

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM

NHDHR INVENTORY # FRE0001

Name, Location, Ownership

1. Historic name First Christian Church
2. District or area N/A
3. Street and number 12 Elm St
4. City or town Freedom
5. County Carroll
6. Current owner First Christian Church

Function or Use

7. Current use(s) Church
8. Historic use(s) Church

Architectural Information

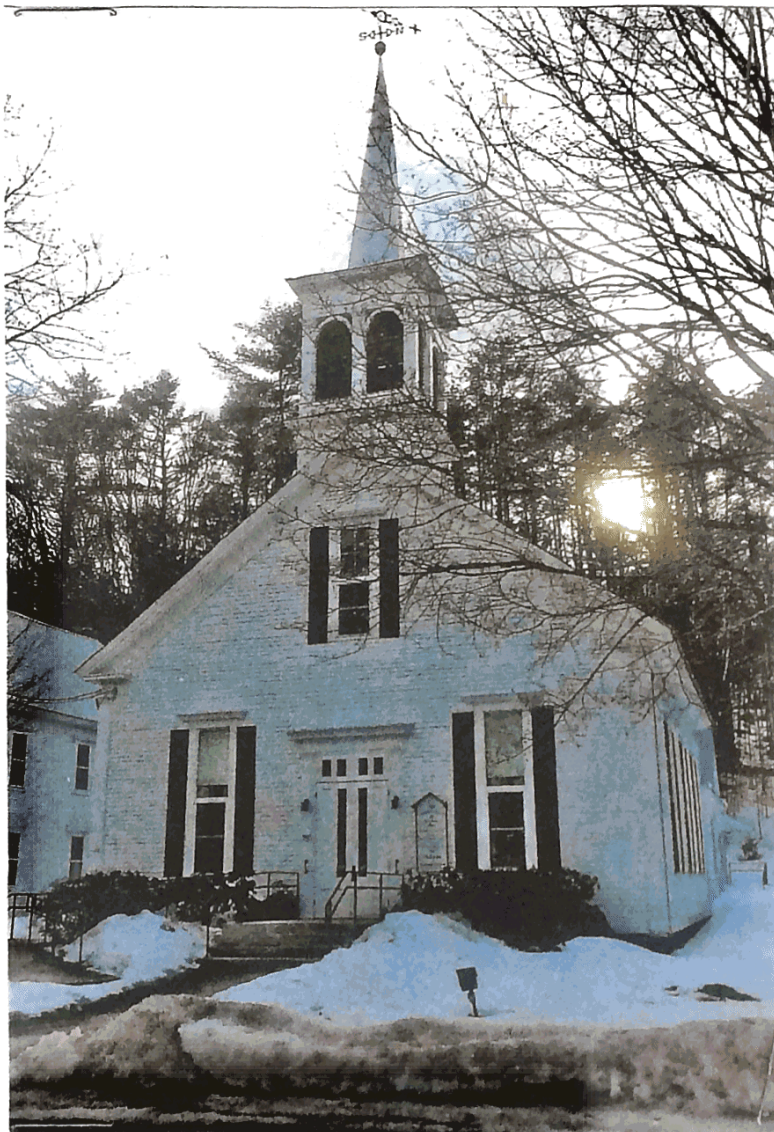
9. Style Vernacular, elements of Greek Revival
10. Architect/builder Building committee and church members Josiah Thurston, Elias Towle, et al
11. Source Davidson- A Village Pastor Looks Back
12. Construction date 1867
13. Source Deeds, Davidson, etc.
14. Alterations, with dates 1958 bell tower louvres; 1978 Fellowship Room #1; 1979 Vinyl Siding; 1987 Fellowship Rm #2; 1998 10x20 addition North Side
15. Moved? no ☒ yes ☐ date: _____

