ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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# REPORT ON THE DANVILLE MEETING HOUSE DANVILLE, NEW HAMPSHIRE

## JAMES L. GARVIN
## DECEMBER 8, 2012

The following report derives from an inspection of the Danville Meeting House on December 4, 2012. The principal purpose of the report is to assess the condition of the building and to make recommendations to the Olde Meeting House Association of Danville for the future stewardship and maintenance of the property. Second, the report refines and corrects statements that were made in the National Register nomination of the property in 1982 (listed April 19, 1982; see Appendix 1). The report includes a second appendix that provides a transcript of "Notes on the Date of Construction of the Danville Meeting House" of October 7, 1995, which revised the date of erection of the body of the building from 1760, as stated in the National Register nomination, to 1755. Third, the report explores in greater depth the physical evidence of changes that occurred to the building in the early nineteenth century.

*Physical condition:* Thanks to the stewardship of the Olde Meeting House Association of Danville, founded in 1911, the physical condition of the meeting house is very good. With few exceptions, the building requires only routine maintenance to remain in excellent condition for an indefinite future. Areas that should be addressed are discussed under the following headings.

*Building frame:* The Danville Meeting House was erected by 1755 under the sponsorship of twenty-seven proprietors who ultimately contributed the property to the newly incorporated parish of Hawke. The proprietors' contribution of land and building permitted the parish to finish the interior of the structure by the then commonplace method of auctioning pew "ground"—the locations for the privately owned box pews within the building—without the need to reimburse the proprietors first for their expenses in erecting the building. The first and succeeding auctions or "vendues" of pew ground on the main floor and in the galleries raised the necessary funds to finish the interior.

No records have yet been located to document the craftsmen who constructed the pews, plastered the walls and ceiling, and fashioned the pulpit. Physical evidence seems to confirm that most of the interior was finished by a joiner or joiners who differed from the highly skilled artisan who built the pulpit. It was not uncommon for a building committee to contract with a specialist for the construction of a pulpit, which was a far more complex and sophisticated fixture than any other element of a meeting house, and to employ local joiners to do the remainder of the work.

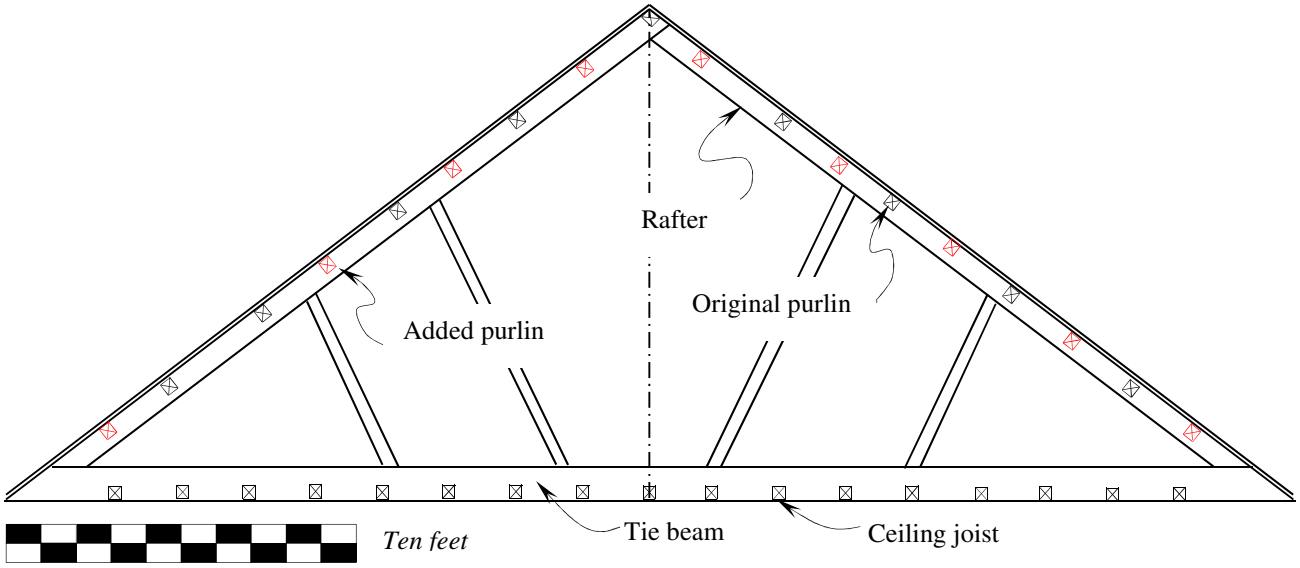
The frame that was erected under the sponsorship of the twenty-seven original proprietors by 1755 is highly significant as the earliest unaltered meeting house frame to survive in New Hampshire. Although a few standing meeting houses, notably those in Newington (1712) and Hampstead (1745) predate the Danville building, these structures have been heavily altered and no longer fully express the appearance of an eighteenth-century meeting house.

The frame of the main body of the Danville building is staunchly built and heavily braced, as seen in the views below.

*Main floor, looking northwest toward pulpit*

*Gallery, looking southwest, showing braces between posts and tie beams (above ceiling)*

While the main frame is heavy and well braced, the roof frame of the building is more lightly built than is usual among the surviving eighteenth-century meeting houses in New Hampshire. The relative lightness of the roof frame has required reinforcement over the years, and may have permitted some distortion of the structure above the main body of the meeting house.

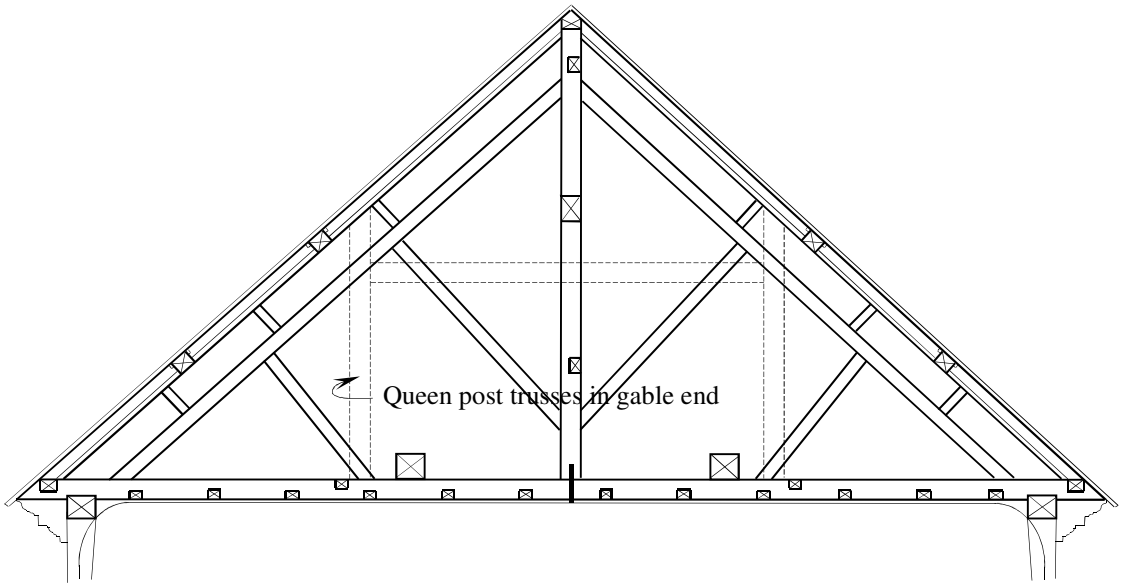



It appears that the roof frame was originally composed of rafters and purlins alone. Unlike most meeting house roofs, the rafters (or "spars" as they would originally have been termed) at Danville are single hewn members; in later and larger meeting houses, the rafters are typically doubled, and the parallel members are connected to one another buy a series of short struts, as shown in the drawings on the following page.

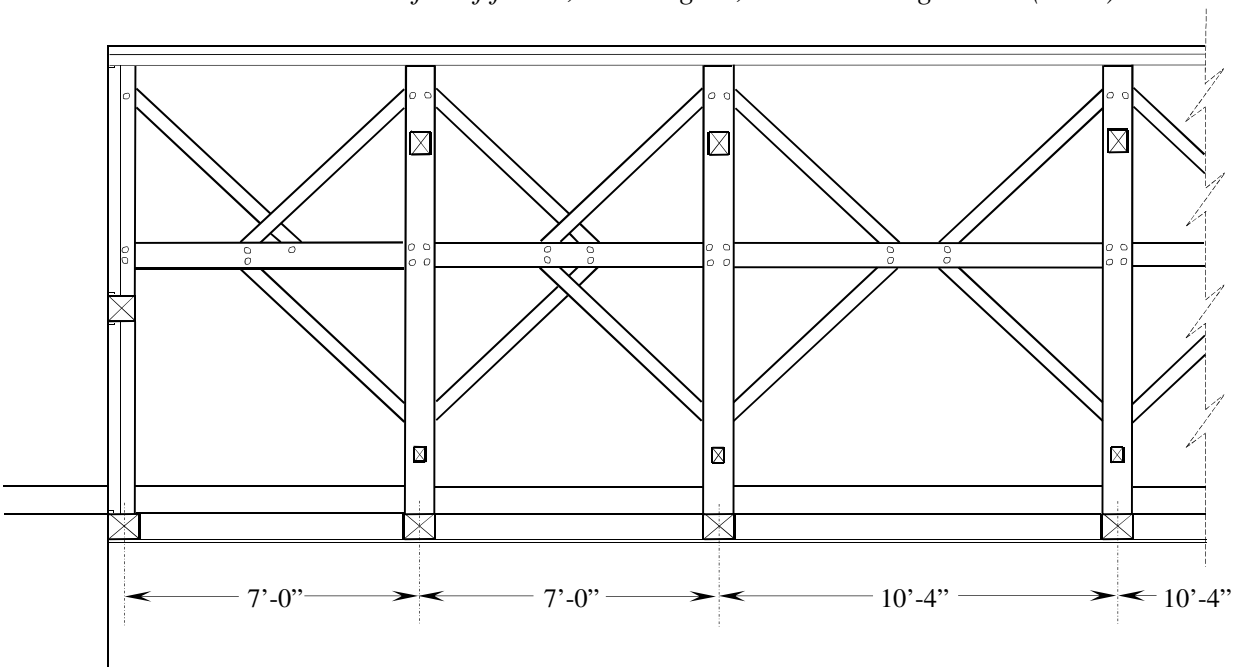
The diagonal struts seen in the drawing above are not symmetrically placed, and appear to have been added after the original construction. Likewise, the purlins shown in red, also not symmetrically arranged from one slope of the roof to the other, were added later, presumably as the roof sheathing began to bow under its own unsupported weight and the weight of snow.

