

Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives, Inc.
8 Meetinghouse Lane
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Number 26

Memorial Hall



Memorial Hall at the time of its Dedication in 1897

On July 4, 1894, nearly 400 people gathered at the First Congregational Church to consider creating a memorial to Madison's soldiers. After much speechifying and discussion, the majority of those present favored the construction of a hall. Ultimately a site was purchased, an architect hired, and planning begun. The estimated cost of the hall was \$12,863.98. Of this, \$7,500 was voted by the town, and the rest was raised by public subscription.

The site of the proposed hall was occupied by Philander P. Coe's store and dance hall. Mr. Coe was a merchant and gun powder dealer. To make room for the memorial hall, Mr. Coe's store was moved down Main Street by oxen and set up on the south side of the street, where the business, known as People's Store, remained until the building was demolished in 1946.

Memorial Hall was dedicated on Memorial Day, 1897. Although the original plan called for memorial tablets, pictures, and displays, the building rapidly developed into a community center and gymnasium. Theatrical productions were

presented and regular basketball games were scheduled. The hall was rented for activities, including dances and roller skating parties.

Marble tablets were (and still are) displayed with the names of soldiers who served in the Civil War. In 1919 the names of soldiers and sailors serving in World War I were added. These memorial tablets can be seen at the top of the steps leading to the main entrance.

In 1899 the town received two 10-inch Civil War mortars and twenty projectiles from the federal government. The mortars were installed on either side of the main entrance. In 1942 the town voted to contribute them to the World War II scrap metal drive. Several of the projectiles survived, and one is displayed in the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives, which is housed in this building.

The name of Memorial Hall was changed to Memorial Town Hall in 1938, when the town spent \$18,000 to remodel the building so it could be used for town offices. Town business was conducted here until 1995, when the town offices were moved to a new location, the Madison Town Campus. After the departure of the town offices the building was remodeled again and became a community hall once more. Today, community groups use the meeting rooms; lectures are sometimes held in the auditorium; and the basement is in great demand by senior citizen groups, scout troops, and other organizations.

The completion of the mid-1990s remodeling was celebrated on Memorial Day 1997, and the occasion was marked with a rededication ceremony quite like the 1897 ceremony. The assembled crowd was regaled with speeches and musical selections, and a photographer gathered everyone together for a group photograph.

Directly across from Memorial Hall is a small park-like area with memorials to Madison residents who served in the military during various conflicts, including Korea and Vietnam. Madison also has an imposing monument honoring those who served in the Civil War. Most of those present at the 1894 meeting at the First Congregational Church were in favor of a memorial hall, but Col. Vincent Wilcox was not. He felt so strongly about a formal outdoor monument that he arranged for a separate memorial in West Cemetery. The granite monument has a classical colonnaded backdrop and was dedicated on July 4, 1896. Unfortunately, Col. Wilcox died shortly before the monument was unveiled.

Directions: From center of Madison drive west toward Guilford. Continue past the traffic light at the intersection of Route 79 and Route One. Take the next right onto Academy Street immediately turning left onto Meetinghouse Lane. The large yellow brick building just past the stop sign is Memorial Hall, the home of the Charlotte L. Evarts Memorial Archives..