Exterior Features

16. Foundation Granite
17. Cladding vinyl (wooden beneath)
18. Roof material corrugated metal
19. Chimney material N/A
20. Type of roof gable
21. Chimney location Basement, vented outside
22. Number of stories 1 1/2
23. Entry location Facade Center
24. Windows main, double hung, 4/4, additions, 2/2
Replacement? no ☐ yes ☒ date: 2001

Site Features

25. Setting Village Center
26. Outbuildings none
27. Landscape features mature trees, plantings
28. Acreage .65 acre
29. Tax map/parcel # 52/23



35. Photo #1 Direction: East
36. Date March 16 2018
37. Reference (file name or frame#): Heritage Commission

30. State Plane Feet (NAD83) _____
31. USGS quadrangle and scale Freedom-

Form prepared by

32. Name Peg Scully
33. Organization Freedom Heritage Commission
34. Date of survey March 16 2018

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Date photos taken:

2/29/18



Photo # 2 Description: Side view facing North
Reference (file name or frame#):: FRE0001-2

Direction: North



Photo # 3 Description: First Church - South
Reference (file name or frame#):: FRE0001-3

Direction: South

Date photo taken:

2/28/18



Photo # 4 Description: Church front ramp
Reference (file name or frame#): FRE000_4

Direction: East



Photo # 5 Description: Sanctuary
Reference (file name or frame#): FRE0001-5

Direction: —

Date photos taken:

2/28/18

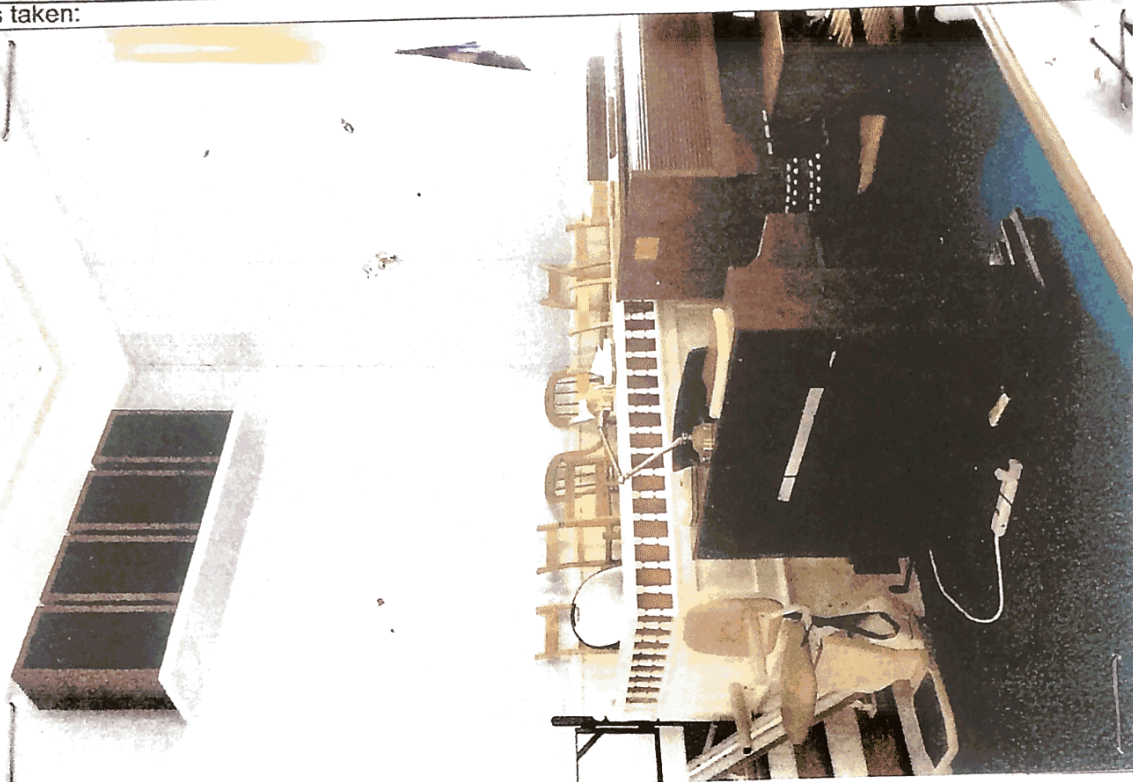


Photo # 6 Description: Choir Loft
Reference (file name or frame#):: FRE0001-6

Direction: —



Photo # 7 Description: Pulpit
Reference (file name or frame#):: FRE0001-7

Direction: —

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Date photos taken:



