

# **Sterling 1835 Town Hall**



©2014 Robert McKay Jones

## **The Historical Evolution of the Sterling 1835 Town Hall**

Prepared September 2014  
by  
The 1835 Town Hall Committee  
in association with the  
Sterling Historical Society, Inc.



### Sterling Incorporated—1781

Chocksett (as Sterling was so named in the early 18th century) separated from Lancaster and incorporated as Sterling. The site of the 1835 Town Hall at that time had been Samuel Brown's Blacksmith shop. Samuel Brown sold the property to Ebenezer Pope.

### Separation of Parish and Town—1799

It was in late 1799 when Ebenezer Pope (1752-1825) son of Joseph and Hannah (Shaw) Pope of Danvers and his wife Lucretia (Wilder) Pope (1761-1816) decided to deed a parcel of land near the centre of Sterling to be used by the inhabitants of the Town of Sterling.

In 1801, the first Town House in Worcester County separating the Church from Town business was constructed on this site. A 28' by 38' structure which served the dual purpose of space for Town business on the first floor and a school room on the second floor.

A deed was prepared on May 16, 1807 formally deeding the property to the inhabitants of Sterling with the following conditions: the Town is never to convert said premises to private use.

The inhabitants of Sterling paid \$48.30.

### New Building is Needed—1834

Before too long, the Town outgrew the aging building and in 1834 the Town voted to build a new Town Hall. John B. Pratt purchased the old Town building and moved it south to Worcester Road where it was repaired and improved. It still stands today.

Sterling Architect/Builder John Springer (originally from Lan-

caster, New Hampshire) planned and built our Town Hall and local builder John M. Stevenson constructed the doric columns. Springer was responsible for many Greek Revival



buildings in Sterling, including the First Federated Church and the Holbrook Sawyer Houses. The Greek Revival style was based on the architecture of

classic Greek temples and was known as the “National Style” in America between 1830 and 1850. The new Town Hall was completed in November of 1835 at a final cost of \$2,857.85.

Edwin A. Conant, Esq. gave the dedicatory address . The same man who gave the Conant Library to the Town in 1885. It was a gala event attended by many a towns-people. In the evening following the dedication, music and singers of some notoriety entertained the gathering.

### Sterling One Hundred Years Old—1881

A grand celebration was planned for the one-hundredth anniversary of the incorporation of the Town of Sterling. Bells were rung and salutes fired at Noon and Sunset. A procession traveled through the streets and ending at the Unitarian Church across the common from the Town Hall. The dignitaries included Police, Firemen, The Sterling Grange, School Chil-

dren and the Citizens in carriages and on foot. Dr. William D. Peck (the Town Clerk for forty-four years and Treasurer and Collector for 32 years, who graduated from Harvard Medical School in 1836 along with Oliver Wendell Holmes) read the Act of Incorporation. Dinner was served under cover of tent on the Town Common.

The Town Hall was filled with displays of portraits and photographs of past and present inhabitants of the town, antique articles and it is said, interesting relics.

### More Improvements—1891

A number of improvements have been added over time, some provided with great thought. In 1888, ventilators were added to the roof to improve interior ventilation. In 1891, the Town voted to enlarge the building and in 1893, Mrs. Jane (Bailey) Kilburn donated \$2,000 to add a gallery on the west end over seeing the great hall on the second floor as well as a stage on the east end of the great hall.

During this time, the first floor consisted of a large hall with stairs on the right and left as you entered from the front and a kitchen on left.

Throughout this period, the Town Hall was used for many purposes including school lunches, dinners, exhibits, annual cattle show events, balls, graduations, antique fairs, dances, plays, presentations and other community events and social gatherings. Of course annual and special Town meetings were held in the upper hall.

