

## ALLENSTOWN — GRASSROOTS PRESERVATION AT THE OLD ALLENSTOWN MEETINGHOUSE

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Built in 1815 as a place for town meetings and a house of worship, the Old Allenstown Meeting House is a unique one-story town meetinghouse. Over the years, it has been owned and cared for by the Town of Allenstown (1815-1908); Buntin Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) (1908-1991); the New Hampshire Department of Resources and Economic Development (1991-2004), and, again, by the Town of Allenstown (2004-present). When the DAR restored it in 1908, the building became a pioneering example of historic preservation in New Hampshire.

The building has narrowly escaped destruction three times. During the raising of the frame, New Hampshire was ravaged by the Great Gale of 1815, our most destructive windstorm before the Hurricane of 1938. Almost a century later, in May 1914, the worst forest fire in Allenstown's history narrowly spared the structure, leaving it standing in a devastated landscape that eventually became Bear Brook State Park.



Early on July 15, 1985, a passing motorist noticed smoke. An arsonist had started a fire under a rear corner of the building, and flames were creeping upward into the attic. Local fire departments responded quickly. The building lost its roof, but the interior remained miraculously intact. Local preservationists, beginning with the DAR, followed by DRED, and finally by a steering committee appointed by the Town of Allenstown, have spent the last 30 years working to safeguard and restore the much-loved building.



Due to limited town financial support, the committee searched out alternative funding sources and won four grants, including three Conservation License Plate grants and a New Hampshire Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) grant that addressed exterior and interior rehabilitation. A historic structure report and a preservation plan helped ensure all work followed the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation*.



Members of the Allenstown steering committee were also leaders in the Allenstown Historical Society. The Society allied itself with the town steering committee, making the restoration the Society's top priority until completed, and raising crucial funds to match the Conservation License Plate and LCHIP grants.

Archaeology Dig Days at the Allenstown Meetinghouse have been conducted since 2005 and encouraged public participation. Through the years the State Conservation and Rescue Archaeology Program (SCRAP) provided educational opportunities to all those interested in learning about the property's history

through participating in archaeological excavations and in the analysis of the material culture recovered.

Extending for 30 years after the fire with no direct tax-supported funding, this project could not have happened without grants from New Hampshire's Conservation License Plate Program and LCHIP. These preservation efforts demonstrate that the near impossible can be accomplished with an unanimity of purpose and a determined alliance of volunteers, whose contribution will not be forgotten in Allenstown.