



Exeter Hall rich in history

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By Stewart Bean

EXETER — Since the old Exeter Grange Hall at Exeter Mills is being made into a Community Center, your Correspondent thought it might be proper to research the history of this old building.

I succeeded in finding quite a history of the so called Exeter Mills Hall in a book in the Bangor Public Library. As it turned out, the building was actually a Community Center when it was built.

It all started in the fall of 1873, when three ladies of this town, Mrs. Benjamin Laird, Mrs. Edmund Canny, and Mrs. Hammon Eastman, got the idea to start a Literary Club for entertainment and mutual social benefit. The first meeting was at the home of Mrs. Canny on December 20, 1873.

Besides the three ladies above, present were: Mrs. Amasa Stetson, Mrs. Harry Palmer, Mrs. Calvin Buswell, Mrs. Charles Davis, Mrs. Jacob Eastman, Mrs. Vernon Barker, and Miss Elizabeth Laird. Officers elected were: Mrs. Edmund Canny, president; Mrs. Benjamin Laird, clerk; and Mrs. Hammon Eastman, treasurer. Meetings were held on Saturday evenings at the homes of members and dues were \$.01. The time was spent in reading, songs, subjects for debate, needlework, knitting, etc.

They soon wished they had a hall for their use and for a Community House. With the aid of Noah Barker they became a corporate body. The application was signed by 26 members and was dated April 29, 1876. The meeting to incorporate was held at the home of Hammon Eastman on May 16, 1876. The site for the building was donated by Hammon Eastman and the whole village helped in lumber and labor.

The building was dedicated on November 2, 1876 with a big meeting and oyster supper. Prayer was offered by the Rev. Thomas Marsden, Rector of the Exeter Corner Episcopal Church and with singing by Elisha C. Tibbetts, and his sons, Clarence and Dayton.

At this time, the officers were: Mrs. Joanna Davis, president; Mrs. Lorenzo Eastman, vice president; Mrs. Cordelia Laird, clerk; Mrs. Julia O. Eastman, treasurer; and Mrs. Eliza Eastman, Dr. S.W.L. Chase, and Charles Woodbury.

The following passage was written by Noah Barker, and published in the "History of Penobscot County": "To the ladies of Exeter Mills and vicinity was reserved the crowning honor of erecting, in the centennial year of our national independence, the first free house within the precincts of the town, where the people of every creed and denomination may unite in the worship of the Great Common Father, and in the mode and manner that his conscience shall dictate; it being designed not only as a place for public worship, but for scientific lectures and social gatherings but also, for the convenience and benefit of a free, intelligent and progressive people."

The hall has been used by Exeter Grange No. 86, P of H, since the granting of its charter and also, by the Universalist Parish as a meeting place.

The members of the Literary Club thought it would be wise to sell the hall, so they sold it to the P of H in the 1930's and further meetings of the Club were held in the homes of members. Exeter Grange No. 86, P of H, has boasted nearly 150 members, but the number of members gradually decreased and the hall was closed up in the 1960's. The building is now owned by the town.