Unlike most meeting house roofs, the Danville frame does not have longitudinal trusses (usually either kingpost or queen post trusses) running through the attic from one end of the building to the other to stiffen the roof against racking or leaning, and to support the long tie beams that span the full depth of the meeting room. This lack of support from above was compensated for by the unusually long and prominent curved braces that rise from the four inner posts of the building's frame to support the tie beams from below, as seen in the photographs on the preceding page. The tie beams at Danville are heavy members, measuring 11 inches broad and 12 inches deep, and the support provided by the exposed braces below the meeting room ceiling seems to have been sufficient to prevent these massive members from sagging appreciably under their own weight and that of the ceiling plaster. (In a room measuring some 37 by 49 feet, the total weight of the one-coat plaster ceiling, calculated at an average weight of between 5.5 and 6.0 pounds per square foot, is some 10,000 pounds.)

A contrast between the light roof frame at Danville is offered by the frame of the meeting house at Washington, New Hampshire. The Washington structure is considerably later and larger; it was framed in 1787, more than thirty years after the Danville building, and measures 45 by 60 feet in contrast to the 37 by 49-foot dimensions of the Danville meeting house. Despite these differences, the frame of the Washington building represents a fairly typical post-Revolutionary design, while the frame of the Danville building may be a rare survivor of an earlier tradition.




*Lateral section of roof frame, Washington, N. H. Meeting House (1787)*

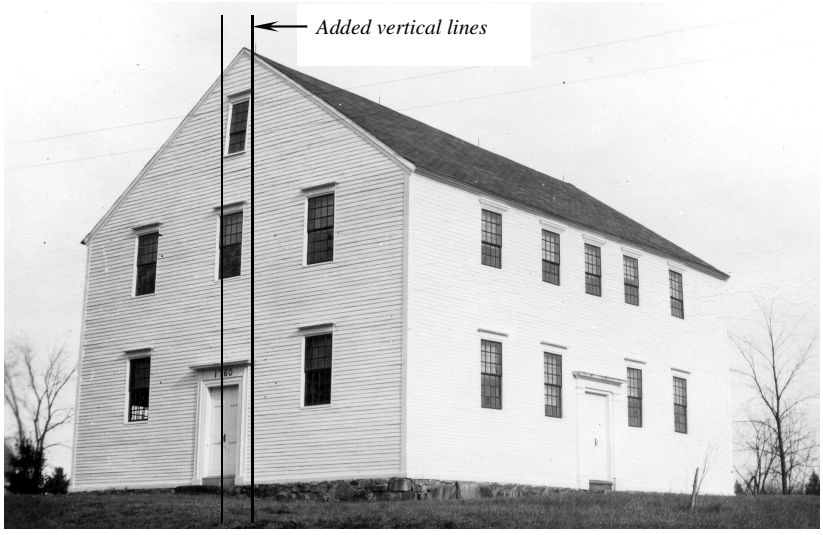



*Longitudinal section of roof frame, Washington Meeting House, showing a portion of the longitudinal roof trusses (1787)*

Perhaps because of the relative lightness of the Danville roof frame, there is some visible distortion in the building above the wall plates. The western gable, facing the road, is not plumb. Based on measurements made on December 4, 2012, it appears that the peak of the western gable is some twelve inches out of plumb, leaning toward the east. This distortion is normally not visible, but can be seen when the sun provides a raking light across the gable end, as shown in the photograph below.

*Danville Meeting House, photograph taken July 1982 by James L. Garvin*

Without further measurement, it is not clear whether this distortion applies to the entire roof structure. For the moment, it appears that the lean is confined to the western gable, and that the remainder of the roof stricture is relatively plumb. It also appears that this condition is of long standing, and perhaps original to the building's construction. In the photograph below, probably dating from the 1950s, the tilt of the attic window is as visible as in the 1982 photograph above.




*Photograph circa 1950 by C. Ernest Walker*

Despite its relatively light design and its supplementary reinforcement in the years after its construction, the roof frame of the Danville Meeting House is impressive and appears to be in good condition, as seen in the photographs below.

*Left: Longitudinal view, looking east. Platforms for two former brick chimneys rest on tie beams at the left of center.*

*Right: View looking southeast, showing original and supplementary purlins, and ceiling joists supporting lath and plaster.*

There is considerable distance between the four tie beams that support the inner sets of rafters. Because the fragile ceiling, composed of plaster applied over riven (split) lath, is supported by the light ceiling joists that can be seen at the bottoms of the tie beams, it is presently not safe to attempt to traverse the length of the attic for a detailed inspection of the roof frame and sheathing. To facilitate future inspections and to safeguard the ceiling of the meeting room, I suggest that one or two catwalks be constructed along the middle of the frame, or between the sets of struts on each side of the centerline of the roof.

Because sheets of plywood are too thin to offer adequate support and are too large to fit through the small trap door that provides access to the attic, the catwalk might best be constructed of two-inch planks, laid parallel and adjacent to one another down the length of the attic and attached to wooden cleats on each side of the tie beams in order to do no damage to the original beams.

*Roof covering:* The asphalt shingles that currently cover the roof of the Danville Meeting House were reportedly installed around the year 2000. Paul Collins of the Olde Meeting House Association of Danville has cared for the building for decades. Mr. Collins kindly accompanied Association president William Gard during the inspection on December 4th. He reported that when the roof was last re-shingled, he specified that the asphalt shingles be underlaid with thirty-pound roofer's felt rather than standard fifteen-pound felt. This felt can be seen from the attic between cracks in the waney-edged roof sheathing boards.

This was a roofing job of high quality, and (depending on the stated life of the shingles) should have a remaining service life of twelve to twenty-five years. There are, however, two aspects of the condition of the roof that should be considered further.

The first aspect occurs on the south (front) slope of the roof. As may be seen in the photograph below, there is an unexplained longitudinal lifting at the butts of a course of shingles along most of the length of the roof, just above the halfway point of the slope.

*Southeast corner of roof, showing separation of butts at one course of shingles.*

The cause of this lifting is unexplained, especially inasmuch as the roof sheathing boards run vertically, from ridge to eaves, as seen in the photographs on the preceding page. Mr. Collins explained that no plywood was installed over the original sheathing, and none can be seen from the attic through joints in the sheathing boards. The lifting may be the result of a shifting of a single roof purlin, or possibly from the upward bowing of the rafters caused by a strut or prop, but the photograph above shows that the roof surfaces typically sag between points of support rather than bowing upward. Rows of shingle nails used in lapped rolls of roofing felt, or other aspects of the shingle underlayment, could be the cause. The separation of the shingle butts does not appear to be serious, but could invite water penetration during a driving rain from the south. The condition should be monitored from the ground and also from the attic if a catwalk is constructed to permit safe and careful study of the roof from beneath.

A second aspect of the roof attracts attention and invites concern. This is the staining of the shingles on the rear (north) slope of the roof, as seen in the photograph below.

This type of stain, radiating downward from multiple points high on the roof and merging into a pronounced and generalized blackening of the lower shingles, is commonplace on modern asphalt shingle roofs. Shingles with fiberglass felts impregnated with calcium carbonate, or those that use limestone granules to impart light colors to the shingle surface, are especially prone to this condition. Algae identified as *Gloeocapsa magma* are the usual cause of shingle staining; some authorities assert that *Gloeocapsa magma* is a cyanobacterium rather than an alga. Because of the widespread nature of this staining—today almost universal on newer asphalt shingle roofs after a few years of exposure to the elements—many products and treatments have been introduced to remove the algae stains. There is also one traditional method of preventing the recurrence of the staining.

Shingle manufacturers and roofers almost universally state that algae staining does not diminish the life of an asphalt roof shingle; the problem is a cosmetic or aesthetic one, not a symptom of imminent shingle failure. As seen on the Danville Meeting House, algae staining occurs most commonly on the northern slopes of roofs, where lack of direct sunlight encourages chronic dampness and reduces the ultraviolet light that inhibits the growth of algae. To combat this behavior of modern roof shingles, several manufacturers add cooper or zinc granules to the aggregate that covers the shingles and protects their felts against destructive ultraviolet light.

This preventative measure works because algae are inhibited in their growth, or poisoned, by copper or zinc ions. This fact has long been recognized, and has been specified as a means of inhibiting the growth of lichens or moss (formerly more troublesome than algae) on wood roof shingles. The usual method of preventing these growths has been to string a copper wire along the ridge on each slope of the roof, or to rely on a copper lightning arrestor cable, if present, to shed ions along the roof surface with each rain. An alternate method has been to tuck strips of copper or zinc flashing under the shingles of the ridge cap or the uppermost regular course of shingles, leaving a few inches of the metal exposed to the weather. Long strips of pure zinc are marketed for this specific purpose.

It is noticeable that there is no algae staining on the south roof slope of the Danville Meeting House, as seen in the upper photograph on the preceding page. This can be accounted for in part by the exposure of that slope to strong sunlight. Lack of staining can also be attributed in part to the fact that the braided copper lightning arrestor cable is attached to the southern slope of the roof ridge, thus shedding metallic ions down the southern slope of the roof and helping to prevent the growth of algae.

Since specialists assert that the stains seen on the north slope of the roof of the Danville Meeting House are not indicative of a reduction in the service life of the shingles, the Association may choose to do nothing about the stains. If the Association wishes to address the issue, the first and least expensive approach would be to install a copper wire or a copper or zinc strip at or near the ridge, then monitor the roof to see if this removes the stain. If the stain is too entrenched to be dissolved by the ions from such a metallic inhibitor, it may be necessary to wash the roof with one of the commercial preparations that are marketed to clean algae-stained shingles. If this is done, it will be important to choose a product that needs only to be sprayed gently on the roof, then rinsed with clean water. It is crucial that the shingles not be washed with high-pressure spray or with harsh chemicals that could shorten their life or kill the grass beneath the eaves.

