

History of The Elder Grey Meeting House Chadbourne Ridge, North Waterborough, Maine

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Sporting the new 1806-style foundation, 2002. Photo by Shawn Patrick Ouellette

From Here to There

Listen!

*And across 150 years
Perhaps we still can hear
The creak and groan of cartwheels
The grunt of sixteen yoke of oxen
Urged on through springtime mud
By the shouts of sturdy men
Who moved this small white church
From the foot of Ossipee Pond in 1832
to here on Chadbournes' Ridge
Here half-way to their goal
Where the strength of men and oxen
(and the rum) ran out:
Here on Bradeen farmland beside this quiet road
Where each year now we once again return
And make these hand-hewn rafters resound
With the ancient songs of faith
And once again
Remember.*

*Lillian P. Davis
June, 1982*



ca. 1910

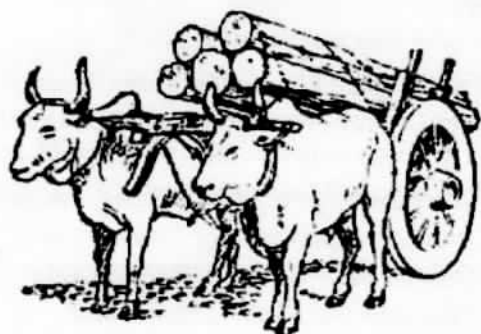
In 1806 a church was built at the foot of Little Ossipee Pond in North Waterborough. John Harper, a descendant of the Deerings of Deering Ridge, in the early 1930s wrote of his understanding of Waterborough history, "A church was built at Chadbourn's Mills near the outlet of Ossipee Pond by the Universalists..." The Universalist connection is possible, but no records have been found to verify it.

Nothing is known of the first pastor, but one of the early ones was Elder James Gray, born to Nehemiah and Olive (Goodwin) Gray in 1784. On December 31, 1807, he married Anna Woodard, the daughter of William and Mary (Johnston) Woodard. Willam had moved with his family to North Waterborough from York sometime prior to 1787.

James and Anna Gray moved to Waterborough from Lyman in 1813. He was affiliated with the Henry Hobbs Church on Ossipee Hill and was ordained a Free Will Baptist preacher in 1825. The Meeting House gets its name from Elder Gray, who served as pastor for many years.

In 1832 the Meeting House was moved to its present site atop Chadbourne Ridge, also known as Bradeen Ridge, in order to be nearer the aging pastor who lived some two miles away, and possibly to accommodate the growing number of families who were living on the hills and ridges to the north of this area. Men and oxen brought the building to the top of the Ridge and, according to local legend, "they ran out of hay for the oxen, ran out of rum for the men and the building got mired in the mud." They felt they had met the pastor "half way." In those days Joseph and Samuel Bradeen, brothers, owned farms on opposite sides of the road. Joseph gave the site where the Meeting House was placed, and Samuel gave land across the road for the cemetery.

In 1928 the North Waterborough correspondent for the *Sanford Tribune-Advocate* wrote of the move:



In our imagination we can picture the scene, many yokes of oxen each with its driver goading the faithful animals along to the rattling of the chains and creaking of yokes with the usual accompaniment of small boys, as at that time the number of boys was much greater than now. ...so the house was at last settled on a little knoll, where it has withstood the cold bleak winds of winter and basked in the sunshine of summer for a century. The view is magnificent, showing the White Mountains of N.H. and many other nearer hills and mountains. The Word of God has been faithfully preached from the pulpit by men of talent, James Grey, James Nason, Jesse Warren, James Stevens, Wescott Bullock, Mr. Perkins, S. Poindexter and many others, coming down to later times, John W. Butler, who became a Missionary to China.

During foundation restoration work in the Spring of 2000, Arron Sturgis, proprietor of Preservation Timber Framing, Inc. of Eliot, Maine, observed that the front peak is slightly bowed forward and concluded that the Meeting House came up the long, steep hill backwards.

On February 24, 1851, Mary Lovina Chadbourn wrote to her sister, Joann Wells:

Our singing school is not done yet. Mr. Ham is giving us a few nights. The three schools [at] the Corner and the school in the Carpenter district and ours meet at our meeting house for a sing next Wednesday evening. Shan't we have a time.

At the age of 69, on June 17, 1854, Elder Gray died and lies with his wife in the cemetery across from the church. On June 26 Mary Lovina Chadbourn wrote to Joann:

Elder Gray died very suddenly a week ago last Saturday. He was taken sick the Monday before... went outdoors the day he died. He went into his room to lay down, in a few minutes his wife went into the room and found him dead. It appeared that he died asleep but most people think he died in a fit. The Doct. said he had symptoms of apoplexy.