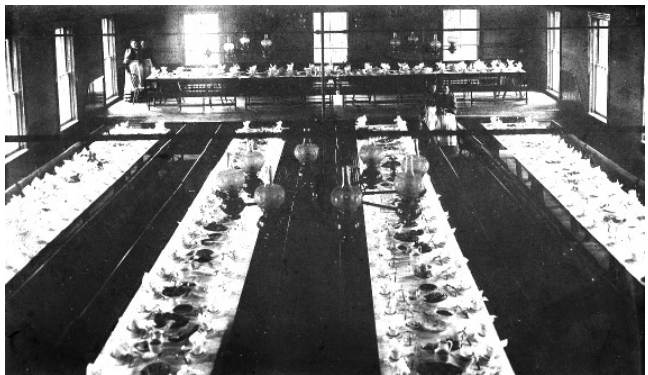
It was used for a time to store fire equipment in the lower level. In the early 20th century, the Sterling Police had offices on the first floor with the jail cell encased in brick and steel door in the lower level.

## All the World's a Stage—1900



The great hall (upper level) was used for many things, but one of the most endearing is that of a performance hall. Pictured above is the stage of the great hall during a performance.

Here is a banquet held in 1906 also in the upper level of the Town Hall. Note the original chandeliers and wonderful vaulted ceilings.



## Electricity Comes to Sterling—1910

Prior to 1890, there was no electricity in Sterling. Slowly the lines began to be added. The electric Trolley came to Sterling



in 1906. The Sterling Municipal Light Department was granted the exclusive authority to distribute electricity in 1910. The Town Hall added electric lighting. It was the Mitchell Sawyer Company of Sterling

(organized in 1903 and incorporated in 1919), as an agent for Western Electric, that distributed the electric lighting fixtures to Sterling and all the surrounding towns. This was the time that Sterling saw the incorporation of Sterling Cider and Meadowbrook Farms.

## Tragedy Strikes Sterling —1919

Prohibition in Massachusetts had just been adopted in May of 1919 and on September 19, 1919, Constable George E.

Peeso of the Sterling Police Department, then housed in the Town Hall, was shot and killed during the line of duty. Constable Peeso responded to a call to the Sterling Inn and was shot by a suspect while he was being hand-cuffed. Suspects were



held in the 1835 Town Hall jail cell. The jail cell, pictured here,

still exists to this day in the basement of the Town Hall.

It was reported in the Boston Evening Globe that Ernest H. Nordenstedt was found not-guilty of murder. The defense claimed Nordenstedt thought the officers were robbers when they began to beat him on the head with a billy club while he was waiting in the road for a trolley car to take him to Worcester. Nordenstedt testified that he fired the fatal shot but he did not know it. He was dazed and confused by the beating.

### Let the Good Times Roll

Dancing was a weekly event during the 20's, 30's and 40's. Every Tuesday night for years was Regular Old Time Dance. For \$3.00 admission, an orchestra (like the St. Cyr Orchestra) would serenade dancers.

In the early 50's, auctions became very popular and the Sterling Town Hall hosted Levi Lashua, a famous local auctioneer.

**Town Hall, Sterling, Mass.**  
**FRIDAY EVE'G, DEC. 16.**  
**A SOCIAL DANCE!**  
**MUSIC BY**  
**Brigham's Orchestra,**  
**OF MARLBORO.**  
**SIX PIECES.**  
**The Order.**  
1. Waltz. 8. Quadrille.  
2. Quadrille. 9. Newport.  
3. Waltz. 10. Quadrille.  
4. Quadrille. 11. Schottische.  
5. Schottische. 12. Quadrille.  
6. Contra-Lady Wal. 13. Galop.  
7. Wal. 2. 14. J. S. Rell.  
15. Waltz.  
Dancers will leave the American House at 7 o'clock, returning after the dance. Fare 50 c. a. for the round trip. 014 St.



The Town Hall continued to be used for many community events, meetings and gatherings. Including 4-H meetings, Square Dancing, Receptions and boy Scout Troop

meetings.

### Town Business

During the 1970s, a major renovation took place to repair some structural problems, meet fire safety requirements, up-

date bathrooms, replace the wooden staircase and install drop ceilings. At that time, the town offices were located in this building and continued to be there until the early 1990s.

