

RYE TOWN



HALL

An iconic building, in the center of Rye's Historic District, sits prominently at the head of our town green. The 1839 Greek Revival meetinghouse was built as the first Methodist Episcopal Society Church. After 1839, the bell tower

was added as the church expanded the building's entrance. The town purchased it in 1873 for One Thousand Dollars. It became the hub of the community, as it played host to annual meetings, elections, performances and meetings of the Odd Fellows, the Grange and dancing schools.



Rye even had a high school within its walls during 1889-90. The next year witnessed the addition of a new stage and an indoor double decker “double holer” with ladies’ on the top floor and men’s offset on the floor below. In 1911, a final annex of a six and one half foot porch brought the building to its current length.

The Rye Town Hall has been sound and sturdy, according to a number of structural studies completed over the past few years. As testament: Rye Town Hall has been used for semi-pro basketball games, plays, parties, dances, eighth grade graduations, District Court, political meetings and fairs. It is one of many buildings of this era and before, in our town, which continue to serve.

In 1974, the Selectmen began to adapt the space for expanded town office use. Previously, the town clerk, tax collector and treasurer had worked from home.

By 2004, the upper hall and stage were partitioned for additional offices. Despite the changes in space use, the building retains its twin curvilinear staircases, an intact tin ceiling original from 1912, its monumental windows and the proscenium arch over the



stage.

Rye Town Hall has been listed on the NH Division of Historical Resources Register of Historic Places since 2012. Renovation and expansion of this building have been studied for at least six years. Rye's Master Plan endorses the re-use of historic buildings, singling out this historic town hall in the heart of Rye's town center as a preservation priority.

The Rye Heritage Commission promotes rehabilitation versus new construction of the Rye Town Hall. The Commission's purpose is the proper recognition and protection of resources valued for their historic, cultural, aesthetic, or community significance. The

Commission is guided by the NH Department of Cultural Resources, the NH Preservation Alliance (who has highlighted the state's interest in the Rye Town Hall by designating it as one of the seven historic properties to save) and the Secretary of the Interior Standards for treatment of historic properties. The standards rely on the character-defining features of the structure. Modern accoutrements for the building are welcome when the "nuts and bolts" of what makes that building historic are left intact. Compatibility in the look/design and materials of the structure is a goal. Subservience of the addition requires that the historic building should remain the focus. All of these criteria should be "set in a field" of reversibility.

Of the options before the voters in 2017, the 20' addition on the Hutter Proposal for renovation is acceptable in scale and materials to the Heritage Commission and other historical commissions and societies in the town. The interior changes have been designed to preserve the historic features in such a way that if the building were ever re-purposed in the future, these features could be highlighted and enjoyed again.

This is your town hall. Go for a visit.

By Mae Bradshaw, January 2017