Photo # 8 Description: Town Hall and Church

Reference (file name or frame#): FRE0001_8

Direction: East



Photo # 9 Description: First Christian Church

Reference (file name or frame#): FRE0001_9

Direction: East

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Date photos taken



Photo # 10 Description: Church, Town Hall, old horse barn circa 1900
Reference (file name or frame#): FRE0001 - 10 Direction: West

STAPLE PHOTO HERE



Photo # 11 Description: First Christian Church, neighboring barn, circa 1960
Reference (file name or frame#): FRE0001 - 11 Direction: East

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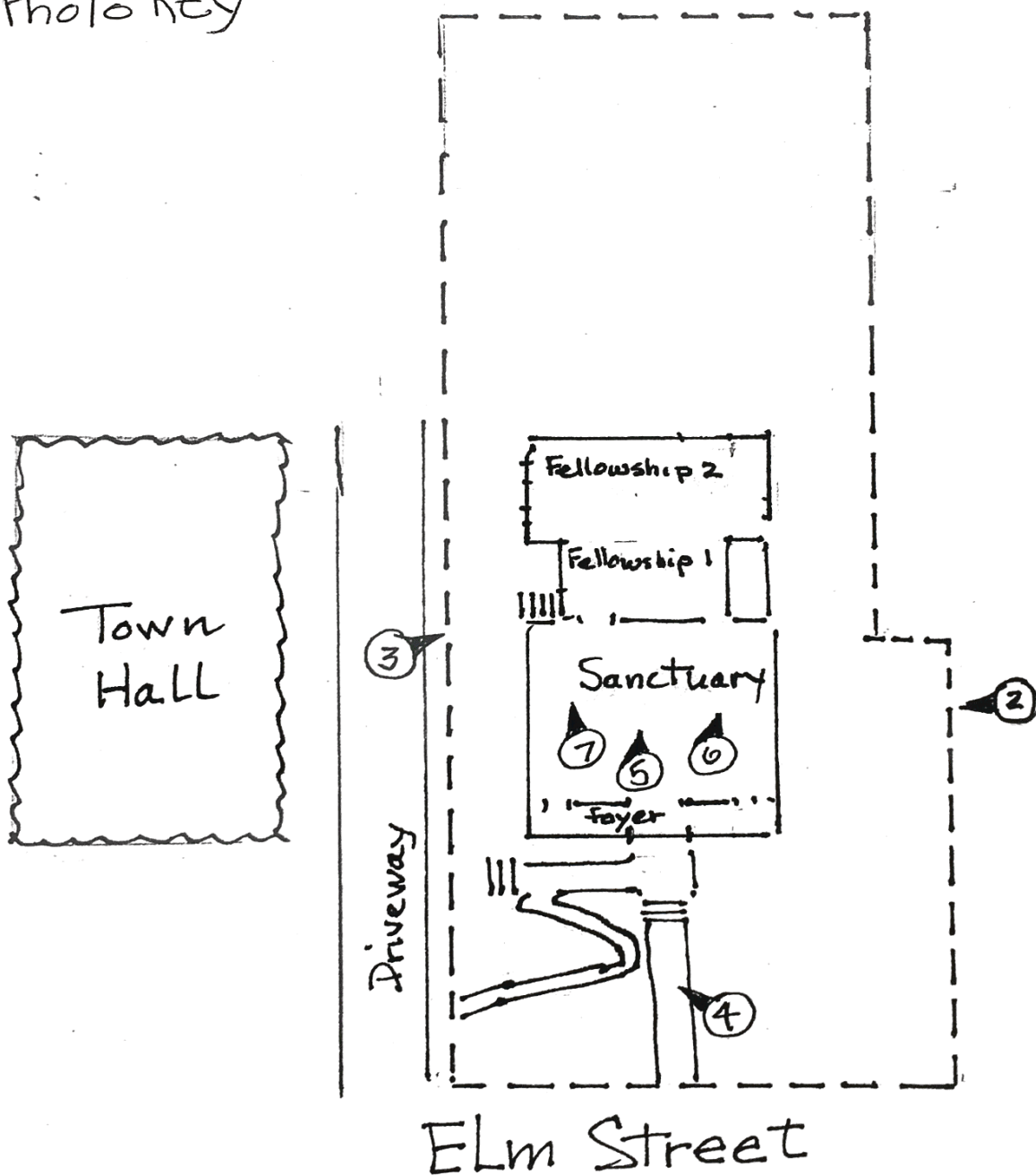
39. Location Map