*Clapboards:* Most of the walls of the Danville Meeting House retain very old clapboards, probably original. These are hand-split (rived) and hand-shaved, and impart a character-defining texture to the exterior of this important structure. The nail heads are hand-forged, and the vertical rows of nails tend to follow the wall studs behind the sheathing, thus imparting a logical and disciplined visual character to the texture of the wall surfaces. This character is seen in the nails on each side of the pulpit window in the photograph below.

It is important that all surviving old or original clapboards be preserved. Most are in good condition, and can be retained when the building is repainted; treatment of the clapboards and nails is discussed further under *Painting*, below.

Because most of the backband moldings around the exterior window casings were replaced during the early 1800s, it is possible that the building was fully re-clapboarded at that period. New clapboards could have been necessary if the building had been left unpainted (or even un-clapboarded) for decades. Preparation for future repainting of the building will provide an opportunity for sample nails to be extracted for examination. Nails that are original to the date of construction will be hand-forged; nails dating from the early 1800s will almost certainly be "cut," or machine-made, and it will be possible to determine the date of the existing clapboards by determining the type of nails that hold them.

In addition to early nails, as seen in the photograph above, the clapboards are also held by modern wire nails that were added to tighten the clapboards when the building was re-painted during the twentieth century.

Although most areas of clapboarding appear sound and ready for preparation for future re-painting, there are a few areas where deterioration needs to be explored. The area of greatest concern in the northeast corner of the building, shown in the photograph below. Here, the clapboards and the lower sections of the corner boards are softened by decay. Moisture meter readings taken in this area reveal saturated wood, with 25% to 30% moisture content, which is a symptom of advanced decay.

*Left: east side of the building, showing deteriorated clapboards at corner; right: rear (north) wall showing algae growth on water table and moss growth on foundation stones.*

The condition of the wooden lower walls, the algae film, and the moss on the foundation all point to chronic dampness and absence of direct sunlight. Much of this dampness is attributable to roof water falling from the eaves on the north side of the building. Some of the dampness, however, may be associated with the trees that overhang and shade this corner of the building. Trees transpire a surprising amount of water vapor during the summer months, often being the direct cause of lichen or moss growth on the roofs of buildings below the branches.

As noted above, metallic ions have long been regarded as inhibitors of algae, lichen, and moss growth. The addition of copper or zinc wires or strips near the ridge on the northern slope of the roof could have a beneficial effect in killing the algae and moss that are obvious as the bottom of the north wall.

Beyond that, however, the situation at the northeast corner calls for careful removal of the clapboards and the lower corner boards in this vicinity, followed by removal of the underlying sheathing if the latter is found to be deteriorated. Chronic dampness will permit the fungi that are present in the wood to propagate and affect adjacent wood, leading to ever-increasing problems. Once established, decay fungi have the ability to retain moisture and transmit it through sound wood with organic filaments, thus maintaining and distributing the dampness needed for their growth even in relatively dry conditions. It will be important to remove all affected wood at the northeast corner and to replace it with sound new wood. This must be accomplished before any re-painting is attempted in this area of the building.

Excessive moisture, although not to the degree seen at the northeast corner of the building, is also seen around the front (south) doorway of the meeting house. As seen below, the paint is failing on both sides of this doorway.

This can largely be attributed to the failure of the flashing detail above the flat doorway cap. The lowest clapboard here has curled and pulled away from the building, allowing water that falls on the cap to find its way behind and under the flashing, and ultimately behind the clapboards on each side of the doorway. Moisture meter readings in this area range from 15% to 18%, ensuring paint failure.

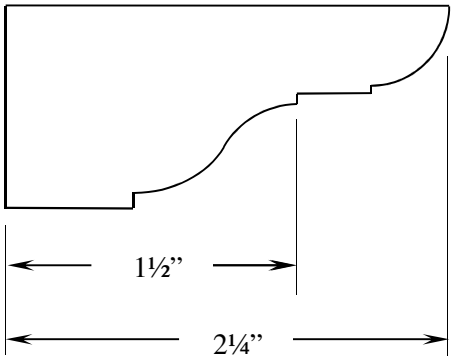
Elsewhere around the lower perimeter of the building, however, moisture meter readings are uniformly in a favorable range. Even though the building was examined on a damp and foggy day, readings around the building consistently averaged 10% to 12% except in the isolated areas described above. Readings above 15% signal potential problems of paint retention, but most of the Danville Meeting House is currently in good condition to receive fresh coats of paint after the problems described above have been investigated further and remedied.

*Windows:* The Danville Meeting House retains nearly all of its original window sashes. This determination contrasts with a statement made in the nomination of the building to the National Register of Historic Places, which was written in January 1982. The nomination stated that most of the windows, with the exception of the gallery windows on the front (south side), had been enlarged subsequent to construction of the building.

In keeping with the practice at the time, the National Register nomination was edited by James L. Garvin, then curator of the New Hampshire Historical Society, from the original draft that had been prepared by Ruth J. Rich in 1981. Editorial revisions were made on the basis of three

black-and-white photographs submitted by the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office to the New Hampshire Historical Society, and on a few 35mm. slides made when the building was visited by the Dublin Seminar on New England Folklife in the summer of 1979. Budgetary constraints at the time prevented field examination of buildings for National Register nominations. The State Historic Preservation Office assigned a total time commitment of eight hours for editing for the Danville Meeting House nomination.

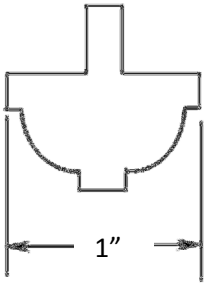
The current examination of the building has verified that the existing sashes, which have twelve-over-twelve panes except for the twelve-over-eight sashes lighting the front gallery, uniformly display an eighteenth-century muntin profile except where a modern upper sash has been installed in the southwestern gallery window. All the window openings have unusually narrow casings of an eighteenth-century profile. As noted below, the backband moldings of most of these casings were replaced during the early 1800s, but the front gallery windows retain their casings and band moldings unchanged, as shown below.




*Casing profile, front (south) gallery windows*

This configuration, with the wide backband molding measuring more than half the total width of the casing, is highly unusual and is probably an example of the work of a local joiner.

The original window sashes of the building have this profile, which is typical of eighteenth-century buildings:




Another unusual detail of the windows, both the unaltered openings at the front gallery level and the others around the building that were altered in the early 1800s, is the fact that the window sills project no farther from the building than the width of the butts of adjacent clapboards; in

fact, they do not project as far as the backband moldings that rest upon them. This detail may be seen in the photograph of a front gallery window, below, and it is uniform around the building

*South gallery window*

Because of the rarity of all these features, it will be important to protect the window detailing during future re-painting of the building.

Mr. Collins pointed out that the sill of the western attic window has deteriorated, as seen below, and will require replacement. This sill, and any other replaced exterior detail, should carefully replicate the unique configuration of the original feature. The unusual design of many of the building elements at Danville contribute to the integrity and significance of the meeting house.

*Western gable window*

The nine-over-six sashes in the attic opening are twentieth-century replacements of the original sashes.

*Painting:* The Danville Meeting House will be ready for a re-painting after the issues affecting the building envelope, described above under *Clapboards*, have been addressed. The current paint job, applied in 2004, is the first attempt to paint the building with a latex exterior paint instead of an oil- or alkyd-based paint.

It has been traditional to specify paints based on natural linseed oil, or on synthetic alkyd resins, to historic buildings in the United States. Recent changes in paint manufacturing technology, partly driven by the requirement to minimize volatile organic compounds (VOCs) during paint production, have had a tendency to reduce the quality and longevity of alkyd-based paints. The removal of white lead from the marketplace as a paint pigment during the 1970s has effectively precluded the use of lead and linseed oil based paint, which was formerly the best covering for exterior use. At the same time, latex exterior paints have tended to improve in quality, making them for the first time equal or preferable to oil-based paints for use on historic buildings.

Because of the rapidly changing nature of American paints, it may be appropriate to continue to use water-based finish paint when the Danville Meeting House is re-painted in the future. Finish coats should be used in conjunction with priming coats that are approved and specified by the manufacturer of the selected finish coats. Most American paint companies continue to recommend the use of an oil-based priming coat of their own manufacture.

Attached to this report is an appendix that provides generic specifications for the exterior painting of historic buildings. It will be seen that these specifications, first developed in 1990, assume the use of oil-based paints both for primer and for finish coats. As noted in the preface to the specifications, the document may be used for paint jobs using water-based paints simply by ignoring the clauses that are specifically relevant only to oil-based formulations. In the case of the Danville Meeting House, clauses that deal with color mixing and matching may also be ignored.

If the Association wishes to consider non-American paint brands in addition to those listed in the painting specifications, high quality paints made in the Netherlands are now available in New England, some of them oil-based. These paints are more expensive than American formulations, but are reportedly much superior in longevity, and much closer to older American paints. More information about these Dutch paints can be found through a company called *Fine Paints of Europe*; see http://www.finepaintsofeurope.com/

As noted above, the preparation of the meeting house for painting will provide a potential opportunity to extract a few clapboard nails and to determine whether these are hand-forged, denoting the retention of eighteenth-century clapboards, or are machine-made, denoting a re-clapboarding of the building when certain exterior features, discussed below, were added in the early 1800s.

