

Editor's note: Last week, we experienced some technical difficulties with our system and lost the last 400 words and a photo for the following article. Therefore, we are re-publishing article in its entirety.

Pelham's Sherburne Hall: Rich in History

by Doug Robinson

The legacy of E.G. (Gardner) Sherburne (1885-1948) began nearly a century ago, and his values and contributions to the Pelham Community are still witnessed today. Sherburne understood and valued the need for good education, and he was committed to assisting Pelham with their educational system. His dedication to education was recognized by the Pelham School Board by the naming of the four-room schoolhouse, originally built in the 1920s in his honor in 1950. Today, after nearly a century of transition and change, the function room within Pelham's Town Hall continues to bear his name. The following story not only addresses what is Sherburne Hall, but also addresses the man known as E.G. Sherburne. The story begins in the early 1900s with Pelham voting to build a new school.

In 1919, the residents of Pelham voted on School Warrant 14 to approve or not approve "to see what action the District will take relative to the erection of the new building voted last year and if it is voted to proceed with the same to appoint committees and raise and appropriate money for the same," states Pelham's Annual Report dated January 31, 1920. The Pelham School Board commented that "the matter of the much-discussed new building should be taken up at once and pushed so that it may be used the coming fall, in view of the threatened condemnation of the present graded school quarters by the state and in this connection would make the following recommendations: The District should elect a committee in whom they have sufficient confidence to allow them to constitute the whole or a part of the construction committee; also not withstanding the vote as it now stands for a three-room building; they would advise, as they did originally, a two-room building with a basement, with provision for a stock room for the District." So began the construction of the original E.G. Sherburne school, long before it bore his name.

Once erected, the small, rural schoolhouse was located in the center of the town of Pelham. "In contrast to the one-room schools, the new school was to have a furnace, running water, and inside toilets," writes the Pelham Historical Society.

During this past century, that tiny schoolhouse has manifested and grown into many different buildings and uses. Today, as the buildings have been altered, enlarged, and changed to keep up with current times, one cannot even recognize that the historic site upon which Town Hall sits once resided that four-room schoolhouse.

The original E.G. Sherburne building was built of white clapboard with an entrance located in the front of the building, just underneath the present-day sign stating "Town Hall." Having been enlarged to support a municipal center, the rural school now rests within Pelham's Town Hall. At the other end of Town Hall is located Pelham's Police Department, while the structure to the right of town hall is the old elementary building.

The entrance door and windows to the old schoolhouse has long since been replaced with walls that house the Pelham's Planning Department. The ceiling, however, continues to sport the big beams and original ceiling first constructed nearly a century ago.

According to *Reflections, A Pictorial History of Pelham, New Hampshire, 1746-1996*, Pelham is "nestled in the southeast corner of New Hampshire, Pelham was incorporated in July 5, 1746. The land that became Pelham had been part of Nottingham, Massachusetts to the west and Dracut, Massachusetts to the east." Between the 1720s to 1920, most of Pelham's residents were involved with the business of farming. Regardless of profession, most of the residents participated in the farming trade to some extent. Today, few, if any, Pelham farms exist.

Prominent to Pelham was the John Sherburne family. "John Sherburne, the emigrant ancestor of the Pelham Sherburnes, was born in Odiham, England, in the early 1600s and emigrated to Portsmouth, New Hampshire, where he married Elizabeth Tuck in 1645. John, his brother Henry, and their descendants were very prominent in the government of colonial New Hampshire. On November 29, 1751, John's great-grandson, James Sherburne, purchased from Joseph Wright 150 acres adjoins the property of Captain William Richardson," states *Reflections*.

The road leading to Sherburne Farm was eventually called Sherburne Road and, to this day, remains named the same.

As generations grew up and worked the farm, the last Sherburne to work the farm was Ernest Gardner Sherburne (b.1885), more commonly known as E.G. Sherburne.

Educated in Lowell, MA, Cushing Academy, and the University of New Hampshire, Sherburne "had a great respect for education and he supported the Pelham School System throughout his lifetime," continues *Reflections*.

Ernest G. Sherburne served as a School Board member for many years and had great concerns for the students, teachers, and curriculum. He was a hands-on administrator who took the time to become personally involved with "fixing broken windows, windows, unclogging the plumbing, or repairing the furnace." In 1950, after an addition was added to the small schoolhouse, the building was renamed the Ernest G. Sherburne building in his honor. In later years, the E.G. Sherburne School was replaced with Pelham Elementary School.

