

A Self-Guided Tour of Sanbornton Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Organized in November, 1771, when the first minister, the Rev. Joseph Woodman, was installed, this building is the second building of the Sanbornton Congregational Church. The first Meetinghouse was built on Tower Hill on the south side of Centre Cemetery. In 1834, the original building was taken down, beginning in April, and built over at this present location. The “new” Meetinghouse was dedicated on September 24, 1834. It is on the National Register of Historic Landmarks, as are the Sanbornton Public Library (formerly Woodman Academy), and the Town Hall. Upon the church’s construction, it was voted to sell spaces for horse sheds to church members at the rear of the building. In the 1950’s, the Sanbornton Fire Department fire truck was kept there, and earlier, it was used as a workshop for the school. The last remaining horse shed was removed in 2000.

In 1990, a handicapped access ramp to the church was completed behind the church, with the door leading out the right side of the chancel area. **A Memorial and Peace Garden** was also created there, with a granite bench memorializing Janet Norman, late wife of the Rev. Leslie Norman (1992-2002), and a peace pole.

The church’s one story main block has a shallow, shorter, two-story gable roofed entry pavilion on its street gable end. Above the pavilion rises a two-stage belfry tower. The main block and the pavilion both have clapboarded walls, sill boards, corner boards, and the same pedimented box cornice with moldings and frieze. The two-bay wide pavilion has two entries (each a paneled door with a built-in stained-glass window, paneled side

trim with corner blocks topped by paneled triangular “finials”); 12/8 sash windows in the second story; and a semi-elliptical louvered fan in the pediment accent the building. The main block is lit by tall, large, stained glass windows topped by Gothic arched blind louvers and trimmed by molded, arched frames with “impost blocks,” two windows in the street gable end and three windows in each side façade.

The first stage of the tower, clapboarded with corner boards and a box cornice with moldings and frieze, has one painted arched louver with molded frame in each public façade. The clapboarded upper stage, trimmed by wide paneled corner pilasters and another box cornice with moldings and frieze, has a Gothic arched louver set in molded frame with “impost blocks” in each public façade. The upper stage is surrounded by and crowned with balustrades with simple balusters and corner posts topped by a tall pyramidal “pinnacle.”

In 2015, the church was awarded an LCHIP grant (Land and Community Heritage Investment Program) that included the installation of new custom shutters to match the original shutter profile and hardware. New Lexan (non-yellowing) panels and frames were also installed to protect the windows on the outside, replacing the Lexan installed in 1987.

Church Interior

In the narthex, the photos on the wall are of Nathan and Abigail Taylor, from the original Walter Ingalls paintings; the stained glass windows on the front doors memorialize the Taylors. The guest book table was the church pulpit before 1950. Upstairs rooms were remodeled in 1953 as Sunday school classrooms. Later, in 1988, one room became the

pastor's study. In the early days, this space served as an open gallery, used by the choir and church orchestra.

The **oak pews** were installed in the nave area in 1897, and the most recent blue carpeting was installed in 1980. An original church pew is part of the Sanbornton Historical Society's collection at the Lane Tavern. Two front pews were removed (and sold) in 2017 in order to make additional space for liturgical rites and for visitors/members in wheelchairs.

The coat rack was built by Ellwood Bennett, and a hymn board by E. Willis Sanborn. A cabinet (over the book and brochure shelf) holds **early Communion cups**, plates and a 1971 church bicentennial plate. A **banner** adorns the wall on the left, denoting the year (1771) when the church was organized. The banner was designed by Joy Tilton and the Committee for the 200th Anniversary Celebration of Congregational Churches in New Hampshire, now the New Hampshire Conference of the United Church of Christ. Joy Tilton carried it in the Parade of Banners on October 28, 2001, at the Whittemore Center in Durham, New Hampshire. Nearby in the corner, on top of the old organ, are the **pewter Communion plate and chalice** (date unknown) that was used before the current **silver Communion set** (already in use by 1940).

The **church chancel, altar, altar set, dossal (curtain), and lectern** have an interesting history. In 1950, Douglas Prescott was the architect, and the plans now hang on the narthex wall. George Currier and his father, J. Sherman Currier, constructed the platform. Three of the original church pews were used as choir seats. Robert and Richard Wiggins were hired to construct the pulpit, altar and lectern. The altar, lighted cornice

and dossal (made by Elizabeth Cotsibas), were given by the Bodwell family, in memory of the Rev. Abraham Bodwell, the second minister of the church. The lectern was given by descendants of the Perrin family in memory of the Rev. J. Newton Perrin, the seventh minister of the church. The Carl Hansen/Kent families donated the altar set. Others involved in the project were the Rev. Edward Ernst, Mr. and Mrs. Milton Stone, and Richard Currier. The chancel was dedicated on July 29, 1951.

Before 1950, four small deacon chairs, upholstered in red velvet were used. These chairs were placed below the platform. The present **deacon chairs**, Victorian in style, were made by ancestors of Robert Hanson and were given to the church by him in memory of the Hanson family.

The choir loft was expanded in 1953. The chancel lighting was donated by Mr. and Mrs. Warren Wilson. The offering plates were given in memory of Harry and Edith Barrett, by Mr. and Mrs. Warren Wilson, Mr. and Mrs. Ed Mattlin, and Mr. and Mrs. James Barrett. The lectern and pulpit appendia (also called paraments) were given in memory of Dr. and Mrs. Charles Bramble, and the lectern Bible was given in memory of Janet Norman (1930-1996). Marjory (Hillman) Marcello donated the audio system.

By the rear door of the Meetinghouse, there are two chairs and a table on loan by Elizabeth Cotsibas from the Currier family. The Communion table was originally owned by Clifton Ramsey. It was inherited by Paul Cotsibas who gave it to the church in 1989. The wall sconces for candles on each side of the altar were part of Clifton Ramsey's estate.

