

1 Sanger Street



Sherborn Town Hall

Form No.	123
Town Address	Sherborn 1 Sanger Street
Historic Name	Sherborn Town Hall
Uses: Original	Town meetings, high school
Present	Police station
Ownership, 1981	Town of Sherborn
" Original	Town of Sherborn
Constructed	1858
Source	Mark P. O'Brien
Style/Form	Italianate
Architect	Elbridge Boyden of Worcester
Ext. Wall Fabric	Clapboard
Outbuildings	
Alterations	Major interior changes after 1876 fire on first floor, staircase removed, northwest room created.
Moved	No
Acreage	Less than one acre
Setting:	Situated on southeast corner of Church common, surrounded by architecturally and historically significant structures of the Town Center (e.g. First Parish Church, Col. Calvin Sanger House, etc.)
Recorded by	Edward W. Gordon, August 1981

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

The Sherborn Town Hall, (currently the Police Station), rests on a granite block foundation and rises 2 1/2 stories to a gable roof and cupola. The principal entrance to the building is on its northern gable end. Along with the Greek Revival First Parish Church to the north it is adjacent to the Church Common, in the heart of Sherborn Center. To the south, across Sanger Street, is the Sherborn Library (1971) and the Center School (1910). Directly across Washington Street to the west are private homes whose architecture compliments that of the public buildings - e.g. the Col. Calvin Sanger House (1819) and store (1805), 8 and 12 Washington St. respectively and the Flagg House (1740) at 22 Washington Street

The Old Town Hall's principal building material is wood. Its roof is covered with asbestos shingles. Its most distinctive exterior feature is the small square cupola in the center of the roof. The cupola is composed of a platform, a square midsection which displays square windows set into round arched panels, and a bracketed cornice. It culminates in a diminutive dome and a weather vane.

The treatment of this building's walls is similar on all four sides. Stylistically, its surface treatments are distinctly Italianate.

The 3 bay main facade exhibits a wide central entrance which is bordered by Doric pilasters and a pedimented entablature. It is flanked by a single window which is fully enframed and capped by a bracketed hood. Variations on the Palladian window form appear in the center of the second and attic levels. The second floor's triple window is surmounted by a triangular pediment. The attic window's three segments culminate in round arches. Its edges are boldly defined by quoins, fascia boards and a modillion cornice. The side walls are 5 bays wide. Projecting from the west wall is a small open porch above which is a sign which reads "Police". To the south of the porch is a fire escape stairway which leads to a door cut into the second floor wall.

The Town Hall's interior was extensively remodeled, after a fire in 1876. Only one of its original stairways is still extant. The pressed tin walls and ceiling of the stair hall display a "fleur de lis" motif. The second floor's hall was modified by the addition of Colonial Revival treatments in the 1920's.

The Old Town Hall, the work of the highly skilled Worcester architect, Elbridge Boyden, is a stylish, well-crafted Italianate public building. Along with the First Parish church it is a major focal point on the east side of the Church Common. It greatly contributes to the 19th century charm of Sherborn Center.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Sherborn's Old Town Hall has been an important focus of community life since 1858. It is located at the southeast corner of the Church Common in the heart of Sherborn Center. Over time it has housed town meetings, the Dowse High School, the town library, meetings of various clubs and organizations, and most recently, the local Police Dept. It was built from plans provided by Elbridge Boyden (1813-1896), architect of Worcester's Mechanics Hall.

From 1674 until 1809 the business of church and town were inextricably bound and meetings were conducted in the First Parish Church. In 1836 the Town purchased a structure which had been built on the common as a private academy. Town meetings were held in this apparently unimpressive structure until the Town's people became disenchanted with it in the 1850's. It was noted in a local newspaper editorial that "It is poorly fitted for the transaction of our public business and the hall is by no means suitable for those lectures on moral and scientific subjects that the welfare of the Community demand." The edifice completed in 1858 was "a neat structure of sufficient size for the wants of the Town and contained two graceful stairways leading to the large meeting hall, which the Town's people used so

much that it needed remodeling in 1875". That it required remodeling 17 years after its opening was undoubtedly because it housed a high school until 1874. Indeed, the Town Hall had been built with the intention of housing the Dowse High School. Thomas Dowse, Cambridgeport businessman, philanthropist and relative of the leather dressing Sherborn Dowses, bequeathed \$5,000 to the Town. The annual income from the Dowse School Fund was to be used for the support of a public high school. (For many years the fund realized \$400 a year.) According to reports of the School Committee a "spacious and elegant school room was furnished in the Town Hall, and the school opened in March, 1859, under the guidance of Mr. F. A. Baker of Dedham. Sixty pupils enrolled for the first term. The classroom extended across the back of the first floor. Sherborn's first public high school remained in the Town Hall until the summer of 1873. In September of the following year Sawin Academy opened its doors to Sherborn high school students. (Sawin Academy was located on the site of the present Sherborn Public Library, across Sanger St. from the Old Town Hall.)

In 1876 a fire destroyed much of the first floor of the Town Hall. Fortunately, fire insurance had been purchased by the Town Fathers a year earlier prior to remodeling. During the renovation which followed, one of the main stairways was removed to create a northwest corner room for the Town Library. Since 1860 the library had occupied a small middle room in the building. The new room was outfitted at a cost of \$406.76. Francis Bardwell notes that "it had an ingrain carpet on the clean floor space, and was heated by an airtight stove that could heat but did not smoke."

In 1893 the town voted to build a brick vault in addition to the fireproof town safe. It was constructed at a cost of \$400 and had to extend beyond the building. The additional land required for the extension was deeded to the town by C. A. Clark.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries a number of local clubs and organizations held meetings in the second floor hall with fees scaled according to the type of social function. Only the Temperance Group, a powerful force in town life, used it without charge.

By the 1930's a heating and plumbing system had to be installed in this building. The Selectmen's room had been heated by a pot-bellied stove.

Since 1971 Sherborn's Old Town Hall has served as a Police Station. Recently threatened with demolition, a group of concerned Sherborn citizens rallied to save this architecturally and historically important structure. In 1856 an editorial in a local newspaper expressed the need for a new Town Hall and noted that "we do not aspire to an edifice so spacious and costly as some of our neighbors but we would have one that in some good degree comports with the intelligence and taste of the age in which we live."

BIBLIOGRAPHY and REFERENCES

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- "Sherborn Past and Present 1674-1924" compiled by members of the Sherborn Historical Society
- "Historical Sketches - Sherborn Tercentenary 1652-1952" compiled by Francis Bardwell
- Maps of 1857, 1875 and 1889