Twenty years later, it was written that "if one were to identify Pelham's paramount problem, it would have to be 'space.' That concern will be partially solved with the

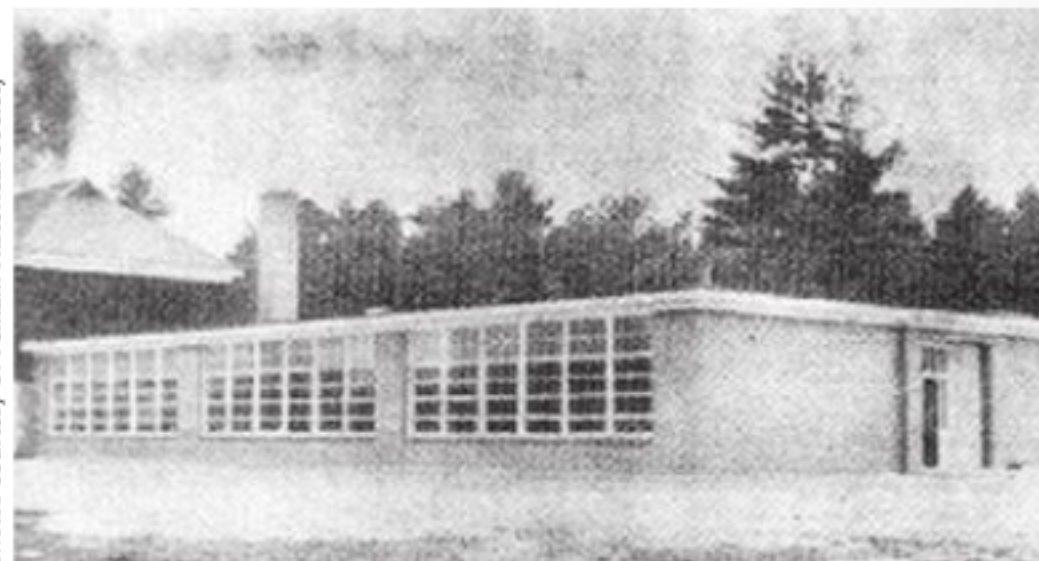
opening of the new addition to the E.G. Sherburne school during or prior to the coming school year," writes Pelham School Superintendent Peter G. Dolloff in his Annual School Report for year ending June 30, 1971.

"The new addition will have 16 teaching stations, a new teacher's room, and an Instructional Materials Center to service the entire school. The building committee and the School Board are to be commended for their foresight in creating teaching stations that are flexible, permitting their use either as conventional classrooms or as various-sized instruction areas. With the opening of this addition, all of grades 1-4 will be housed in the E.G. Sherburne school permitting improved coordination of the primary program while the remaining grades will be housed in the Memorial School."

In appreciation of his years



Original Ernest G. Sherburne building (above), and the E.G. Sherburne School (below) were replaced with Pelham Elementary School



photos courtesy of Pelham Historical Society

of dedicated service to the Pelham School District, in 1950, the E.G. Sherburne School was "named in his honor," states *Reflections*.

When Sherburne Hall was converted to a Municipal Center during the early 1990s, the gymnasium of the E.G. Sherburne school remained untouched. The Town of Pelham organized the Sherburne Hall committee and raised \$44,000 to cover the 1958 gymnasium into a functional meeting room for organizations and Town officials to host their meetings.



Town Hall, as seen today, now envelops the original school, while the rooms to the elementary school can be seen to the right. Town Hall entrance is to the left, and the Police Station is behind Town Hall

"We got rid of the basketball hoops, bought carpet, professionally cleaned the carpet, painted, and re-lamped the room," stated Bill McDevitt. "Our town officials were using goose-necked lamps and could not see the information."

As the gymnasium was brought up to town code with regards to fire regulations, the much-needed air conditioning system had to be placed on a back burner.

Today, the converted gymnasium now has the ability to host theatrical stage performances, town-wide meetings with up to 400 people in attendance, as well as the daily scheduled cable television productions.

"We had a serious desire to maintain the Sherburne name," continued McDevitt. "It had been called the E.G. Sherburne School since day one. He was a very important person in the town of Pelham, who donated a lot of time, resources, and talents to the schools. There is not a day that goes by where at least one, two, and even three people who walk these halls don't say, 'That was where my classroom was.'"

From a four-room schoolhouse, then enlarged twice more to accommodate Pelham's school children, to having been recently converted into Pelham's Municipal Center, E.G. Sherburne's gift for education continues to flourish. As meetings progress and stage productions occur, the residents of Pelham continue to receive that special gift of an education. Whether that education is being provided by civic leaders, thespians, entertainers, or speakers, E.G. Sherburne continues to give that gift that can never be taken away—an education.