*Paint colors:* The Danville Meeting House is currently painted white, and areas of peeling paint reveal no other color beneath the white paint. The Association will undoubtedly wish to retain white paint on the building in the future. However, the majority of eighteenth-century New England meeting houses were not painted white at the time of first construction; white lead pigment was simply too expensive at that period to be affordable for so large a building as a

meeting house. Some meeting houses were left un-clapboarded and thus unpainted for some years after they were raised, with the bevel-edged wall sheathing being relied upon the exclude the rain. Most meeting houses were clapboarded, but the clapboards were sometimes left unpainted for some time. Most meeting houses appear to have been painted from the first, but the paints used were relatively inexpensive "earth" colors, mostly derived from iron oxides. These included red and yellow ochre and Spanish brown. Some exterior paints may be been based on white lead, but were tinted with less expensive pigments to attain gray or "lead" color. Many meeting houses were painted in a relatively inexpensive pigment, yet had their door and window frames, corner boards, and cornices picked out in contrasting white. Pure white paint became progressively common for the entire exteriors, as now seen at Danville, after 1800.

Future repainting of the Danville Meeting House will afford an opportunity for paint color research. If the building was re-clapboarded at some time after its construction, its existing clapboards may always have been white. Yet areas of the building that appear original, such as the ogee caps above the south gallery windows or the main cornice of the building, may reveal traces of an earlier color. Paint color for meeting houses has long been a topic of considerable interest in New England, and the Association could make a lasting contribution to our general knowledge by employing a paint color analyst to examine the various exterior elements of the building and prepare a technical report when funds and opportunity permit. The interior of the building retains significant paint evidence in the treatment of the pulpit, gallery breastwork, and columns; comparable knowledge of the original and subsequent treatments of the exterior would add greatly to the documentary value of this highly significant building.[1]

*Alterations following the construction of the Danville Meeting House:* As noted above, the meeting house was altered during the early nineteenth century. The earlier of these alterations included the replacement of the western (roadside) doorway and elements of the exterior window casings and caps, together with the installation of additional pews in the galleries. Based on stylistic evidence, these changes could have occurred at any time between about 1800 and about 1830. The installation of the present front doorway and its double-leaf doors, and of the double-leaf doors on the eastern gable end, appear to date from around 1830 or slightly later.

All these features are described in some detail below. All are important aspects of the continuing care of the meeting house by the Town of Danville during the decades following the building's completion. The physical evidence of these changes should be appreciated as elements in the history of the building and carefully preserved or replicated during future care of the structure.

Because the Danville Meeting House was used consistently for town meetings and religious services at least through 1830, it is to be expected that the town would have repaired the building from time to time as features deteriorated or were damaged. It was commonplace in the nineteenth century for alterations to follow then-current architectural fashions instead of being carried out in the spirit of restoration. Thus, the changes that occurred to the building in the early nineteenth century can be distinguished visually from the original detailing of the meeting house.

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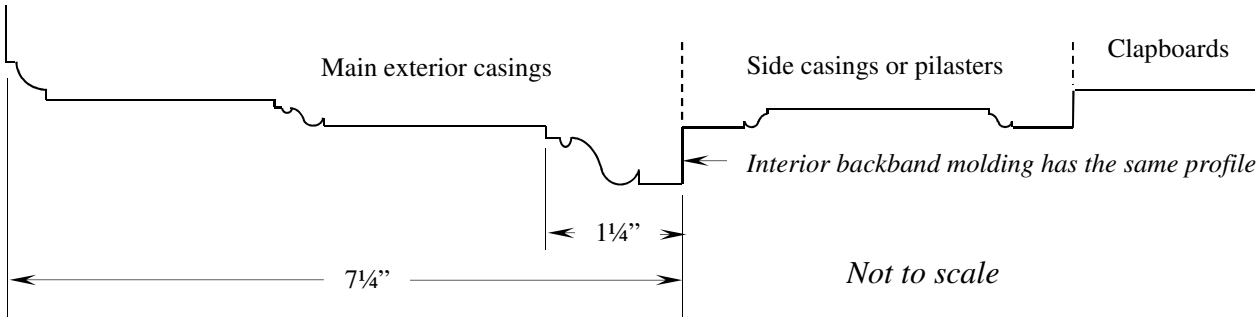
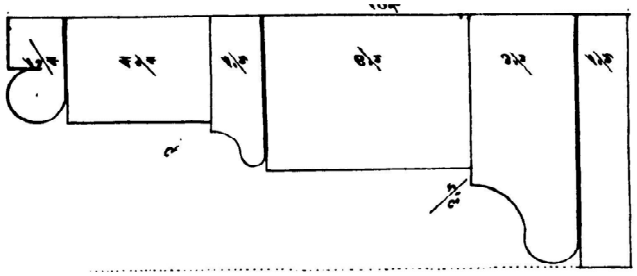
[1]For a discussion of exterior paint treatments of New England meeting houses, see Peter Benes, *Meetinghouses of Early New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 191-201 and Appendix E.

Among the changes that appear to have occurred at this period were the installation of new pews in parts of the galleries. The detailing of paneling and doors in a number of these pews matches that of the western entry doors of the meeting house, described below, and is recognizable as originating at a later date than the original pews. As is also discussed below, however, the restoration of pews in 1936 was extensive and skillful, but apparently not documented in detail. The degree of care and the level of craftsmanship invested in replicating pews in 1936 makes it difficult to distinguish between surviving original or early materials and restored features. Thus, until the work of 1936 has been studied carefully and differentiated from original or early joinery, reliance on the stylistic details of the existing pews may lead to erroneous conclusions about early nineteenth- century changes to the interior of the building.

The most easily recognizable alterations of the early nineteenth century are the main (south) entrance and the doorway on the west, facing the nearly highway. The main entrance is shown in the photograph on page 11. The western entrance is seen in the photograph on the following page. Both of these building elements display overall style and details of joinery that mark them as distinctly different from eighteenth-century joinery and identify them as dating from the early nineteenth century. In terms of overall style, the doorway cap seen on the following page is a near duplicate of a Federal-style mantelpiece of the early 1800s, and the two casings or pilasters that support the cap are identical to the side casings of many such chimneypieces. The profile of the exterior door casing and these pilasters is given below.




The architrave or door casing shown at the left of the sectional drawing above compares closely with a detail for an architrave given in Plate 11 of Asher Benjamin's *The American Builder's Companion* (Boston, 1806), a highly influential New England source for the new "Federal" architectural style of the early 1800s. The coherence between these two details reveals the approximate date of the western doorway.

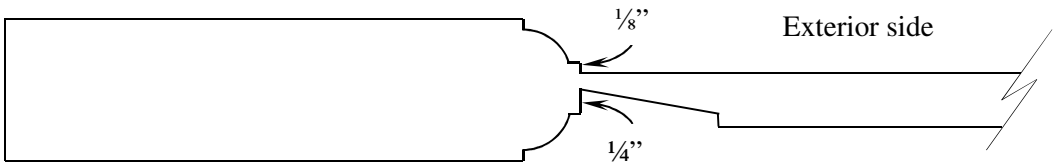


*Detail from Plate 11, Asher Benjamin,* The American Builder's Companion *(Boston: Etheridge and Bliss, 1806)*


*Western (side) doorway, as remodeled in the early 1800s*

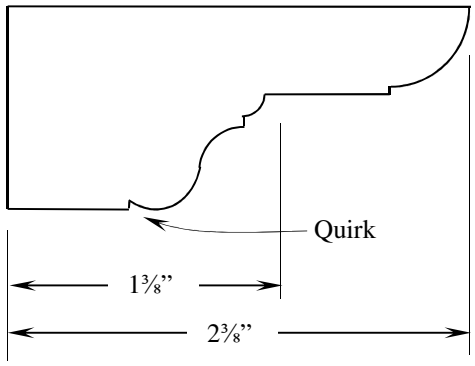
All windows except those lighting the front (south) gallery, as seen on page 9, were provided with projecting caps that echo the style of the western doorway, shown above. The south gallery windows were left unaltered, retaining their original casings, backband moldings, and heavy ogee caps. The original and the remodeled windows can be compared in the photographs on page 13, above.

The two-leaf doors that were installed in the western entrance, when closed and seen together as in the photograph above, exhibit the characteristic panel arrangement of a single six-panel door of the Federal style. These doors also display the flat sides of their panels on the exterior in a fashion that is characteristic of the early 1800s but is dramatically different from the raised and fielded panels seen in older joinery on the interior of the meeting house. A cross section of these doors is given below.

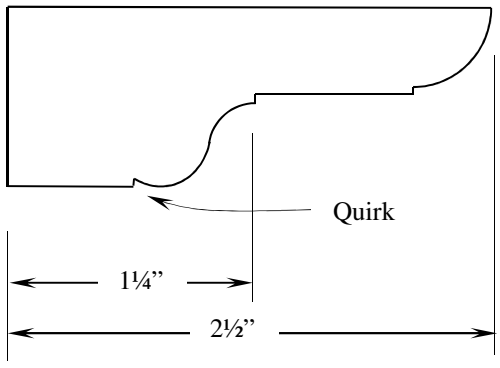



*Section, western doors, Danville Meeting House*

All the windows that were fitted with new projecting caps were likewise provided with new backband moldings, which in most cases were affixed to the original, narrow casings. As seen below, the backbands supplied to the rear of the building were slightly less elaborate than those applied to the front and west (road) side.




*Exterior window casings, west elevation, Danville Meeting House*

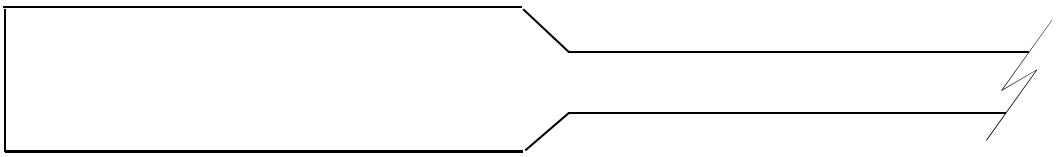



*Exterior window casings, north (rear) elevation, Danville Meeting House*

These backband moldings can be recognized as newer than the original moldings, seen in the drawing on page 12, by the fact that they display a groove, called a "quirk," where the curved contour meets the flat fillet at the edge of the molding. Such quirks were unknown in American joinery until the very end of the 1700s; Asher Benjamin was the first American architectural writer to draw attention to these details and to promote their use, which required joiners to acquire new molding tools. In his second book, *The American Builder's Companion* of 1806, Benjamin remarked that "quirks ought to be large, and as many as the cornice will admit of, as the principal beauty of plain cornices depends upon the shadows of their quirks."[2]

While the alterations to the western side door and most of the window casings of the Danville Meeting House appear to date between 1800 and 1830, the main (south) doorway appears still later, and reflects the earliest hints of the incoming Greek Revival style. As seen on page 11, above, the front doorway is flanked by broad, plain Tuscan pilasters. These pilasters differ from those commonly seen before about 1830 in that the columns have their greatest diameter at about one-third of their height. Above and below that point, the pilasters display a curved reduction in their width. This fashion in proportioning columns, pilasters, and staircase newel posts appeared in New England joinery about 1830, becoming increasingly popular as the decade progressed. Columns, pilasters, and staircase newel posts prior to 1830 follow classical precedent by displaying a uniform diameter up to one-third of their height, then beginning a curved diminution only above that point, not below as seen in Danville.

