

Greek Revival Influence In Design of Our 1836 Church Façade and 1846 Parsonage

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The Greek Revival architecture style (1825 - 1860) incorporated architectural features and motifs adapted from the newly discovered ruins of the ancient Greek civilization. Greece had been controlled by the Ottomans from 1460 and was inaccessible until the end of War of Independence from Turkey in the 1820s - 1830s. When it was opened up, archeological investigations of the ancient cities began which revealed a totally new look: bold, massive, angular, simple and almost modern-looking. It was a complete reversal from the previous elaborate Georgian and Federalist architectural styles that were popular in England. After the vicious War of 1812 with England, America was ready to discard and move away from British influence in architecture and was also done with using British names for new towns. New names in New York state were Syracuse, Rome, Utica and Troy, Camillus, Cicero, Cincinnatus, Corinth, Fabius, Greece, Iliion, Ithaca, Junius, Macedon, Marcellus, Pompey, Romulus, Scipio, Sempronius, Sparta, Ulysses, and Virgil!!!

This new and widely popular architectural style coincided with the move and redesign of our meetinghouse in 1836. A Greek Revival façade was superimposed over the new gable front of the meetinghouse. Additionally, our parsonage house built in 1846 is a model Greek Revival home.

When NH architectural historian James Garvin spoke at our 275th anniversary program in 2017, he remarked on the odd, yet pleasing combination of the Georgian tower and steeple with the Greek revival church front. The decorative elements of the tower; the balustrade with urns at the corners and the lovely six sided bell tower with graceful arches finished with handsome moldings are Georgian touches. The result is a tower that soars gracefully above the solid Greek Revival structure below. Of course they were built at different times; the tower in 1771 and the front in 1836, reflecting the popular architectural style of the year built. Happily it works!

Design books like the *Architect or Practical House Carpenter (1830)* by Asher Benjamin provided scale drawings for Greek architectural design elements. It was a do-it-yourself book to be used and copied by carpenters. Apparently the person who designed our new front had access to this very book. The simplicity of our façade is typical of the new architectural style that imitated the Greek buildings built of granite. This solid look with smooth surfaces was easily reproduced in wood because of the plainness of design: straight lines with no difficult and time-consuming curves. All was white, because it was not discovered until later that the Greeks actually painted their buildings in vivid colors!

The specific Greek Revival features on our church front are the triangular pediment, the area under the roof. The curve-louvered opening centered in the middle of the pediment is the only curved line in the façade and perfectly unites the two different styles, Georgian above and Greek below. It actually is the covering over the original tower window that is still there - keeping out the bats.

The pediment triangle is outlined with wide moldings. The horizontal base of the triangle is called the entablature, and appears to rest on four pilasters or flat columns that suggest Grecian columns.

The three handsome front doors are the crowning achievement of this Greek Revival design. They are perfectly proportioned and executed. Greek architecture did not know arches so these flat-topped doors are classic, as are all the subtle design features.

The panel just below the top molding has a very slight beveled surface, a sophisticated touch. The rectangular transom windows with the interesting pattern of glass panes, and the fluted column-like trim beside the doors are typical. But the exquisite Greek key decorative molding next to the transom windows is a superb example of Greek influence. This decorative motif is made from straight boards, easy for country carpenters to measure out and build. What could be more perfect!

Many of these same design features are used in the classic Greek Revival Parsonage built in 1846. The gable front has the defining triangular pediment that appears to sit on the solid corner posts, which are really wide wood trim boards. Porches were another important Greek Revival feature. As seen in the photo, the original parsonage had a wrap-around porch that went across the front. We don't know when it was removed. But hidden under the porch roof at the corner of the house is a beautiful classic Greek Revival inset front door with the typical side lights.

Because of the porch roof, there was not room for a transom window over the door. The handsome wide moldings and panels indicate that this was a well-built house for the time. The windows are original with mostly original glass.



One of three front doors to the church showing the molding.



Parsonage front door.