

OUR TOWNS

Historical Society respectful of Northboro's past

Once upon a time...

'Once upon a time' is a monthly feature written by Northborough Historical Society Historian Robert Ellis highlighting Northboro's past.

By Robert Ellis
RECORD CORRESPONDENT

NORTHBORO – After forming Northboro's first Baptist congregation in 1827, its members built a modest church on the eastern corner of Main Street and a road, soon to become known as School Street.

As time went on, however, the need for a larger and more

impressive building grew, and by 1860 the original building was moved back to the southwest corner of School and Summer streets and a new church with a proper bell tower rose in its place. For more than 80 years this church served its parishioners. Generations of Northboro Baptists, including members alive today, worshiped there.

The building had its share of problems, of course. A crack developed in the bell, and by the 1890s it had to be replaced. The old bell was dragged off to South Street at the Summer Street intersection where it was inverted and for years served as a watering hole for animals.

A worse fate happened to the building on Sept. 21, 1938 when the worst hurricane ever to

strike town ripped the steeple from the church, as well as the one from St. Rose of Lima on Pierce Street. The latter church was damaged structurally and some years later had to be abandoned. The Baptist Church fortunately remained sound without its steeple.

In 1948, the Baptists joined with the Evangelical Congregationalist congregation to form Trinity Church. Eventual improvements to Trinity made the congregation's continuing use of the basement meeting room of the old church unnecessary. Among the early users of that room was the Northborough Historical Society, whose home at the time was the crowded basement room of the Gale Library.

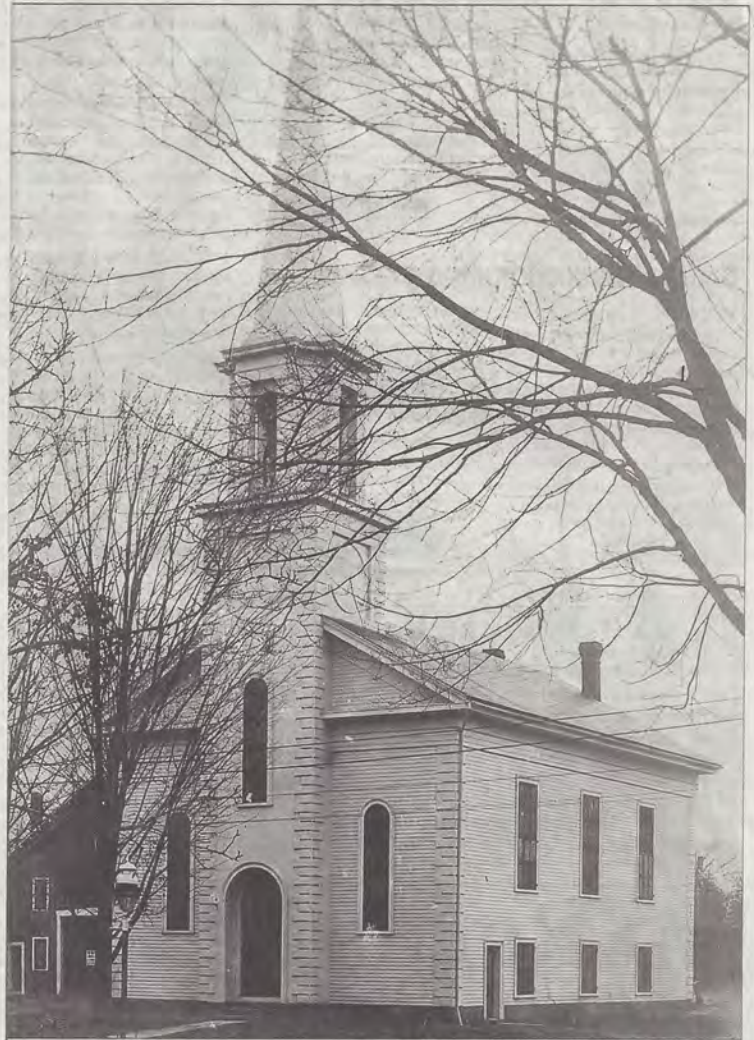
By the late 1950s, the old Baptist Church was on the market. At the same time, the Historical Society was looking for a home and was in fact planning to build on the old cemetery lot on Brigham Street near South Street. Late in 1959, however, the Society decided that the church would in many respects make a more appropriate home. For \$8,000 it became the Society's headquarters; for another \$500, its contents, including its organ and other valuable contents were included in the deal.

Early in 1960, a ceremony in the meeting hall marked the transfer. Old and new church members took part, the former represented by Alice Kimball, who once had been the church organist and later the president and curator of the Historical Society.

The upstairs hall, where religious services had been held, became a museum of Northboro history. Then and later, however, the Historical Society strove to retain as many of the traditional features of the building as possible. The organ was maintained, and concerts, including religious music, have been performed on it.

When the interior needed painting or the window light needed to be controlled, due respect was paid to the building's sacred history.

The minister's study has become a reference and research room – an appropriate use, since several of the church's ministers, especially the Rev. Charles Pease, who served in the earlier 20th centu-



Record photo/COURTESY OF NORTHBOROUGH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

By 1860, the original Baptist Church was moved back to the southwest corner of School and Summer streets and a new church (shown above) with a proper bell tower rose in its place. For more than 80 years this church served its parishioners.

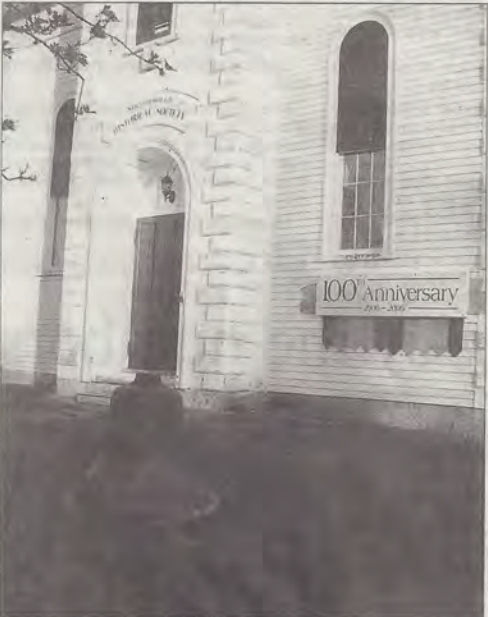
ry, had been historical enthusiasts and active members of the Society.

An archive to hold the Society's thousands of records, pictures, and other aspects of the town's history was added to the rear of the building. During the installation of a sprinkler system, the utmost care was given to retaining the integrity

of the building and its contents. The old church bell was brought back, and now stands, right side up, on the front lawn.

The Society collects local historical records and artifacts and sponsors many educational programs. Now, in the 100th year of the Historical Society's existence, a number of special Sunday programs are being

added to the usual monthly programs to which the public is invited. The Society also welcomes new members, especially anyone who likes friendly associations and the opportunity to learn a little about the town's history. Almost a century and a half old, the building remains a focal point of Northboro life.



Record photo/ROBERT ELLIS

Late in 1959, the Northborough Historical Society purchased the church for \$8,000 and it became its headquarters; for another \$500, its contents, including its organ and other valuable contents were included in the deal.