First Christian Church - 12 Elm St.

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Photo Key



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41. Historical Background and Role in the Town's Development.

Background

Religious "Awakenings" during the first half of the 19th century contributed to the formations of several congregations in the Ossipee Valley area. A religious reformation in Effingham took place in Effingham as it did all over the country. Evangelist Rev. Benjamin Randall, a Free Will Baptist preacher, traveled the area on horseback and was responsible for starting several Free Will Baptist churches, one of which was located in Effingham. Three churches were eventually organized in 1824, 1833, and 1838. Citizens in present day Freedom, then called North Effingham, constructed a church in 1827, but this cooperative venture of three denominations (Freewill Baptists, Calvin Baptists and Universalists) was unsuccessful. Eventually the building deteriorated and was abandoned sometime after 1867.

North Effingham separated from Effingham and changed its name to Freedom in 1832. Apparently religion was one of the reasons for the separation. Feelings ran high between the "new church" liberals who were coming into the area from Maine and the "old church" conservatives from southern New Hampshire areas. The problem was solved when Freedom became a separate town. Some church going citizens of Freedom attended the Old White Meeting House located in the Southwest corner of Eaton, which was built as a Free Will Baptist Church in 1844. The Smarts, Towles, Thurstons, among other Freedom families, were the chief organizers and pew-holders of the church, which still stands and is used today.

The New Church in Freedom

On June 12, 1858, 9 members organized the "Church of Christ", and by 1861 the membership had grown to 25 people. Some members of the Old White Meeting house had transferred to the new church. People in Freedom and the surrounding areas were busy participating in the war effort, so the challenge of building a new church was postponed. No new members joined the church, between February 1861 and July 1866, and services were probably held in members' homes during that time.

On July 7, 1866, the Rev. A.W. Hobbs and his wife, Lucinda, joined the church; he became the resident minister. By the end of 1866, there were 49 members, and the congregation began to plan for building a new house of worship. A building committee included Elias Towle, Lovell Towle, Allman Allard, Sylvester Bennett, Stephen J. Keneson, Josiah Thurston, Horace P. Wood, Alva Davis and Ransellear Towle, who were all prominent citizens, though not all church members. (It's interesting to note that Freedom's population of 917 in 1860 had declined to 467 in 1867 because of Civil War losses and migration to better farmland in the mid-west)

The building committee members agreed that the new church should be built in the center of the village and they chose a site already occupied by a home owned by Joseph Hobbs, Jr which was purchased by Josiah Pierce for \$100 and moved across the street and a few yards south where it still stands and has always been occupied. In 1867, the building was constructed for \$3000 on the land still owned by the Hobbs family, funds having been raised by selling pews for \$50. At that time the land area was approximately ½ acre or 50% of the present size.

The Church was dedicated in 1867 and it now had a home, a resident minister, and a growing congregation where it would play an important role in a prospering town with an increasing population.