The **pewter baptismal font** is inscribed on the bottom: “O. Trask.” Oliver Trask (1792-1847) was a pewterer working in Beverly, Mass. His productive years were 1832-1839, and his work is very highly regarded. There are examples in the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, as well as other museums. This baptismal font may have been made at the same time as our Johnson & Smith clock, around 1834, when our church was moved and rebuilt in its present site. The font sits on a small table made by Robert Bodwell.

A United States flag stands on the left and a Christian flag stands on the right of the main entrance to the sanctuary. In July 1889, The Congregational Society voted alterations for the platform and pews to provide more space in the chancel for the choir members. A photo by Elmo C. Weeks, taken prior to 1903, shows the earlier chancel, chandelier, wall lights, and stenciling on the walls, as well as the pews in use today. The chandelier and wall lamps now stored in the Lane Tavern garage were used until 1926, when the church building was electrified. George Currier remembered helping his father lower the chandeliers to replenish the oil and light the lights.

Ornamentation

The **steeple bell** was cast by Boston Copper Company in 1830, purchased and used in the Woodman Academy (now the Sanbornton Public Library) until it was sold to the church in 1863. Monies were collected by subscription to buy and transfer the bell to the church steeple. A photo of the bell in the narthex was taken by Betsy Akerman.

The **Memorial stained glass windows** were all made by Spence Bell Company of Boston. The twelve stained glass

windows installed in 1903 memorialize two early ministers, active members of the church, the Sunday school organized in 1819, and the Christian Endeavor Society organized in 1891. These memorials reflect well the many families who made the history of this church from 1771 to the present. The Emery window, to the right of the rear church door, was originally damaged during the hurricane of 1938, and at that time a number of new glass pieces were replaced. In 2010, an in-depth analysis was done by Cline Conservators, who found that the Emery window was in immediate danger of collapse. Thanks to a generous donation of an anonymous parishioner, **the Emery window** was completely restored between April and September, 2013 by Don Cline of Cline Conservators, Andover, NH. A history, compiled by Mildred B. Shaw and covering the history of all the windows, is available for sale.

Church records show that “a vote of thanks to Mrs. Helen J. Morse was passed for the elegant clock presented to the church... December 13, 1913.” A clock was presented to the church by Nelson Smith who built the Inn at Steele Hill in 1940. The **clock** replacing the Nelson Smith gift, restored in 1996, was made by **Johnson & Smith, Sanbornton clockmakers** in the 1800’s, and was removed from the church attic. It now chimes the hour with a single strike. The cost of restoration was donated by Edna Hansen and Dennis Akerman. It was placed on our wall by Stephen Sanborn, clockmaker and restorer, on Saturday, October 26, 1996, to coincide with the 225th anniversary of the church’s organization.

The church has a beautiful Christmas nativity set (crèche) hand-painted and donated by Kay Stewart and Evelyn Merrill. This crèche is an integral part of our Christmas Worship services every year.

Pipe Organ

Church records show the first mention of an organ was in 1880 when the Ladies Circle bought a reed organ. It is now situated in the northwest corner of the sanctuary. In 1949, a Minshall-Estey one-manual electric organ was purchased.

In 1968, the church bought 1914 Estey, Opus 1248, a 10-rank pipe organ and moved it here from Carlisle MA. The organ chamber on the east side of the building was built to house the organ, with the console and display pipes arranged as they now appear. The work was done entirely by church members: Dennis Akerman as chair, Ellwood Bennett in charge of the building work, Laurence Leonard of Laconia as advisor, with many parishioners involved. In late 1968, the organ was first played in Worship by Catharine Currier. The dedicatory recital was played by Stephen Garvin of Scarborough, Maine.

In 1976, a 1937 Estey console was installed and tonal changes made. In 1986-7, William Brys of Charlestown did major modifications to the organ, including tonal changes and additions. In recent years, there have been additional tonal changes. The organ contains 909 pipes. In 2014, an organ concert was held to celebrate the Estey's 100th anniversary.

In 2019, the church voted to raise \$60,000 for a major rebuild of the organ. That work, under K. Robert Bengtson, with the help of many church members, has continued into 2020, with completion planned before the end of the year. Work includes replacing the Estey console with a three-manual Austin console, new wind chests, the addition of a Positive division, and many tonal changes. When completed, it will comprise 22 ranks over three manuals and pedal.

Organists have been Mary H. Bodwell 1880; Livonia Hunkins prior to 1918; Catharine Currier 1918-1971; Marylou Crooks 1971-1979; Douglas Embree 1979-2017; and Laura Belanger 2017-the present.

Undercroft

In 1974, **the excavation project** began for the Undercroft with Warren Wilson as Project Manager. 812 hours of labor were spent by volunteers doing the groundwork. Ralph Ingemnsen and Merle Sargent, masons, volunteered their expertise on foundation work. In 1979, the finishing of the project was undertaken with Douglass Prescott as architect, Robert Bodwell as chairman of the Building Committee, and Jim Van Valkenburgh as the carpenter and builder.

Completion of the Christian Education, Fellowship, and Community Service facility was completed in 1980. All the furnishings in the Undercroft were donations from the Women's Union and Harmony Grange #99.

Church members gave the Undercroft a new look with fresh paint in the summer of 2016. As part of the LCHIP grant received in 2015 (see page 2), our unisex bathroom was renovated to make it wheelchair accessible.

Many pictures and photos have decorated the walls. Presently, there is a framed colored photo of the church taken by German photographers in 1997 and donated by Richard Currier. There are also 3 framed collages of the church created and donated by Mildred B. Shaw, Church Historian Emeritus.