Like the doorway enframement, the southern doors themselves display a simplicity of detailing that reflects the incoming Greek Revival style. In contrast to the molded stiles and rails seen on the westerns doors and drawn on page 18, above, the doors on the southern front, and on the very simple eastern doorway as well, display the cross-section seen below.



*Section, front (south) and eastern doors, Danville Meeting House*

Thus, there is evidence embodied in the meeting house itself of repairs and changes to the building carried out by the town throughout the period when the meeting house served both church and town, and probably continuing from time to time until structure ceased to be used for town meetings in 1887.

*Restoration of the Meeting House in 1936.* Several accounts state that the pews on the main floor of the meeting house were removed in 1860. The statement has been made that this was done so that dances could be held in the building, but another reason for the change was probably that the family-owned pews, with fixed seats facing in different directions, did not facilitate the debates of typical town meetings. Most New Hampshire town halls of the 1860s and later were

[2] Asher Benjamin, *The American Builder's Companion* (Boston: Etheridge and Bliss, 1806), "Remarks on Cornices." Benjamin's remarks pertained equally to any molding, not just those used in cornices.

equipped with movable Windsor settees, all facing the moderator's desk, and the Danville building was probably furnished in keeping with this norm after 1860.

Statements differ regarding the disposition of the main floor pews after their removal. Some accounts say that these pews were stored in the galleries. Fragments of pews, however, were found in the building's attic on December 4, 2012; several were brought down and placed in the northwesternmost gallery pew, along with other architectural fragments stored there.

A general survey of the pews on both the main floor and the galleries indicates that at least two different styles of paneling are to be found in the pew enclosures and doors. The first of these has plain quarter-round moldings surrounding the raised panels. The second has quarter-round moldings with tiny added fillets. This small difference in detailing is diagnostic, first, of original joinery of circa 1760 (when the first "pew ground" was sold) and, second, of later joinery of 1797 (when the first gallery "pew ground" was sold, and third, of further work of the early 1800s. Although the pews do not appear to differ in other details—all share the small balusters below their top rails, for example—there is a clear stylistic difference that appears to denote the original construction and sale of pews, followed quite a bit later by the construction and sale of additional pews in parts of the galleries. The differences in detailing are shown below.

*Left: pew paneling of eighteenth-century style*

*Right: pew paneling of late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century style*

While it is tempting to assume that the differences in joinery seen today in these two styles of paneling clearly denote different eras of pew construction, this matter deserves more careful study. The pews on the main floor—and, to judge from physical evidence, many in the galleries as well—were restored in 1936 by two craftsmen: Arthur W. Tuck of Danville (born 1872) and Harold B. Greenwood of Kensington (1877-1969). Physical evidence on both levels of the meeting house suggests that the pews as seen today are largely reproductions. Some may be substantially original, but many include older doors re-hung on new enclosures, and almost all

the pews on the main floor appear to be reproductions of 1936. Where old doors were re-used, their swing was often reversed, with reproduction dovetail hinges affixed to the opposite side from the original arrangement, as shown by "shadows" of older hinges.

The workmanship embodied in the reproduction or restoration of pews in 1936 was extraordinary for the period, but the skill of the workmen makes it difficult to differentiate between surviving old joinery and new joinery. While this may of no concern to most visitors who simply enjoy the striking appearance and sense of originality of the interior, the meeting house deserves the most careful study in order to document its true degree of physical integrity.

Part of the difficulty in recognizing differences between the workmanship of different periods in the Danville Meeting House lies in the fact that the joiners of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries took some pains to replicate older work. Their paneling is mainly differentiated from older work by the subtle presence of the tiny added fillets around the panels, mentioned and illustrated above. The balusters installed in the newer pew walls and doors are virtual duplicates of those in the older work. There was no attempt in pew construction of the early 1800s, for example, to express the then current Federal style by following the new fashion for flat panels rather than raised panels.

But part of the difficulty derives from the high level of skill and attention to detail shown by Tuck and Greenwood in 1936, highly unusual in workmanship of an era before much close study of eighteenth-century joinery had been carried out. Some of this skill may be attributed to the background of the two craftsmen. Tuck was a Danville native, living in the family farm on Beach Plain Road. The 1930 United States Census lists Tuck as a "farmer;" the 1940 Census lists him as "farmer and carpenter." As a Danville native with long ancestral ties to his home town, Tuck may have taken special pride in restoring the community's historic focus of government and religion.

Greenwood, on the other hand, was an English immigrant who lived in an early house in Kensington, running a woodworking shop and doing much restoration work.[3] He was trained in England and immigrated to the United State in 1908, at the age of thirty-one. Greenwood is listed in the 1930 United States Census as "wood finish[er]," and in the 1940 Census as "wood worker."

The surface texture of the joinery created by Tuck and Greenwood reveals little of the evidence of machine fabrication typically seen in twentieth-century woodwork. Rather, the surfaces of most elements of the pews are smooth and highly comparable to that of early hand-planed joinery. The surface texture suggests that Greenwood, as a professional wood finisher, employed cabinetmaker's scrapers to erase traces of modern technology. Only in the turning of new balusters can the work of 1936 be readily distinguished from earlier turning; the new balusters are smoother in surface texture, denoting a lathe of higher speed than that of the hand-powered lathes of the pre-industrial era.

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[3] Roland D. Sawyer, *The History of Kensington, New Hampshire, from 1663 to 1945* (Farmington, Maine: Knowlton and McLeary, 1946), p. 304.

Both to better understand the degree of surviving original or older joinery, and its workmanship and quality, the pews of the Danville Meeting House deserve careful examination, measurement, and comparison at some future date. The pews of 1936, however extensive or limited they may prove to be with respect to the interior as a whole, represent important later chapters in the long history of preservation and adaptation of the meeting house. They are as much a part of the structure's history as the original fabric and the later changes that were carried out during the nineteenth century. But it is important to be able to recognize this newer work and to differentiate it from the surviving craftsmanship of earlier artisans.

Investigation of the scope of Tuck and Greenwood's work will entail identification of surviving original joinery and careful notation of all its characteristics. A comprehensive examination of the full interior should permit the creation of a record showing the detailed evolution of the building. Only with a careful definition of eighteenth-century pew joinery, early nineteenth century joinery, and joinery of 1936, will it be possible to clearly define the differences in workmanship of earlier periods and the degree of understanding of those differences by Tuck and Greenwood. Learning what Tuck and Greenwood understood and did in 1936 will be important in recognizing what earlier generations of craftsmen had done as the building evolved.

*Future treatment of the interior:* Despite the substantial extent of pew restoration in 1936, the interior of the Danville Meeting House is remarkably intact and represents an invaluable document of eighteenth-century New England craftsmanship. Partly because the building ceased to have a public function with construction of the new Danville Town Hall in 1887, and partly because of the stewardship of the Olde Meeting House Association of Danville since 1911, the building has been protected yet permitted to remain largely unaltered. In contrast to buildings that have been thoroughly restored, the Danville Meeting House continues to express the materials, textures, and finishes of the eighteenth century, making the building more valuable for study and research than one that has had its surfaces replaced or covered by new cosmetic treatments.

The future could see a temptation to interfere with this integrity. The walls, for example, display a pattern of cracking that is typical of the reaction to changing humidity of lime-sand plaster applied over riven laths. The aged surface of the exposed hewn and whitewashed posts of the building frame could invite new attempts at brightening the interior. The alligatored surface of the shellac varnish on the painted graining of the pulpit could tempt "restoration" of the varnish.

In keeping with the practice of the Association over the past century, any treatment of the building not necessary for its protection from the elements should be resisted. The Danville Meeting House is far more valuable as an artifact handed down from the eighteenth century than it would be as a cosmetically restored building. Any actions that may seem necessary for the welfare of the building should be guided by advice from architectural conservators or other specialists with appropriate experience and credentials.

The best approach to a treasure of such rarity is that of *preservation* rather than *restoration*. The National Park Service has developed *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation*, and these *Standards* should be considered as guidelines for the future care of the Danville Meeting House. The *Standards for Preservation* are given in the following Appendix.

# APPENDIXES

1. THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR'S STANDARDS FOR PRESERVATION

2. PAINTING SPECIFICATIONS

3. EXCERPTS FROM THE NOMINATION OF THE DANVILLE MEETING HOUSE TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES, 1982

4. NOTES ON THE DATE OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE DANVILLE MEETING HOUSE, 1995

**The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Preservation**

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

1. A property will be used as it was historically, or given a new use that maximizes the retention of distinctive materials, features, spaces, and spatial relationships. Where a treatment and use have not been identified, a property will be protected and, if necessary, stabilized until additional work may be undertaken.

2. The historic character of a property will be retained and preserved. The replacement of intact or repairable historic materials, or alteration of features, spaces, and spatial relationships that characterize a property will be avoided.

3. Each property will be recognized as a physical record of its time, place, and use. Work needed to stabilize, consolidate, and conserve existing historic materials and features will be physically and visually compatible, identifiable upon close inspection, and properly documented for future research.

4. Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved.

5. Distinctive materials, features, finishes, and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a property will be preserved.

6. The existing condition of historic features will be evaluated to determine the appropriate level of intervention needed. Where the severity of deterioration requires repair or limited replacement of a distinctive feature, the new material will match the old in composition, design, color, and texture.

