

## RESTORATION AND PRESERVATION OF THE SANDWICH TOWN HALL



Artist's rendering of the Restored 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Hall

The Sandwich Town Hall, built 1834, is one of the finest and earliest Town Halls in the Commonwealth and is located in a setting that is both appealing and unspoiled. The two massive cypress columns fronting the Town Hall, each 3 feet in diameter and 25 feet high, are characteristic of the Greek Revival style, as are the proportions and symmetry of the entire building. This style came into use in America following the Revolution as the visible expression of the ideals of civic participation first established in Athens over 2000 years ago.

On the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of American Independence in 1976 the Town Hall and the Colonial and post-Colonial buildings leading to it were designated by the federal government as the Town Hall Square National Register Historic District.

The Town Hall was one of the first Town Halls, if not the first Town Hall, constructed in the Commonwealth following the public approval on 11 November 1833 by the voters of the State of a referendum to ratify the separation of church and state by amending the Article III of the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Commonwealth. Prior to 1834 the Sandwich Town Meeting had met in the Congregational Meeting House located at River and Main Streets. The Sandwich Town Hall is therefore not only an architectural symbol of the roots of democracy but also the actual historical embodiment of the separation of governmental power and religious expression.

The construction of the Town Hall was authorized by a vote of the Sandwich Town Meeting of 17 March 1834 with the building to be two stories high and “sufficiently large to seat 500 people.” The building was to be paid for over four years. By the end of 1834

the building was complete, and on 28 February 1835 it was authorized “to notify and warn the inhabitants of the Town of Sandwich qualified to vote in elections and in town affairs to meet [on 16 March 1835] at the Town Hall.”

Following this first meeting in the Town Hall, the building itself is mentioned occasionally during the first 20 years in the records of Town Meetings. By 1853 the Hall had become an active community center for in 1853 it was also voted that a constable should be present to “keep unruly boys in order” during the many public meetings, lectures, and public amusements.

As the Civil War approached, the Fourth of July parade of 1860 became an expression of Sandwich patriotism and the day ended with fireworks and a Military Ball at the Town Hall. The following year it was at the Town Hall that volunteers enlisted for the Union Army, and almost 60 years later those who began their journey into combat in World War I began it at the Town Hall. To this day displayed on the walls of the first floor hallway are commemorative plaques for World War I and World War II that record the names of every Sandwich resident who served their country.

Over the years the Town Hall also became a venue and incubator of civic activity. Sandwich celebrated the national Centennial in 1876 with a concert and public singing in the Town Hall. In 1878 a public demonstration of the newly invented telephone took place with wires strung between the Town Hall and the nearby Congregational Church, and residents were startled to hear music played in the church clearly audible in the Town Hall. A few years later, the Sandwich Public Library occupied a room on the first floor from 1892 to 1910, and this was followed by the Sandwich Historical Society that housed its collections in the same space until 1926, both leaving when they had sufficient support to establish their own buildings.

The Sandwich Town Hall reflects over 170 years of Sandwich’s history and culture as well as the larger issues of State and National life that have had an impact on the Sandwich community. The Town Hall has been in active use as the seat of Town government for every one of those 170 years. There are few towns that can make this claim.

With the preservation and restoration of the building as a whole the magnificent space of the Hall will serve the public in ways that are appropriate for our own time and for a broad range of community events and meetings that can bring residents of the Town closer to each other and to the living history of the Town of Sandwich.

from Town Archives - Sandwich Historical Commission

**The Restoration and Preservation of the Sandwich Town Hall has the support of the following:**

**Sandwich Taxpayers Association; Board of Selectmen; Sandwich Enterprise – editorial; Democratic Town Committee; Republican Town Committee; Sandwich Historical Commission; Heritage Museums & Gardens; Sandwich Visitors’ Services Board & Sandwich Museum Coalition; Sandwich Chamber of Commerce.**