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However, in the coming years there was disharmony and turmoil which roiled the church and caused problems in the church and the town. Two stories illustrate these problems.

Elias Towle, a staunch member of the church, had been involved with the Calvin Baptist Society, another church in town around the corner. Located next to the present Town Offices, it's now the Masonic Temple. Towle had presented the Calvin Baptist Society in 1850 with a bell which they used in their church until 1867 when Towle decided to join the new Christian Church. Since the Baptist Church had not repaid him for the bell nor completed promised repairs to that church, Towle decided to take the bell with him. He obtained legal permission to "recover his goods" and in the dark of one summer night gathered a group of men who took down the bell and placed it in the steeple of the new church. Anger and bitterness over this deed split the town into hostile factions. The bell case was tried at the county level but was twice appealed and went all the way to the NH Supreme Court before Towle was successful in his claim to ownership. At his death in 1881, Towle bequeathed to the church \$1000, ¼ of an acre of land for a parsonage and the bell. It is still used every Sunday to call members and friends to church.

The second story involves church turmoil between June, 1872 and July, 1878. Records show that in December, 1874, over three days, 24 members of the church were granted dismissal from the church "by request." Solomon Andrews, an original charter member, was among them. The problem was the conduct of Rev. Hobbs. The church voted unanimously to join the Strafford County Christian Conference, reporting "The last year has been one of deep trial and adversity." Without spiritual leadership, the church closed its doors for a time, though it continued to meet in private homes and was determined to regroup. On July 27, 1878, the Church formally dismissed Rev. Hobbs describing "a stormy eight years" with "our confidence betrayed by his indulging too freely in intoxicating liquors to alarm his friends and render him unfit to attend to his professional duties...."

Later History

Between 1891 to the 1940s the church was served by a series of interim ministers and supply ministers, and although it was difficult to attract enough financial support, it operated with regular services and activities including Sunday School. In the years after World War II, the church struggled to survive. The 1949 minutes show that "it was impossible to continue the services of Rev. Elgin Green owing to insufficient funds". The treasurer reported later that year that there was \$77.00 left for expenses. There was a dedicated group of members determined to keep the church open, however, and special services continued despite a membership of only 23 people in 1953.

In the spring of 1953, Mr. George Davidson, a lay minister and principal of Kennett High School, was invited to preach the Memorial Day Service. As the years passed, Mr. Davidson continued to preach weekly services and conduct weddings. He was ordained by the church in 1970 and became the full time minister until 1990, a beloved and revered figure for 20 years. At his retirement, Rev. Robert Cedar was appointed and served until 2000. Rev. Robert Bossdorf (2000-2010) served full-time and Rev. Lawrence Wogman (2010-) has served part-time since.

The church membership remains at about 100 in a small town of about 1400, but attendance is determined by the seasons. In a resort area like this, attendance swells in the summer and ebbs in the winter when "snowbirds" depart for warmer areas. A significant demographic change, true in the state of New Hampshire as well as Carroll County, is that the population is aging. There no longer is Sunday

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school or child care, although there is a popular Summer Camp Musical event based on Bible Stories, the cast of which consists mostly of grandchildren of parishioners. An energetic group of volunteers continues to serve in many capacities. It's interesting to see how the history of the First Christian Church of Freedom reveals its strength and endurance during its 150 years of existence. It has closed and reopened, has experienced turmoil and division, has been poor and solvent, but remains forever an important part of the town culture and community and also of its architectural heritage.