7. Chemical or physical treatments, if appropriate, will be undertaken using the gentlest means possible. Treatments that cause damage to historic materials will not be used.

8. Archaeological resources will be protected and preserved in place. If such resources must be disturbed, mitigation measures will be undertaken.

# GENERIC SPECIFICATIONS
# EXTERIOR PAINTING OF HISTORIC WOODEN BUILDINGS

*The following specifications were prepared in 1990 in the expectation that historic wooden buildings would be painted with oil-based paints that employ either linseed oil or an alkyd as the vehicle. Many latex paints have subsequently improved in durability, while some alkyd paints have declined in durability due to environmental regulations governing paint manufacture.*

*If these specifications are applied to a project that uses water-based emulsion paints, the clauses that refer to oils, solvents, flammability, and other non-relevant issues may be ignored.*

## I. GENERAL

### A. DESCRIPTION OF WORK

1. It is the intent of these specifications that this job shall be performed to the highest standards of workmanship known to the painter's trade, using products and materials of the best quality.

2. This job includes all preparation and full exterior painting of the main building and outbuildings, as may be agreed upon between the owner and the contractor.

3. The work includes re-puttying of window glass where putty is loose or missing. No window glass shall be replaced without consultation with the owner or owner's representative.

4. The work includes removal of loose or poorly-adhered paint, preparation of surfaces to be painted, application of spot priming wherever bare wood is exposed after preparation, and application of one full coat of priming paint and two coats of finish paint to clapboards, trim, and mouldings, exteriors of window sashes, casings, and exterior window blinds or shutters.

### B. QUALITY ASSURANCE

Unless paint is hand mixed and tinted, provide primers or other undercoat paint produced by the same manufacturer as the finish coats. Use only thinners approved by the paint manufacturer, and use thinners only within recommended limits.

### C. SUBMITTALS

1. If required, submit samples to owner for review and approval of color and texture. Provide samples of colors and materials on 12" by 12" squares of hardboard or seasoned wood with texture to simulate actual building

conditions. Resubmit each sample as requested until the required sheen, color, and texture are achieved.

2. Final acceptance of colors will be from samples applied on the job.

### D. DELIVERY AND STORAGE

1. Deliver all materials to the job site in original, new, and unopened packages and containers bearing the manufacturer's name and label.

2. Protect materials from freezing or excessive heat. Keep the storage area neat and orderly. Remove oily rags and waste daily. Take all precautions to ensure that workers and work areas are adequately protected from fire and health hazards resulting from handling, mixing, and applying paint materials. No smoking is permitted indoors or in proximity to areas where paint is being mixed or where solvents are exposed.

### E. JOB CONDITIONS

1. Do not apply paint materials when the temperature of surfaces to be painted and the surrounding air temperature are below 50 degrees F., unless otherwise permitted by the paint manufacturer's printed instructions.

2. Do not apply paint materials in snow, rain, fog, or mist, or when the relative humidity exceeds 85%. Do not apply paint materials to damp or wet surfaces, or to wood with a moisture content above 15% as measured by a moisture meter.

## II. PRODUCTS

### A. ACCEPTABLE MANUFACTURERS

Subject to the requirements and standards provided by these specifications, materials to be used on this job shall be products of the following manufacturers unless other products are expressly approved in advance by the owner:

1. Devoe and Reynolds Company (Devoe)
2. Glidden Coatings and Resins, Division of SCM Corporation (Glidden)
3. Benjamin Moore and Company (Moore)
4. PPG Industries, Pittsburgh Paints (Pittsburgh)
5. Pratt & Lambert (P&L)
6. The Sherwin-Williams Company (S-W)

### B. COLORS AND FINISHES

Prior to the beginning of work, the owner will furnish sample color chips for surfaces to be painted in other than pure white. Match the colors of the chips and submit samples, as specified under **I.C.1.**, before proceeding with the work.

### C. MATERIALS

1. Provide the best quality grade of the various types of coatings as regularly manufactured by acceptable manufacturers (above). Materials not displaying the manufacturer's identification as a standard, best-grade product will not be acceptable.

2. Undercoat or priming paint shall be made by the same manufacturer as the finish coats. Use only thinners approved by the paint manufacturer, and use them only within recommended limits.

3. Color pigments shall be pure, non-fading types appropriate for the other paint media with which they are mixed and for the substrates and the conditions of the job.

4. Both priming paint and finish paint shall be the best quality oil or alkyd-based exterior house paint from fresh stock.

## III. EXECUTION

### A. INSPECTION

1. Examine the areas and conditions under which painting materials are to be applied and notify the owner in writing of conditions that are detrimental to the proper and timely execution of the work. Do not proceed with the work until unsatisfactory conditions have been corrected to the satisfaction of all parties.

2. Starting of painting work by the contractor shall be construed as the contractor's acceptance of the surfaces and conditions within any particular area of the job.

### B. SURFACE PREPARATION

1. Perform preparation and cleaning procedures in strict accordance with the paint manufacturer's instructions and with these specifications.

**2.** Carefully scrape and sand all surfaces prior to repainting. Employ metal scrapers, belt sanders, hand sanding, hand wire brushes, or "heat guns" and steel putty knives to remove loose paint and to feather the edges of surrounding paint areas. **Do not use open flames, or power tools other than**

**belt sanders. Do not use disk sanders or power wire brushes. Do not use pressure washing equipment or allow water to touch wooden surfaces that are to be painted.**

3. Before applying paint, clean surfaces that are to be painted. Remove oil and grease prior to mechanical cleaning. Schedule cleaning and painting so that contaminants or debris from the cleaning process will not fall onto wet, newly-painted surfaces.

4. Where knots are exposed during surface preparation, apply a thin coat of white shellac or other recommended knot sealer before applying the priming coat.

5. Lightly set and putty all new nails and all older nails that have lifted above the surface of the wood.

6. Paint the heads of all nails that display rust with a metal priming paint prior to the application of the priming coat to the body of the building. Allow the metal priming paint to dry according to the manufacturer's specifications before priming the building.

7. In areas where damage has occurred to woodwork, notify the owner so that carpentry repairs may be undertaken before painting continues in those areas.

8. Caulk with DAP vinyl/silicone paintable caulking or approved equal.

9. Remove all hardware, hardware accessories, plates, lighting fixtures, and similar items in place and not to be finish painted, or fully protect such items during preparation and painting. Reinstall such items after painting is completed.

## C. MATERIALS PREPARATION

1. Mix and prepare painting materials in accordance with the manufacturer's directions.

2. Store materials not in actual use in tightly covered containers. Maintain containers that are used in the storage, mixing, and application of paint in a clean condition, free of foreign materials and residue.

3. For highly pigmented paints, "box" the individual containers to achieve uniform colors throughout the full batch.

4. Stir materials before application to produce a mixture of uniform density, and stir as required during application. Do not stir surface film into the paint. Remove film and, if necessary, strain the paint before applying it.

**D. APPLICATION**

1. Do not paint over dirt, rust, scale, grease, moisture, scuffed surfaces, or other conditions that are detrimental to the formation of a durable paint film.

2. Do not paint over any code-required labels, such as Underwriter's Laboratories or Factory Mutual, or over any equipment identification, performance rating, name or nomenclature plates.

3. Apply paint in accordance with the manufacturer's directions. Apply paint only by brush, using a brush appropriate for the job and the paint. Do not apply paint by roller, sprayer, or other non-traditional method.

4. Apply paint so as to cover all surfaces completely with an opaque, smooth surface of uniform finish, color, appearance, and coverage. Cloudiness, spotting, gaps, laps, brush marks, runs, sags, ropiness or other surface imperfections are not acceptable. Remove, refinish, or repaint work that is not in compliance with these specifications.

5. **Priming coat.** Priming paint shall be the best quality oil or alkyd-based primer from fresh stock. If the finish paint is to be a dark color, priming paint shall be darkened by tinting to the approximate hue of the finish coats. Carefully spot prime all areas where underlying wood has been exposed by paint loss or surface preparation, followed, when dry, by one full coat of primer over all surfaces to be painted.

6. **Finish coats.** Finish coats shall be the best quality oil or alkyd-based exterior house paint from fresh stock. The formulation of finish coats shall be fully compatible with that of the priming coat. The first finish coat shall be applied only when the priming coat has dried in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations. The second finish coat shall be applied only when the first finish coat has dried in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations.

**E. CLEAN-UP AND PROTECTION**

1. During the progress of the work, remove from the project daily all discarded paint materials, rubbish, empty cans, and used rags.

2. Upon completion of painting work, clean window glass and other paint-spattered surfaces. Remove spattered paint by proper methods of washing and scraping, using care not to scratch or otherwise damage finished surfaces.

3. **Protection.** Protect all plants and shrubs growing near the building, and all door steps, porches, and other projecting features, by carefully covering them with drop cloths. Provide propping beneath heavy drop cloths to prevent

bending or crushing plants. Temporarily pull ornamental shrubs away from the walls of the building by ropes and stakes to provide necessary working room; do not cut or prune shrubs without the owner's permission. Protect the work of other trades, whether to be painted or not, against damage by the painting work. Correct any damage by cleaning, repairing or replacing, and repainting, as may be acceptable to the owner.

4. Provide "Wet Paint" signs as required to identify newly-painted surfaces.

5. At the completion of the job, carefully remove and fold all drop cloths, emptying all paint chips and debris into tight containers for safe and proper disposal off-site. Leave the building site clean and free of any residue from the paint job.

6. For future touch-up, provide the owner with tightly-sealed containers of the residue of all paints used on the job, properly labeling each container with the type of paint and the areas of its use, and applying a sample of the contents to the cover or label.

# DANVILLE MEETING HOUSE
# EXCERPTS FROM THE NATIONAL REGISTER NOMINATION (1982)

*7. Description:*

The Danville meeting house is a two-and-a-half story framed structure with an asphalt-shingled gable roof and a foundation of mortared fieldstone. The walls are covered with riven clapboards which are slightly graduated in their exposure to the weather from the water table to the eaves and are applied with lapped butts. The building measures 37 by 49 feet, and has entrances in the centers of the east, south, and west elevations. The south elevation is treated as the facade, and has a doorway with a flat entablature supported on two pilasters. The entrance has a pair of three-paneled doors fastened with an early lock. On each side of the doorway are two first-floor windows with narrow casings, simple flat caps, and 12/12 sashes. At the second story level, the gallery windows have similar casings, heavy moulded caps, and 12/8 sashes. The cornice of the building is a simple crown moulding without end returns.

