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LIBERTY HALL

*still rings true to
original purpose*

By ANDREW BORGESE

One of the few buildings that have remained surprisingly true to its original purpose, architectural style and construction materials for almost a century and a half is the Community Hall building on Water Street in Woods Hole.

Constructed in 1878 as “Liberty Hall,” it was built to provide the community with a venue for meetings, religious gatherings, entertainment and local civic functions.

The architectural style of these new public buildings was influenced by events taking place around the world at that time. Archaeological excavations were beginning to uncover the ancient Greek ruins and reveal the simple, yet monumental architecture of these timeless temples and agoras.

At the same time, a shift in the predominant European style of highly decorative baroque architecture to a



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neoclassical style was well underway. A uniquely American style emerged that was not as literal an interpretation of the neoclassical style, but was heavily influenced by the proportions, scale, details and symmetry of classical Greek architecture.

This American interpretation was the beginning of the Greek Revival style of architecture that was embraced as a reflection of the simple,

yet strong democratic ideology, and which has since characterized much of New England architecture.

Among the distinguishing features of the Greek Revival style are a strong sense of symmetry but with a deliberate lack of ornamentation, heavy but simple cornices, gable front orientation, large double hung windows, often with a 2 over 2 grill pattern, and elaborate door surrounds with decorative crowns or small entry porches.

All of these features are evident in the Woods Hole Community Hall building, which also has a full basement that elevates the main floor about five feet above the street level, perhaps to visually set the building on a pedestal and accentuate its public

Built in 1878, Liberty Hall still fulfills its original function as a community building for the village of Woods Hole.

significance, or maybe, from a more practical perspective, to keep the wood framed structure above rising tides and floods. I would imagine that it was a bit of both.

For several years the Liberty Hall Association ran the building, which served a variety of civic and social functions; but the shares of the building were later bought up by an association member by the name of Isaiah Spindell, who used the building for commercial purposes.

By 1919 the building had fallen into disrepair and, in an effort to save it, the Woods Hole Community Association was formed and subsequently purchased the structure and the land for \$2,000. They successfully rehabilitated the building and restored its original function as a community gathering place.

For nearly a century now, the Woods Hole Community Association has been an extraordinary steward of this classic example of vernacular New England village civic architecture and has also, to this day, successfully maintained its original use for activities such as theater productions, dances, concerts, civic meetings, art shows, and holiday events.

The act of preservation, in this case, goes beyond the building as an object. Preservation of the building has enabled the preservation of its function as well. This building is a stellar example of how preservation efforts help connect us to our past by protecting resources rich in cultural, architectural and social value.

Despite the significant changes that have shaped Water Street in

the last 150 years, the Woods Hole Community Hall remains essentially unchanged in form and function. It continues to be a place where citizens feel safe and welcomed; a place where children and adults can grow and learn; a place where community ties are strengthened.

The dedication and commitment of the WHCA to keeping this build-

ing in good condition, and in operation since 1919, is appreciated by the many groups and organizations that use it throughout the year, as well as the occasional passersby who notice singing or dancing through the open doors on a warm summer evening and can't help but be drawn in for a closer look at what village life in Woods Hole is all about. ■