Following the pastorate of Elder Gray, Elder Buzzell, born in Parsonsfield in 1807 and ordained in 1834, became pastor. He served his people well and was later a chaplain in the Civil War. During this period, according to church records, "a great blessing of God succeeds our last association in Waterboro which a few--a very few years ago was a vast, howling wilderness." This referred to the great religious revival which occurred here. Of this revival, Elder Gray is quoted as saying, "I cut and piled, and cut and piled, and Brother Buzzell came along and touched the match to it."



On the map of 1856 the Meeting House is shown as the "F B C," an abbreviation for Freewill Baptist Church.

In February of 1857, a committee "desirous of preserving the House where our fathers have worshiped (known as the Eld. Grey Meeting House)," composed of Albert N. Chadbourn, Ivory Chadbourn, Charles B. Mills, William Bradeen and Harrison L. Strout, was formed to receive subscriptions and superintend repairs. Records of money collected and value of work donated were kept.

H. Gile, Clerk of the First Baptist Church of Waterborough, known as the Old Corner Church, wrote on April 10, 1858:

In a conference meeting held this day at the schoolhouse in the north part of the town several Brethren being present from the Waterboro Church who listened to the Christian experience of some present all satisfied with them and also agreed in their becoming of Church on their baptism. Accordingly upon the following Sabbath May 9th at the Greys meeting house the following individuals came forward and received the hand of fellowship.

vis. Mrs. Elizabeth Chadbourn
 Joan Chadbourn
 Lidia Barnes, by letter
 July 11 1858 Horace Nason baptised
 Eveline Nason Abby Chase
 were received in the Church

On the map of 1872 the Meeting House is shown as a Union Church.



By the late 1800s, the Meeting House had fallen into disrepair, but the people became interested in holding services in the church. A young theological student, John Best, was sent from Northfield to serve as pastor for the summer vacation. He was paid \$180 by the congregational board and lived with different families. All the homes in the community were opened for his entertainment. He was a good leader, a fine singer, and was well-liked. It was not long before such an interest was aroused that repairs were made on the building inside and outside. The interior was completely restored, window glass replaced, a new roof put on, etc. through the generosity of the residents and of friends abroad.

The following summer another student continued Sunday evening services in a hall in North Waterborough, thinking this place more central. From this time on there was no continuity in the services held in the Meeting House. Occasionally ministers and able laymen who were available would hold meetings. Among those remembered were Rev. James Stevens; Mr. John Lord, a teacher; and Rev. Frank C. Bradeen.



On November 10, 1890, Jim Frank Chadbourne wrote in his diary, Have been repairing the graveyard fence over at the Grey meeting house.”

Around the turn of the century the Meeting House was used at Christmastime for school and neighborhood parties. Mary Witham of Wolfeboro, New Hampshire, shared her memories with Mary G. Moore (*Sanford Tribune*, August 1, 1968):

One of the special memories of my childhood is of my mother bundling all of us children up in a pung or a sleigh and driving Maud, our old white horse, over to the Christmas tree. How we loved those times! We children would all “speak a piece,” as we called it, and sing songs with Mrs. Bert Bradeen at the organ and either her husband or Uncle Joe Chadbourne as Santa Claus.



The Meeting House was also used for revivals and special services. In 1976, Virginia C. Downs, in a history entitled *Descendants Find Roots at Elder Grey*, wrote of her interview with John Hanscom:

John remembers going to a meeting [in the early 1900s] with his family, a special meeting the citizens had requested the elder to hold to pray for rain after a long drought. “I can just see my grandfather out in the yard with the elder. The elder hesitated quite a time, scanning the horizon, then he said, ‘Well, let’s go, boys, but I’m telling you, t’aint no use.’”

There followed again another period of inactivity until the early 1920s when interest in repairing the Meeting House was again sparked. The first annual pilgrimage service, attended by friends and family descendants from afar, was held in 1926. The Elder Grey Meeting House-Cemetery Association was formed in 1928 by these founding officers: Fanny Mills McDaniel, Maria Grey Kimball, Mary Mellen Sinkinson, Ella Libby Bradeen, Ethel Sinclair Downs, Mary Strout Goul, Herbert A. Bradeen, Harry S. Chadbourne, Dr. Ansel S.

Davis and Annie Chadbourne Sinclair. The Association has been active over the years keeping the Meeting House in good repair and the cemetery well groomed.



October, 1989

Erving Stuart, father of Althea Hanscom and father-in-law of the aforementioned John Hanscom, built the front wall of the cemetery in 1938. To provide for expansion of the cemetery, additional land was donated by Willis Lord and his sister Edith Pierce. New walls surrounding the added space have been built.