The western elevation of the structure, facing the adjacent road, has a doorway with a moulded architrave, a thin horizontal entablature, and a pair of three-panel doors. Flanking the doorway are two windows identical to those on the front (south) elevation. At the gallery level are three windows with flat caps and 12/12 sashes, while a single window with 9/6 sashes lights the attic. The raking eaves of the roof are treated with simple, tapered, two-piece boards.

The eastern elevation of the building is similar to the opposite end, except that all windows (which have 12/12 sashes) have thin casings without any caps, there is no gable window, and the two-leaved doorway lacks an entablature, having only a flat casing surmounted by a backband moulding.

The north (rear) elevation of the building has four first-floor windows with 12/12 sashes and a tall central pulpit window which is halfway between the first floor and gallery levels and has 16/16 sashes.

The building has a heavy braced frame which projects beyond the plaster walls of the interior. Its roof frame is the lightest of those in the several related meeting houses in the region, consisting only of six pairs of rafters reinforced by two relatively light diagonal struts extending from each rafter to the rafter tie below. The rafters are spanned by purlins, and the roof boards are laid from ridge to eaves.

On the north wall of the interior, opposite the main doorway and facing a broad aisle between ranges of pews, is the pulpit. The reading desk is elevated well above the floor pews and projects forward above an ogee-moulded base. The front and the two splayed sides of the desk have single raised panels of tablet-shaped outlines, with semicircular-shaped tops. On each side of the desk are wide rectangular raised panels with down-curved tops, flanked by thin pilasters with fluting and cabling. All pulpit panels are painted with mahogany or rosewood graining, while the stiles and rails are painted off-white. Surmounting all panels and supported by the pilasters is a moulded cornice.

The pulpit is reached by a stairway on the left (west) side, with seven gray-painted risers and treads and with a ramped balustrade on each side. The well-turned balusters, of a double vase profile, are painted off-white and support a heavy moulded handrail. The newel posts are square and fluted; other posts are unfluted. Behind the pulpit is a rectangular window flanked by tall, narrow raised panels. On the outside of each panel is a tall fluted pilaster with cabling; these rise to support architrave blocks and a pulvinated frieze and bed moulding which extend across the top of the window to support the sounding board. Closely flanked by the two middle posts of the building's frame and by two diagonal braces which project forward to support the rafter ties, the semi-octagonal sounding board has a soffit paneled in a radiating pattern with a circular ventral boss bearing a hook for a lamp. The outer faces if the sounding board have crown and bed mouldings of complex profile; the top of the sounding board is flat and the entire unit is supported by two wrought iron rods which extend diagonally down to the top from the northern plate of the frame. The sounding board is painted off-white.

The floor pews of the meeting house have rectangular raised panels and doors. Most of these are unpainted and their tops are ornamented with miniature balustrades bearing tiny vasiform balusters.

The galleries, supported by heavy, turned wooden columns, have paneled fronts which have been painted off-white and contain a number of slip pews and benches in original condition. Facing the pulpit are a group of benches used as a choir loft.

Original appearance: The Danville meeting house remains close to its original appearance. Stylistic evidence suggests that various changes occurred to the doorways during the Federal period. At about the same time, most windows appear to have been enlarged by the height of one pane of glass; only the gallery windows on the front, being limited in height by the plate of the frame, remained the original size and retained their earlier caps. Most of the present window sashes bear the relatively thin muntins of about 1800 or later.

After 1832 when a Free-Will Baptist meeting house was constructed in Danville (then still named Hawke), the old meeting house was used less frequently for religious meetings, though regular town meetings continued to be held there until 1887. In the 1860s, most of the pews on the main floor were removed and stored in the galleries so that dances could be held in the building. In 1911 the Old Meeting House Association was formed to ensure the preservation of the structure. In 1936 a gift of funds by a local citizen, Lester Colby, permitted the replacement of the pews on the main floor; the restoration was done by Arthur Tuck of Danville and a Mr. Greenwood of the neighboring town of Kensington. Subsequent maintenance has included termite control in 1968, sill replacement in 1973, and exterior painting in 1981.

*8. Significance:*

The Danville meeting house is one of the oldest such structures in New England to survive relatively unchanged. It is the oldest of a small group of related meeting houses remaining in Rockingham County, New Hampshire, and adjacent Essex County, Massachusetts. Together, the buildings in this group are the largest assemblage of early meeting houses in New England, preserving within a radius of ten miles a rare picture of the typical public building of the

eighteenth-century New England town. The Danville structure, as the earliest of the group, is crucial to an understanding of the entire collection.

Architecture: The Danville meeting house was built in 1759-60 [revised to 1755 in 1995] in the western parish of the township of Kingston, New Hampshire. This parish was formally set off and incorporated as the township of Hawke in 1760, and this structure thereafter became the chief public building of the town, used both for public meetings and religious services. Because the township of Hawke (renamed Danville in 1836) never attained a large population (the maximum until recent times being 666 inhabitants in 1890), and because the growing success of the Free-Will Baptist religion drew parishioners to a private meeting house some two miles distant, the old meeting house was left relatively unchanged over the years. As early as 1817, gazetteer writers Eliphalet and Phinehas Merrill were impressed with the antique aspect of the "ancient meeting house." After the Old Meeting House Association was formed in 1911, the preservation of the building in its unspoiled form was ensured. Today the building stands as the earliest member of an important group of related structures of the early steepleless type.

Although the Danville building appears unusual in a modern context, and although the only related examples of its type are now found in country towns, the Danville meeting house was actually a rural copy of a building type which had first appeared in such larger coastal communities as Portsmouth, New Hampshire's eighteenth-century metropolis. The Portsmouth meeting house of 1712 was also built as a simple gable-roofed structure without a steeple, although it had two galleries and was thus three stories in height. Another steepleless three-story meeting house was built in 1732 in Kingston, the parent town from which Danville was eventually set off. The Danville structure was therefore a smaller replica of a long-established type. Its early features, especially the pulpit, today provide the only available hint of the interior detailing of the long-destroyed prototypes which existed in all surrounding New Hampshire and Massachusetts towns.

In the same fashion, the Danville meeting house, as the earliest survivor of a nearby group of similar buildings, provides a prototype for these structures. Among these are the meeting houses in Sandown, New Hampshire (1773), the Rocky Hill parish of Amesbury, Massachusetts (1785), and Fremont, New Hampshire (1800). The building thus stands as an important bridge between the lost examples of earlier New Hampshire and Massachusetts towns and the later survivors of this now-rare type.

# NOTES ON THE DATE OF CONSTRUCTION OF THE DANVILLE MEETING HOUSE

**James L. Garvin**
**October 7, 1995**

Construction of the Danville Meeting House has traditionally been place at 1759-60. New evidence demonstrates that the building had been erected, though not finished, by 1755.

The traditionally-accepted date of 1759-60 for erection of the building was based on the petition to governor and council for incorporation as a separate parish by the "Inhabitants of that Part of Kingston . . . adjoining on the Parish of Sandown." Dated January 2, 1760, the petition stated that "We have built a meeting House among us to accommodate ourselves & Families, That we & they might more conveniently attend the public Worship of God . . . ." The petitioners requested that the boundary between Kingston and the new parish be a line parallel to the Sandown parish line "half way between our new meeting house & the old meeting house in Town . . ." The latter was the three-story meeting house that stood in the center of Kingston village.

The petition was acted upon quickly. After review by governor and council and house of representatives, the request of the petitioners was granted on February 20, 1760, and an act incorporating the parish of Hawke was passed on February 22, 1760; its text is copied into volume one of the town books.

The Province Deeds, however, reveal that the meeting house alluded to in the petition of January, 1760, had stood for at least five years before the petitioners requested separation as a new parish.

On June 12, 1755, Jonathan French of Kingston signed a deed containing the following words:

> . . . I Jonathan French of Kingstown in the Prov$^{ce}$. of New Hamp$^{s}$ in New England Husbandman for Divers Good Causes & Considerations me hereunto moving and Especially for the Encouraging the making a New Parish or Precinct in said town & So the Setting up & maintaining the Publick Worship of God among the Inhabitants of the Beach plain & Habbaca (so called) & thereabouts Have given Granted conveyed & confirmed & by these Presents Do fully freely & absolutely Give Grant Convey & Confirm unto the s$^{d}$ Inhabitants of the
> Beach plain of Habbecai & thereabouts their Heirs & Successors a Certain Small piece of land situate in said Town for the use & Privilege of a meeting House forever containing one-quarter of an acre it Laying Joyning to that Piece of land whereon the meeting house now Stands which was Set up by the s$^{d}$. Inhabitants & is part of the 2$^{d}$. Lot in Number in the Division of twenty acres below the

> two hundred acre Grants (so called) & is bounded as followeth (viz) Beginning at a white Oak tree which is the South Westerly Corner Bounds of the s$^{d}$. Second Lot in Number in S$^{d}$. Division & Running Easterly Six rods then to Extend Northerly making Such an angle as to Compleat s$^{d}$. Quarter of an acre the said Premises with the Appurtenances [to] the sd. Inhabitants their Heirs and Successors for the use & Privilege afores$^{d}$. TO HAVE & TO HOLD forever on the terms & Conditions following (viz) PROVIDED the said Inhabitants their heirs & Successors shall & Do well as may be with Conveniency & Propriety go on & finish our s$^{d}$. Meeting house which we have Erected by the s$^{d}$. Piece of land & Settle & maintain an Orthodox minister of the Gospel to preach & any [carry] on the work of the Gospel therein & I the s$^{d}$. Jonathan French Do hereby avouch my self to be the true & Lawful owner of the above Given & Granted Premises & am Lawfully Seized thereof & have in my self good Right to Dispose of the same as aboves$^{d}$. & that they are free of all Encumbrances whatsoever & I do hereby for my self my heirs Execu$^{rs}$. & Admin$^{rs}$. covenant & Engage the above Given & Granted Premises with the Appurtenances to them the s$^{d}$. Inhabitants their Heirs & Successors for the use & Privilege afores$^{d}$. On the terms & Conditions above mentioned against the Lawful claims & Demands of all persons whomsoever forever hereafter to Warrant Secure & Defend by these Presents IN WITNESS whereof I do hereunto Set my hand & seal the 12$^{th}$. Day of June Annoq$^{e}$. Dom 1755 & in the 28$^{th}$ Year of y$^{e}$. Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Second by the Grace of God of Great Britain &c King &c.

