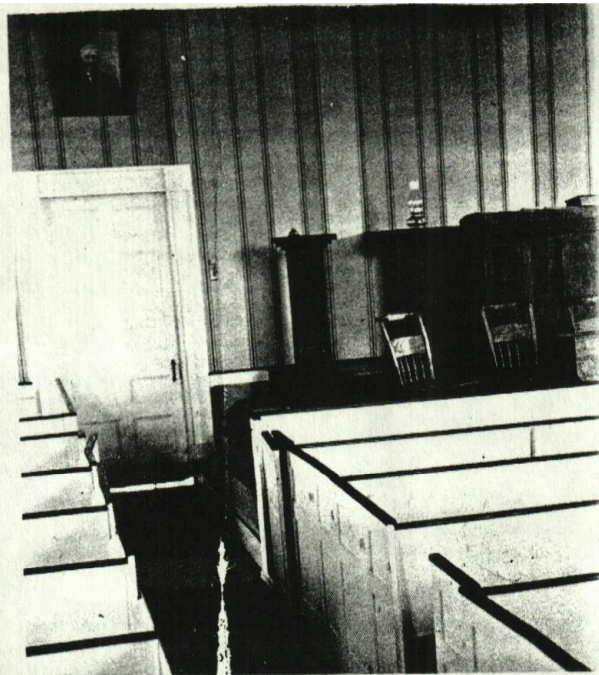


EAST HARPSWELL BAPTIST CHURCH



INTERIOR VIEW — The pulpit of the East Harpswell Baptist Church on the back and raised above the pews. Wallboard in the background will be removed in its effort to restore the church to its original beauty. The portraits are on the box pews with small plaques. (Hinckley photos)

presented to the Council at its regular monthly meeting next...

Club to restore oldest church

HARPSWELL — The old wall lamps of the East Harpswell Baptist Church will be replaced again through the efforts of the Sebascodegan (Great Garden) Club.

In 1817, the church on the Harbor Rd. will be restored to its original beauty by the time the years to come.

Restoration of the 150-year-old building has been the dream of the garden club president, Mrs. Swallow of the Bethel Rd., since she returned to the island 12 years ago. Mrs. Swallow's ancestors attended church and she remembers attending services there as a child.

She was a Dunning, born on South Island, off Bethel Point. She is marking that the church is the oldest landmark in this section of Harpswell, Mrs. Swallow and her husband have felt "something should be done about the church."

The garden club has held two services there earlier this year, and as a means of fund-raising, "Old Peabody Pew" by Douglas Wiggin, will be presented August 4 and 5.

When the church was organized April 17, 1817, it was the first on the island for many years the only one on Great Island. In the early days it was known as the First Freewill Baptist Church after the name was changed to the present one. The first minister was the Rev. George Lamb who served for early 13 years. Subsequent ministers supplied the church until 1843 when the Rev. Hersey came to the area and served until 1854. Ministers included Libby, Heath, Prescott, Adams, Holmes and Lane followed.

Little is known about the church's membership after 1804 as records cease to exist. Mrs. Swallow and garden club members have been unsuccessful thus far in attempting to find church records;

no one seems to know if they were destroyed or never were kept.

The church was heavily damaged when struck by lightning in 1898, but a few members rallied together to repair the structure. Services were discontinued for many years until 1937, when a lay minister, Charles Huff, Orr's Island postmaster, began conducting services there. He organized the Ladies Aid Society and appointed committees to raise funds for church maintenance. For 15 years, Huff preached each Sunday, May through November, offering to the parish a discourse which was "inspiring, uplifting and brought the island folks to the old weather-beaten church edifice to hear him."

The church is of unusual construction — the seating arrangement is just reverse of the normal. The high raised, boxed pulpit is at the back of the church and the rows of pews face the main doors. The raised choir loft is at the front with the old woodburning stove.

Mrs. Swallow commented, "once you get in, you're stuck, there is no chance of getting out."

The club expects the cost of restoring the church will run from \$5,000 to \$7,000. The largest and most expensive project will be the removal of wallboard from the walls and ceiling. Why and when this wallboard was put up, no one seems to know, and what will be found behind the interior covering remains a mystery. In time the walls and ceiling will be replastered.

If there are old beams, these will be left exposed. Mrs. Swallow hopes the original fixtures for the hanging lamps in the ceiling and walls will be found as well.

"Actually the church isn't in that bad shape," Mrs. Swallow said. Plans also called for painting the interior white, leaving the

wood its natural color.

The original large Bible, used by preachers through the years, still holds its prominent place on the pulpit.

Electricity was installed in the church many years ago, but the wiring will be checked and replaced as needed during the restoration. The oil wall lamps, four on each side, and two at the front and back, still remain and add much to the simplicity of the interior. Through the years one lamp had been broken but one has been given to replace it.

The two portraits back of the pulpit are of Stephen Purington, son of Nathaniel Purington, an early Cundy's settler, and a Mr. Coffin, an early church deacon.

Most of the early church members are buried in the cemetery very near the church where dates on the gravestones go back to the 1700's. Such island names as Purington, Curtis, Dingley, Totman, Rich and Hall, can be found here.

Permission to restore the church was given by the three living officers, Mrs. Nellie Skolfield, treasurer; Mrs. Marion Jordan, a member of the pulpit committee, and Sidney Watson, who had the position of deacon handed down to him from his father.

C
a
t
e
n
a
c
I
t