Unfortunately, many of the architectural features of the building were covered up in favor of low cost drop ceilings and more effective fluorescent lighting. We lost the high ceilings and grand chandeliers in the great hall.

In 1998 the Historical Commission completed a study of the building and in 2001 the 1835 Town Hall Com-



mittee was formed by the town to plan and coordinate maintenance and facilitate the use of the building. It was a slow process since there was much work to be done. Temporary walls were removed from both the first and second floors, open meeting space was created, floors were repaired and carpeted, broken windows and window panes were repaired, roof repairs were done, unwanted articles were removed and auctioned, the building was furnished by recycling items from the school and library renovations, walls were patched and painted by a prison pre-release program, and floors were cleaned and waxed. This work was done with a small annual maintenance budget, a lot of elbow grease by committee members, community volunteers and an incredible contribution by the Boy Scouts and an Eagle Scout project. After a significant amount of work, the space was finally ready for use by any group or member of the community that needed it.

It is the goal and mission of the 1835 Town Hall Committee to

continue to maintain and enhance the building while planning the restoration of original architectural details lost during previous renovations. Some of the original items are the wooden staircases, original ceilings on the both the first and second floors, and access to the second floor balcony. Universal accessibility to the second floor auditorium and stage is also priority as is the continued maintenance of the building.

In 2005 the town, aided by a grant from the state, commissioned an “Architectural/Structural Assessment and Feasibility Study for Universal Accessibility of the Sterling 1835 Town Hall”. The study found that the building was structurally sound, needed some immediate maintenance and provided a plan for accessibility. The immediate maintenance included roof repairs, furnace and chimney repairs, painting of the exterior, replacing storm windows, repairs to the exterior plaster on the portico, and reglazing of the window panes. This work has been completed with the exception of the reglazing and the painting of one side of the building. One of the reasons for the study was to determine the best way to provide universal accessibility to the second floor. The study suggested an addition to the side of the building to house an elevator. The plan is to complete the painting on the right side of the building once the addition is complete.

Over the last few years, the building has provided a temporary home for a number of public services: EMS 2002-2003, Library 2003-2004, Fire Department 2004-2005 and most recently the DPW 2007-2008 while their facilities were being renovated. It is currently home to many of the town recreation programs, as well as the Veterans Office, community and non-profit functions, and can be rented for private functions.

It is used regularly by scouting groups, 4-H, town committees, guitar lessons, a children's music program and hosts various

community clubs. Periodic events such as the Candidates Forum, cultural events, and informational presentations are also held here. To reserve the 1835 Town Hall for a group or meeting, contact the town recreation department, (978) 422-3041. The 1835 Town Hall is open most days and many evenings.

In 2012, the 1835 Town Hall Committee contracted the archi-



tectural and preservation firm of Menders, Tomey & Spencer to develop a plan to rehabilitate the old Town Hall ena-

bling full use of the entire structure and bringing all aspects up to current code requirements and ADA requirements and handicap accessible. This included a full kitchen and elevator to all three floors, yet maintain the original ambience and architectural.



The complete Rehabilitation Study is available on-line at <http://www.sterling1835townhall.org/history/>

As it has been since 1835, The old Town Hall is a work in progress. Please support our efforts to not only make it last another 150 years but shine along the way.

For continued and current information, please see our web site at <http://www.sterling1835townhall.org>.



# Sterling 1835 Town Hall Community Center

WelcomeHistoryActivitiesThanksLinksContact



## Recent Posts

Historic Photographs on Display

A Sense of Place

Private Functions at Sterling 1835 Town Hall

Welcome to the Sterling 1835 Town Hall

## Welcome

A message from the Sterling 1835 Town Hall Committee



In 1835, this Town Hall became the center of our community where it hosted hundreds of Town Meetings, community functions, town fairs, dances and theater.

Today, 179 years later, it remains a focal point in our Community and home to dozens of events every month including meetings, wellness and arts programs, community gatherings, and private functions.

Thank You Sterling!