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CONTINUATION PAGE

42. Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts(s) (List names from Appendix C

120. Religion in New Hampshire (1623-present)

43. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation

The First Christian Church is located in the center of Freedom Village on the west side of Elm Street next to the Freedom Town Hall and across the street from the Freedom Village Store. The church is accessed by a center blacktop walkway lined with Hosta plantings which leads to three granite steps with wrought iron bannisters and a concrete landing. Two mature maples are on either side of the walk. The appearance of the handicapped ramp, described in the next section, is softened by perennial shrubs which also adorn the front of the church. In the center of the main building is the church's main entry, tall double-four panel doors, above which are 4 transom panels each having its own separate window. The entry is framed by pilasters with molded capitals and a pronounced cornice. Small ornate lamps are mounted on each side of the doors and on the north pilaster is a painted wood sign identifying the church, the pastor and other information. Two side bays on each side of the door each contain a tall 4/4 sash window with plastic louvered shutters and with a pronounced cornice and frieze. In the gable above is a single tall window with the same features. On each side of the church are three tall windows of the same design as the gable on the front. A two-stage belfry tower sits astride the east end of the roof ridge of the church and hold the historic bell donated by Elias Towle who removed it from the Baptist church in Freedom. (A summary of this controversial act and the court cases deciding its outcome is written in Question 41.) The square bell tower has a clapboard base trimmed by corner pilasters and molded capitals and a box cornice. There are square pillars at the corners and in the center of each side; the openings are filled with louvres installed in 1958, and topped with a semicircular timber so that they have an arched appearance.

Each of the two added wings has concrete foundations, vinyl clapboard, and corrugated metal roofs. A short brick chimney is located in the central wing on the roof ridge. The south facades of each wing have two 1/1 windows with simple trim and in the center wing there is a modern paneled door which opens onto a wide porch with a wooden base and a cross gable above the steps. Inside there is a door from which you turn left to the two fellowship rooms from a hall leading straight to a handicap access rest room and steps to the basement which houses supplies for a busy weekend food pantry. The two single south facing rear wing windows are 1/1 with narrow trim; there is a double window in the west wall or rear. There are three single 1/1 windows in the north side of the two additions.

Visitors enter the First Christian Church through the main east facing façade into a small vestibule. The bell tower's rope descends from a cavity in the ceiling above. Enter from the vestibule through a swinging double door into the church or through a left and right door. . A center carpeted aisle separates 20 double wide pew sections painted white with a stained wood trim. Plaster walls are painted blue and white moldings are at the juncture of the walls and ceiling. Four bowl pendant chandeliers hang from the ceiling of the sanctuary; we don't know when they were installed although it probably was when the church had electricity, likely the 1920s. Two steps at the front (west) end of the church extend from choir loft on the north to the pulpit on the south, and a small chair lift has been installed on the edge of the choir loft. An electric piano and organ occupy the north end. The recessed altar has a table for flowers and candles with two bishop's chairs on each side; a plain wooden cross hangs on the wall. On each side of the altar wall are two small, unused draped windows. Originally part of the original west wall, they were left intact when the first addition was built. The pulpit on the south end has a lectern and two small tables for weekly flowers. In 2016 half of one of the front pews was moved to the pulpit area to create more space and the Pastor sits there during parts of the service.

The church retains much of its original appearance, although over the last 150 years, significant changes have been made. The original building which sits on a cut granite block foundation, is now sheathed in vinyl siding, installed in 1979, although it retains its original wooden trim. Two fellowship rooms have been added to the rear of the main building. The first, with a basement, was built in 1979 on land donated by the Thomson family, and the second room (The George Davidson Room) was built in 1987. The later addition sits perpendicular to the 1979 central wing. An entry porch is situated on the south side of the central wing. In 1998 another 10 x 20 foot addition on the north side of the fellowship rooms was completed and the next year a 6 x 14'9" handicapped ramp and entry door was added on the north side of the church. In 2000, a handicap ramp to provide access to the front of the building was designed and by Mr. Jon Chromatin, a Massachusetts architect who volunteered his services. Every effort was made to insure that the ramp would not interfere with the appearance of the building or hide the granite steps. In 2000, steps in front of the altar area were widened to extend from choir loft to pulpit and a riser was built for the back row of the choir loft. In 2001, sanctuary windows were replaced and in 2003, after steeple and bell tower were repaired, the tall brick chimney on the south side

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Continuation Sheet Question 43.

of the bell tower was removed; now the furnace vents through a small shed connected to the building at the south side.

