

4 North Main Street



Dowse Memorial Building

Form No.	82
Town	Sherborn
Address	4 North Main Street
Historic Name	Dowse Memorial Building
Uses: Original	Library
Present	Town Offices
Ownership, 1981	Town of Sherborn
" Original	Town of Sherborn
Constructed	1914
Source	"Sherborn Past and Present 1674-1924"
Style/Form	Jacobean
Architect	Pray, Hubbard and White of Boston
Ext. Wall Fabric	Flemish bond brick
Outbuildings	
Alterations	
Moved	No
Acreage	Less than one acre
Setting:	Located on hillside overlooking North Main St. houses to west, adjacent on south to old Central Cemetery and Memory Statue.
Recorded by	Edward W. Gordon, August 1981

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in 1914, the Dowse Memorial Building is situated to the north Sherborn Center's Washington, South Main and North Main Streets intersection. Adjacent to its lot's southern boundary is the Central Burial Ground which contains gravestones dating to the late 17th century. To the rear of this building is a competent example of Edwardian country house architecture. Directly across the street is the Oliver Everett House (1833), one of the finest Federal-Greek Revival houses in Sherborn.

Essentially T-shaped in plan this ivy covered two story structure is composed of a 61' x 30' main block and a 27' x 22' fireproof rear wing. Constructed of Flemish bond brick, limestone trim and concrete, it is one of the Town's very few masonry Structures. Stylistically, it may be loosely termed Jacobean. In the center of the main facade is a projecting pavilion which culminates in a Flemish gable. This midsection is flanked to the north by a pair of battlemented mullion windows and to the south by a recessed entrance porch which is located on the main block's northern gable end. This compact structure is crowned by a slate shingle roof.

Its interior contains fine oak paneling and Dowse family portraits Moses Wight, William Paxton and other American artists. The 16' x 29' delivery room, now the reception area, culminates in a barrel vaulted ceiling which is divided into three compartments by ribs springing from pilasters on the walls. Adjacent to its southern wall is the 22' x 16' Trustees room, now a mail room and office area. On the north side of the old Delivery room is the 20' x 28' general read room which presently is the Selectmen's room. It has a fireplace and windows on three sides. This room originally contained two large reading tables. The east wing was once the stack room and presently houses the Town's records. This 27' x 22' segment is completely fireproof.

In the basement is a 36' x 28' hall which serves as a meeting room and display area for the Sherborn Historical Society. It is amply lighted by windows opening above ground level.

Although the Dowse Memorial Building no longer serves as a library it has been effectively adapted for use as a Town Office building. It is a picturesque early 20th century addition to a Town Center comprised primarily of early 19th century residences and public buildings.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Originally built to house Sherborn's library, the Dowse Memorial Building presently contains town offices. William Bradford Homer Dowse presented it to the Sherborn Selectmen on May 18, 1914 "on condition that the Library be used and maintained by the town as a free public library to be known and called the Dowse Memorial Library." It was his wish that the basement house the Sherborn Historical Society. It was given in memory of his parents, Rev. Edmund and Elizabeth Bowditch Dowse. This building's design was provided by the Boston architectural firm of Pray, Hubbard and White.

The Dowse Memorial Building occupies the site of the Joseph Sanger House (built ca. 1800). Joseph, the brother of the lawyer, cotton factory owner and real estate magnate, Col. Calvin Sanger, owned land on three sides of the Central Burial Ground and on the western side of North Main Street. Joseph Sanger's general store stood on the southwestern portion of the Dowse Memorial Building lot. His tavern was located across the street on the site of 3-5 North Main Street. By 1888, Charles A. Clark owned this property and it was from this family that Dowse purchased the library's land.

Born in 1852, William Bradford Homer Dowse graduated from West Newton Classical High School and Harvard (undergraduate and law school). His father Rev. Edmund Dowse was pastor of Sherborn's Pilgrim Church from 1837-1905. He developed a successful patent law practice and had offices in

Boston and New York City. By 1898 his energies were devoted to oversee his manufacturing interests. These included Reed and Barton, United Carr Fastener and other businesses located in the U. S. and Europe. Governor Calvin Coolidge appointed him as his personal representative to the Tercentenary of the Pilgrims departed from England and Holland. He was received by Holland's Queen Wilhelmina. He followed in the philanthropic footsteps of Thomas Dowse (1782-1857), a leather dresser who spent most of his life in Cambridge but left money for the Sherborn Town Hall's construction. In addition to giving the Library, Wm. B. H. Dowse provided funds for Cyrus Dallin's Memory Statue, a War Memorial dedicated in 1924 (located just to the south of the Library).

Dowse's "center of education and sociability" was designed by Pray, Hubbard and White of Boston. Information pertaining to this firm is sketchy. It was founded in 1906 as Hubbard and White and was located at 15 Ashburton Place and later at 101 Tremont St. Pray joined the firm a year or two later. Its partners, James Sturgis Pray, Henry Vincent Hubbard and Henry Preston White were Harvard educated and shared a passionate interest in Landscape Architecture. Toward the end of his life, Henry Vincent Hubbard recalled the year Dowse's building was erected. He noted that "In 1914 our firm had a good year and interesting practice. This was completely squelched by the war, and we three partners were busy at other things. We dissolved the firm in 1918. Of the three, Henry Vincent Hubbard (1875-1947) had a particularly memorable career as a landscape architect. After receiving training in architecture at M.I.T. 1897-1898 he completed his education in landscape architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. In 1910 he was a co-founder of "Landscape Architecture" Magazine. He was the author of numerous books and article on landscape architecture, architecture and city planning. From 1921 until his retirement in 1944 he was a Professor of City and Regional Planning at Harvard. In 1920 he became a partner in the Olmstead Brothers Landscape architecture firm. He served as President of the Society of Landscape Architects from 1931-1935.

Further research is needed to identify other buildings by Pray, Hubbard and White. Besides the Dowse Memorial Building they are probably the architects of 2 North Main Street, an Edwardian Country House in the manner of Edward Luytens. It was also built in 1914.

Prior to the Dowse Memorial Building's construction Sherborn's library had been housed in inadequate facilities in private homes and later in the Old Town Hall. In 1860 Sherborn was among the first Massachusetts towns to take advantage of the General Court's permission to establish local libraries

The new library given by Richard and Mary B. Saltonstall opened its doors on January 17, 1971. It is located on Sanger Street to the south of the Old Town Hall. Since that time the old library has been known as the Dowse Memorial Town Office Building.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES

- Maps of 1857, 1875 and 1889
- "Sherborn Past and Present 1674-1924" - Sherborn Historical Society
- Anne C. Shaughnessy - The History of Sherborn, 1974
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- Historical Landscape Architecture Magazine - Jan. 1948, vol. 38 No.2