On August 3, 1941, following the annual service, a bronze plaque was unveiled by Gray descendants John Sinkinson and Charles Stedman Grey following an address by Harry Chadbourne, also a Gray descendant. Harry's sentiments, in part, were:

For three generations this church was the effective social and religious center of this part of Waterborough. Here gathered the Grays, Bradeens, Chadbournes, Mills, Strouts, Parchers, Webbers, Browns and Lords to hear the word of God preached and visit with neighbors.

Inscribed on the plaque in front of the Meeting House are the words written by Raymond Bradeen:



The unveiling. August 3, 1941

1832
Elder Grey Meeting House
Here a century ago Elder James Grey
preached the word of God.
This tablet placed by
Elder Grey
Meeting House Cemetery Association
1941



Also in 1941 a deed for the land and building signed by Ralph and Mabel Emery was presented to the Association by Raymond Bradeen. Although the church had been on the site since 1832, the Association had no legal title to the land until this deed was executed.

Through the efforts of Evelyn Thompson and the Waterborough Historical Society, the Meeting House was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on October 9, 1979. It was the first building in Waterborough to be so designated.

The age and charm of the Meeting House is especially evident inside. The 37 boxed pews, painted blue with a darker trim, are carefully numbered on the faux grain painted doors, which often stick a bit. The seats are shallow and not comfortable during a long sermon.

And best you not be tardy. The pulpit and two front doors face the congregation, so the disapproving looks of your fellow churchgoers as you enter the Meeting House and proceed up the sloping floor, facing all, could be embarrassing.



Organist-eye view ca. 1995. Photo by Chuck Campbell

A careful observer will note a patch in the ceiling, the only evidence of the stove that at one time heated the building. The chimney was removed ca. 1939.

Affixed to eight of the pews are name plates. Although the records do not reveal their history, a best guess is that descendants paid for their placement, perhaps on the pews they believed their ancestors had traditionally occupied. The names on the plates are: James C. Chadbourne, Jacob Bradeen, James M. Chadbourne, Col. Ivory Parcher, William Mills, James Mills, Edmund Webber and James F. Lord.

An old organ, purchased by the Association within the last fifty years, is at the back of the church. Its straps fairly regularly provide nesting material for mice during the winter months, leading to last minute repairs.



A Bible for use in church services was presented to the Association around 1900 with the undated inscription, "This Bible is a gift of the people of this neighborhood. The donors are Maria, Julia and Celestia, daughters of Samuel Gray and granddaughters of Rev. James Gray, for whom this meetinghouse was named." In 1978 the cost of repair and restoration of this Bible was donated by Amelia "Kitty" Woodsome and Mona Ann Grey Woodsome Bucci in memory of Onville Curtis Woodsome, a descendant of Elder James Gray.

In 1947 Fred H. Goul donated two old record books which had been kept by his grandfather, Harrison L. Strout. These books contain the Constitution and By-Laws of the Ladies Sewing Circle formed in 1858; accounts of subscriptions and repairs made to the Meeting House in 1857, 1858, 1870 and 1876; and expenses of fencing the burying ground in 1875 and 1876.

In 1993 the family of Starrett Pierce, following his wishes, presented to the Association the James Gray Family Bible. For many years Mr. Pierce had kept this Bible for safekeeping in a wooden box he had constructed specifically to accommodate its dimensions. The births and deaths of the James and Anna Gray family are carefully enumerated within its pages.

The 1806 Meeting House is a treasure to many, and its preservation remains a high priority. Services with a guest minister are held each year on the first Sunday afternoon in August.

July, 2006

This history is adapted from *Elder Grey Meeting House*, a history written in 1955 by Eva Davis Shapleigh. Subsequent updates were written by Edie Anne Hutchinson for *Reflections of Waterborough* in 2000, and additional material was written by Linda Hanscom.

Note: Although the family name of Grey was often alternately spelled with an "a," the Association in 1928 adopted the "e" spelling for the Meeting House, the Cemetery and the Association.

Additional Sources:

Letters of Mary Lovina Chadbourn held by William F. Butterfield of Trevett, Maine

Records of the Elder Grey Meeting House-Cemetery Association

Records of the First Baptist Church of Waterborough, aka Old Corner Church, held by the Maine Historical Society.

Diary (1890-1893) of James Frank Chadbourne held by Linda M. Hanscom.

Map of York County, Maine; J. L. Smith & Co., 1856

Atlas of York Co., Maine; Sanford, Everts & Co., 1872

*National Register of Historic Places
in the State of Maine*



This is to Certify that the

Elder Grep Meeting House

has been reviewed by the Maine Historic Preservation Commission and by the Department of the Interior in Washington, D.C. and under the provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 has been entered upon the National Register of Historic Places on October 9, 19 79.

Be it further certified that by inclusion in the National Register the above named is recognized as a part of the Historical and Cultural Heritage of our nation and should be preserved as a living part of our community life and development in order to give a sense of orientation to the American people.

Earle S. Shelkowitz
State Historic Preservation Officer