[Province Deeds, vol. 62, page 443.] The deed was not witnessed until June 12, 1758 and was not registered until April 7, 1761.

Since this deed conveys a piece of land "Laying Joyning to that piece of land whereon the meeting house now Stands," there may be a still earlier conveyance of the meetinghouse lot proper. Or perhaps the meeting house was placed within the right-of-way of the central road in Danville (now Route 111A) and the French deed was intended to add a small portion to its lot. The wording of the deed implies that French intended to convey a triangular lot with a base of six rods (99 feet) in the extreme southwestern corner of Lot 2 in the twenty-acre division. If the center road served as a range road, it would define the western line or boundary of Lot 2.

More likely, the wording of the deed is simply misleading. The meeting house now stands, and apparently always has stood, on a lot encompassing "one Quarter of an acre," as described in the deed. French's deed probably conveyed a piece of land on which the structure had been erected with his concurrence—the quarter-acre on which it stands today.

Thus far, I have been unable to locate any early maps of Kingston detailed enough to define the twenty-acre division of lots below the two-hundred-acre grants. The location of these lots could

undoubtedly be determined by a careful study of the town records of Kingston. Those records contain descriptions of a number of subdivisions of town land into house or farm lots.

The most detailed early map readily available is the manuscript map published in Volume 24, between pages 678-9, of the *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers* (1894), and reproduced in Ruth J. Rich's *The History of Danville, New Hampshire* (1976), between pages 8 and 9. A copy of the map is attached to this report. This map appears to date from 1759 and to have been compiled as an exhibit to accompany the petition of January 2, 1760 for separation of a new parish. The mapmaker carefully laid out the distances between various points in the proposed new parish and the old meeting house in the center of Kingston, thus documenting the hardships encountered in traveling to the old center. The map also shows the location of the new meeting house.

In the absence of a more detailed map showing the ranges of lots in old Kingston, we are next left with the question of whether Jonathan French's deed of 1755 conveyed land for another meeting house somewhere else in the township, and not the quarter-acre on which the Danville meeting house now stands.

The first question that arises from French's deed is the location of the territory he describes as "the Beach plain & Habbaca (so called) & thereabouts." Is this the district that became Danville?

The question is largely answered by the mileage map referred to above. The table of distances in the lower corner of the map notes that "From Sandown Line To follow the Road Called habbaca Road to the old meeting house is 6 / 1." On the left-hand side of the map (the top of the map as reproduced here), along the road today called Colby Road in southwestern Danville, is the legend, "This Road from Sandown Line to the old meeting house is Six miles and one quarter By our measure." Thus, Habbaca was apparently identical with the southern or southwestern portion of today's Danville.

The table of distances on the mileage map also notes that "From Sandown Line on the Beach Plain Road to the old meetinghouse is 5 / 3." Along the road today called Sandown Road, in the upper corner of the map, is the legend, "Which makes the Road from the old Meeting house To Sandown Line Six miles Save 40ty rods." Thus, Beach Plain must have been the northerly section of today's Danville, which still retains "Beach Plain Road."

This cartographic evidence strongly suggests that the lot on which the meeting house stood in 1755 was identical to the lot on which the Danville Meeting House stands today. This evidence is bolstered by the fact that the mileage map described above shows that Jonathan French, the grantor of the meeting house lot, lived a short distance north of the meeting house, on the road from North Danville to Kingston.

Further confirmation of this fact is given in a second deed granted by Jonathan French. On May 5, 1761, French sold to a committee of the Parish of Hawke, for £800,

> . . . for Parsonage land for the use of the Ministry in s$^{d}$. Parish of Hawke forever a certain tract of land Situate in sd. Hawke it

> being part of the Second & fourth Lots in Number in the Division of twenty acres below the two hundred acre grants (so called) which I purchased of Francis Bachelder & Isaac Godfrey Containing six acres & is bounded as followeth viz beginning at the Southeasterly Corner of s$^{d}$. land on a hemlock tree from thence running westerly on Jonathan Sanborn's land to that quarter of [an] acre that I gave for a Privilege for a meeting house then Extending Nothely keeping the whole wedth of my land till it Compleats six acres measured off Having the highway on the west & Jonathan French jun$^{rs}$. on the East . . .

[Province Deeds vol. 64, pages 384-5.]

The lot described in French's deed of 1761 is the same six-acre house lot that the Parish of Hawke conveyed for a parsonage to the Rev. John Page in 1764. The parsonage lot and the house that the Rev. John Page built on it are adjacent to the Danville Meeting House on the north. Thus, it is certain that the lot on which a meeting house stood in 1755 is identical with the meeting house lot of today.

The town records also show that the meeting house was constructed by a committee of twenty-seven proprietors who bore the initial expense of erecting and enclosing the structure, but who did not complete its joiner's work or finished woodwork. The building was used for meetings from March, 1760, when the first parish meetings were held.

Although the proprietors of meeting houses were normally reimbursed for their expenses through sale of pews in the buildings, the proprietors of the Hawke meeting house eventually conveyed their building to the parish free of charge, permitting the income derived from pew sales to be applied toward finishing the building.

The warrant for the town meeting of April 10, 1760, included an article

> To See if the Parish will Expt [accept] of the meetinghouse upon the Propriters Tarms.
>
> It was Put to Vote where the Meetinghouse should be given up to the Parish by the Propriters and it went in a Negative.

Two months later, on June 16, 1760, however, the following conveyance was inserted in the town book:

> Parish of Hawke, June 16$^{th}$ 1760 We the Subscribers Joyntly and Sevrely Promis to Discharge and aquit all Cost and Charges that Have Heretofore arison in Building of the Meetinghouse in the a Bove said Hawke and that it shall be no Parish Coast as witness our Hands.

[Book I, Hawke Parish Records, page 9.]

The conveyance is signed by the following twenty-seven men, who may be presumed to be the proprietors who had had the meeting house constructed at their own expense:

1. Caleb Towle
2. Jonathan Sanborn
3. Benjamin Sally
4. Leiten[ant] Benjamin Webster
5. Samuel Wabster
6. Jonathan French
7. William Clefford
8. Henry Morill
9. John Page
10. William Busel
11. Dyer Hook
12. Joseph Worth
13. David Tilton
14. Elias Rand
15. Ensign Israel Dimond
16. Daniel Brown
17. Jacob Hook
18. Elisha Clough
19. Elisha Bachelder
20. Edward Eastmen
21. Aaron Quimby
22. Jonathan French junr
23. Reuben Bachelder
24. Moses Quimby
25. Ephraim Page
26. Humphry Hook
27. Jabez Page

An examination of the mileage map attached to this report will reveal the names of all but two of these men—Benjamin Webster and Henry Morrill—and will show that the proprietors lived close to the meeting house. Moses Quimby and Israel Dimond, who lived on the Habbaca Road, now Colby Road, were located farthest from the building. Thus, the building was erected, and initially owned, by those who lived in the immediate vicinity of its location.

As soon as the proprietors conveyed the meeting house to the parish free of encumbrances, the parish proceeded to raise funds for finishing the building. The mechanism used was a traditional one: spaces for pews ("pew ground") were sold at auction. The parish minutes of June 16, 1760, contain the following deliberations:

> Firstly to See if you will Vote to Sell the Privlige For Sixteen Pues at a Vandue to the Hiest bidders of these Lawful Voters and Lay the Money out Towards Finishing the Meetinghouse as Soon as may be—
>
> 2$^{dly}$ to Chuse a Comity to manige the whole Affair of this Vandue and lay out the Money in Fineshing the said Meetinghouse as soon as may be
>
> Voted that Sixteen Pues Privlige shall be Sold to the highest Bidders of the Lawful Voters of said Parish
>
> Jonathan Sanbon Samuel Webster Henry Morill Jacob Hook and Aaron Qunby was chosen as a Commite to

> Carrey on the whole affair according to the warrant of said Meeting
>
> Jonathan French and Elisha Bachelder was Chosen to Call the Commite to an accompt concarning to the Sail of the Pues and finishing the meetinghouse

Immediately following this vote are detailed "Articles of Sale of a Privilege for Sixteen Pews in the Meeting house in the Parish of Hawke to be sold at Public Vendue to the highest Bidders pursuant to a vote of the freeholders Inhabitants in said Parish passed the 16th Day of June instant." An abbreviated account of the first vendue is given on page 9 of Ruth J. Rich's *The History of Danville*. Another sale was held on September 14, 1761, and a third, for pew ground in the galleries, took place on December 25, 1797.

The documentation summarized in this report confirms that the Danville Meeting House is the oldest structure of its kind in New Hampshire to survive in substantially original condition. The French deed of 1755 adds another four or five years to the known age of the building. The wording of that deed also shows that the proprietors of the meeting house (of whom French was one) hoped to be set off as a separate parish almost five years before they succeeded in their plan. The list of proprietors given on page 9 of Book I of the Hawke Parish Records, combined with the names and house locations shown on the mileage map of circa 1759, show that the meeting house was erected, and initially owned, by those who lived nearest its location. The conveyance of the unfinished meeting house to the parish in June, 1760, is unusual in that the proprietors relinquished any hope of being reimbursed through pew sales for their previous expenses in erecting the structure.

Map, circa 1759, from *New Hampshire Provincial and State Papers* Volume 24 (1894), pages 678-9.
The meeting houses in Kingston (center), East Kingston (bottom) and Danville (top) are circled.