### The Sterling 1835 Town Hall

Always at the Center of Our Community

©2014 Robert M. Jones

The 1835 Town Hall became the center of the community where it hosted over a hundred Town Meetings and probably

**1835 TOWN HALL**  
**USERS AGREEMENT**  
**1 DAY EVENT**

**RATES BASED ON 1 HOUR USE**

**ROOM RATE:    \$10.00 X    \_\_\_ Hours X    \_\_\_ # Rooms = \$    \_\_\_ total**

**Security Deposit            \$50.00**

**USER:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(Organization name)

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Type of Event:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Day(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Time Event Starts:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Time Event Ends:** \_\_\_\_\_

**User's Contact Person:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Cell phone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Agreement:** User shall indemnify, defend, and hold harmless the Town of Sterling, 1835 Committee, Recreation members from any and all losses, cost and claims of any kind whatsoever arising from or incidental to User's use of the 1835 Town Hall. I agree to all Users Guidelines and payment agreements.

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Make checks payable to: The Town of Sterling**  
**Mail to: 1835 Building Use, 1 Park Street, Sterling, Ma 01564**

**Payments:**

- A. Reservations cannot be held until the Security Deposit of \$50.00 is provided to the Town of Sterling. Checks shall be made payable to the "Town of Sterling-Restoration Fund". The check will be applied toward the repair and/or replacement of any property damaged, lost, or destroyed during the event. If there is no damage, loss, destruction, and the check list has been satisfactorily completed the security deposit check will be returned in full.
- B. Payment in full of all use fees (including deposit) is due prior to the commencement of the event. Access to the facility will not be granted unless such payment in full is received.

**Cancellation:**

Cancellations by the User at least one month prior to the date of use will result in a refund of the security deposit and usage donation.

**Events Coverage:**

Users must provide a binder for liability to the 1835 Committee

**Users Guildlines:**

- 1. Do Not use scotch tape, nails , staples, glue gun, or duct tape on any hall surface. Please use ONLY masking tape or decorating putty for decorations.
- 2. No Candles allowed in the facility, except cake candles
- 3. Absolutely NO smoking allowed inside the facility.
- 4. NO alcohol will be allowed in the facility
- 5. No confetti, rice, or glitter is allowed
- 6. Do Not drag, scoot, push slide or pull anything not on wheels across any floor surface
- 7. All User property must be removed from the Facility immediately following the close of the event, failure to do so will result in additional charge
- 8. Vacuum or sweep the floors and clean up all debris from the floors
- 9. Take all trash from your event with you
- 10. Make sure the facility is in the condition it was at the start of your event
- 11. Lights will be turned off, heat turned down, air conditioner turned off, and doors locked.

**1835 USER CHECK LIST**

User's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Event Date: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1. Remove all trash from the facility from your event \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. Hall floor and room floors vacuumed or swept \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. Tables wiped down and returned to where found \_\_\_\_\_
- 4. Chairs returned to original location \_\_\_\_\_
- 5. Decorations removed- including tape \_\_\_\_\_
- 6. Restrooms cleaned- toilets flushed, sink cleaned out \_\_\_\_\_
- 7. Litter removed from the floor \_\_\_\_\_
- 8. All spills cleaned up and floor moped if needed \_\_\_\_\_
- 9. Heat turned down or air conditioner turned off \_\_\_\_\_
- 10. All lights turned off \_\_\_\_\_
- 11. Doors locked \_\_\_\_\_

Thanks to the following people  
for their assistance in the preparation of this document

## **Sterling 1835 Town Hall Committee**

### Members

Vern Gaw  
Ronald Pichierri  
Joann Drown  
Robert McKay Jones  
Phil Nash  
Danielle Ray  
Jo-Ann Cummings

## **Sterling Historical Society, Inc.**

### Trustees

David Gibbs; Curator  
Loret Schur  
Al Long  
Robert McKay Jones  
Joan Strang  
Vern Gaw  
Dan Borg  
Diana Munoz  
Merilee Callahan  
Ernie Spencer

