

Pelham Library building now officially a historic place

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PELHAM — Built in 1896, the former Pelham Library and Memorial Building was already easily one of the most historical buildings in the nation.

Now it has an official certificate to prove it.

In April, the National Park Service placed the building at 5 Main St., now the home of the Pelham Historical Society, on the National Register of Historic Places. The building is also on the state register.

“I never had any doubt this building would qualify for the National Register,” said Pelham Historical Society president Bill Hayes. “We had a sure-fire three-ingredient recipe for success.”

First, Hayes noted the building was designed in 1875 by famed, award-winning architect Frederick Stickney, of the Pelham Stickneys, when he was a student at MIT.

“It was 10 years after the Civil War ended,” Hayes explained. “Stickney’s professors at MIT held a contest among their students to come up with the best design for a small town library that could double as a Civil War memorial building.”

Twenty years later, Pelham put Fred Stickney’s building design to use. A special Town Meeting in April, 1895, approved the sum of \$4,000 to construct a new library building that would also contain a memorial room to honor town residents who fought in the Civil War.

It has also served as a memorial to Pelham men who served in the French and Indian War of 1754-1763, the American Revolution, the Pelham

tion, the War of 1812, and World Wars I and II.

Secondly, helping to ensure the building would qualify for the National Register was historic preservation historian Sarah Dangelas Hofe, who grew up in Pelham and even worked in the building as a library assistant during her high school years. Hofe, who holds degrees from the University of Maryland and Northeastern, completed the complex research and paperwork required to satisfy the National Register’s extensive requirements for an historical placement listing.

“It is highly unusual for a building’s first application for listing to be approved,” Hayes said. “First applications are often sent back with a request for additional information and documentation.”

Hayes said the third vital ingredient for the National Register listing was the financial support of retired Pelham District Court Judge J. Albert Lynch, a founding member of the Pelham Historical Society. Lynch, who held court in the building for many years, volunteered to pay the expenses associated with the application.

The building served as the town’s library until 2003, when the new library opened on the Village Green. For the past eight years, it has been the home of the Pelham Historical Society, which oversaw comprehensive renovations to the interior and exterior in 2009 and 2010.

During the 2010 renovations, the building’s alarm system was upgraded and strobe lights were added to better safeguard the museum’s priceless contents, Hayes said.

“The building has been



NOW AND THEN: Above, a contemporary view of the Pelham Library and Memorial Building at 5 Main St., built in 1896.

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At left, what the Pelham Library looked like much soon after its construction. The elm tree standing in front of the building was blown down by a hurricane in 1938, according to Historical Society President Bill Hayes.

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preserved with great historical accuracy,” he said. “Only minor insignificant modifications have been made in the last 115 years. No changes have been made to the exterior facade.”

For several years, Hayes and other Historical Society volunteers have worked steadily to set up the interior of the building as a museum to display many of the town’s most precious artifacts and

documents.