The First Christian Church is now the only church in town and is an important community space. Its plain vernacular style has some Greek Revival characteristics of symmetrical façade and gable roof, and is practically a twin to the Town Hall built 22 years later in 1889. This pair of structures makes an attractive visual esthetic and contributes to the unique architectural heritage of New England towns.

44. Statement of Significance

The First Christian Church was part of the Third Great Awakening of religion in this country and its history show the commitment of those whose devotion and persistence resulted in the formation of the congregation and the building in the face of some pretty daunting obstacles. It continues to be important to the town after 150 years, where in addition to providing worship services and performing weddings, funerals, and baptisms, also carries out a mission of service to the community operating the food pantry, providing transportation, and visiting the sick as well as offering worship services.

Architecturally, the building is a plain and simple structure, typical of so many village churches built in the middle of the 19th century. It has changed with the times but has retained the same classic look in its rural setting that conveys both its architectural and historical significance.

45. Period of Significance

1867- 1968

46. Statement of Integrity

In its 150 years of existence, the First Christian remains in the same location and is surrounded by buildings built within the same time period, thus contributing to the rural character and architectural style of a mid-19th century New England village. Its sturdy construction shows competent and artistic workmanship, especially in the two-stage bell tower and the front façade design.

Perhaps the most significant change to the church exterior has been the vinyl siding on the main church, but the wooden trim, the corner pilasters, window and door frames and the main cornice have been preserved. The two additions in 1977 and 1987 have been done for practical purposes and have had no impact to the integrity of the original building. Window replacements were done before some other alternatives were available for heat retention and fuel cost saving.

Above all the church gives a sense of historic time and place and has been appreciated and enjoyed by townspeople and visitors whether they attend or not.

47. Boundary Discussion

The boundary of the church property is its current tax map parcel (map 52, lot 23). The boundary of the church was originally ½ an acre. Land on the west measuring 70' x 260' was donated by Chilton and Janet Thomson in 1978 for the first Fellowship Room addition.

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48. Bibliography

1. Bickford, Gail H., Here is Freedom, 1975
2. Bickford, Gail H., A Bell for Freedom, 2002
3. Davidson, George, A Village Pastor Looks Back, A History of the First Christian Church of Freedom, New Hampshire, 1993
4. Foord, Carol and Jones, Sheila, Ossipee Riverlands, 2000
5. Ruell, David; Buswell, David; Works, Nelson, NHSHRS Intensive Survey Form, First Christian Church of Freedom, 1989
6. Smart, Robert (Present Church Historian) and Gale Morris (Asst. Historian) History of the First Christian Church of Freedom , May, 2009 and June 2016
7. Smart, Robert, Origin and History of the Congregation, Revised May, 2006
8. Anecdotal Interviews with Velma Hormel, church member, and Alan Fall, Heritage Commission Chair

FUN TO KNOW

HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

August 14, 1971: This was the wedding day at the Freedom Church of Judy Smith, North Broad Bay Rd., Freedom and Potter Stewart, Jr. of Walpole, VT. Judy's parents were long time owners of a home on the lake. Judy has lived year-around in the home since 2016. Judy has loaned the Heritage Commission several photographs from her wedding day. Two of them help recording information relating to the church:

Inside The Church -

- Numbers on back of pews. Probably original from construction of the church in 1867 when pews were sold to individuals to help pay for the construction. They were discontinued next time the pews were painted.
- No steps in center front of the pulpit area. They were constructed in 2000. Picture of Christ where cross now hangs.

Outside The Church -

- No fellowship hall until 1978
- No flagpole until 1976
- No outside ramp until 2000
- South side driveway closed with a heavy chain and stone columns
- Chimney located very close to south side of bell tower. Originally it included a long, metal stove pipe

