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**EXETER HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 141  
EXETER, ME 04435-0141**

**NEWSLETTER  
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2002  
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**MEMBERSHIP FEES:  
SINGLE - \$8 / FAMILY - \$12  
DUE ANNUALLY  
TEL. 285-7903 OR 379-2449**

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Well, the weather sure has changed from hot & dry to cool. Fall will be here soon enough.

Our society has been in existence for two years now. As of yet, we do not have a building to serve as a museum, but are looking at two prospects. We currently have a membership of about 25, and send newsletters to three other historical societies.

We cleaned and repainted the Town Office and Post Office signs recently, and will restore the sign across from Exeter Variety now that the weather has cooled.

We attended the quarterly meeting of the Mid-Maine Association of Historical Societies on August 18th. It was held at the Frances Brown House in Brownville, a restored 1814 homestead. After our meeting we were served refreshments, and then toured the privately owned home, which is on the National Register.

Two families of old Exeter roots held their annual family reunions recently.

The Downing Family held their reunion on August 10th, while the Eaton Family held their reunion on August 17th.

A donation was made to our society by the Corinth Historical Society. They gave us the book "Poems by David Barker" which they had in their collection. Barker was a well known poet and lawyer from Exeter Corners. A special "thank you" goes out to these folks.

New members: Rev.Theodore & Doris Smith of Corinth.

Church bells are ringing once again in Exeter after many years of silence. The Cornerstone Baptist Church has completed the new bellfry and steeple on the church. It will be the first time a steeple has been on the church since 1947. In June of 1947 a severe thunderstorm, with what local residents describe as a tornado, tore the steeple from the building, sending it down into the roof, point first. It then continued to fall to the ground, landing on the south side of the building. The roof was repaired but the steeple was never rebuilt. Now, 55 years later, a steeple again adorns the church and bells are ringing. According to Pastor Stanley Griffin, a cross has been placed on top of the steeple and floodlights will illuminate the steeple each and every night. The bell, which has been in storage,

has been reset, and if everything goes well, will be rung every Sunday morning before services.

Today the church boasts a congregation of 200, along with a youth group, nursery, and summer bible school. The church also received a new addition and entry, which has nearly doubled it's size. This church first began as the Exeter Free-Will Baptist Meetinghouse, and later the Exeter Baptist church.

The Exeter Freewill Baptist Meetinghouse Society was formed in 1855. The application to organize and erect a meetinghouse was held on March 22, 1855, and was signed by 14 residents. The first meeting was held March 29, 1855, where all the officers were chosen and it was voted to construct a meetinghouse. Benjamin Evans was chosen agent to receive a deed in trust of a piece of land to

erect the house on. Payments to the contractor would be 1/3 on June 1st, 1/3 on Sept. 1st, and 1/3 fifteen days after completion. Voted that the house would be the same dimensions as the meetinghouse at Morses Corner in Corinna, and to be finished equally as well, with two exceptions. Clapboards shall be laid 3-1/2 inches to the weather, and the inside to be finished with an entry each side the door. Voted the bellfrey be 11 feet. On July 3, 1855 it was voted to locate the meeting house east of the Town House on land owned by Col. Francis Hill. Voted the floor be sheathed likewise the trimmings on the outside. On Dec. 22, 1855 it was voted that the Appraisers of the Pews appoint the day of sale and sell and deed to those who shall buy. On Jan. 6, 1856 it was



August 2002 Photo



Early photo, with steeple

voted to pay up for the bell, and appoint Samuel Oak head of the choir. On Feb. 4, 1856 it was voted to fence in the Meeting House lot. The job was given to Levi Stevens at 80 cents per rod.

The above information is excerpts taken from the original records of the Exeter Free-Will Baptist Meetinghouse. The book was acquired by Stewart Bean from a woman in Farmingdale, who found it in an old trunk she purchased at a flea market in Hallowell.

Before the building of the first church, residents would meet just about anywhere for Sunday sermon and song. These early days are reflected in this poem by Noah Barker of Exeter:

To build the towering church & spire,  
God's people were not able,  
And so, to hear their humble prayer,  
The Lord would meet them anywhere,  
In kitchen, grove, or stable.

Some of the earliest preachers in Exeter were: Jothan Sewall, Paul Ruggles, John Sawyer, Isaac Davis, Jonathan Palmer, Aaron Hatch, Joseph Osgood, Albana Pease, and Jacob Hatch. The first baptism was that of Reuben Seavey, performed by Rev. Paul Ruggles, in 1811. It took place in the "Bradbury Rips" on the French Stream, down behind the Fogler farm on the Fogler Road.

A Baptist Church was organized in 1815 by Rev. Paul Ruggles, and shortly after, a Free-Will Baptist

Church was organized by Elder Joseph Osgood. In 1818 a church known as the Christian Band, was organized by Elder Albana Pease. They later became the Christian Adventist. In 1829 the first meeting house was built jointly by the Methodists and Free-Will Baptists, at Exeter Corners. It was built of brick and was 40 feet wide and 60 feet long. This building burned in 1833. A new church was built on this site in 1835. This church burned in 1896, along with the John Walker farm, which stood opposite the present Masonic Hall. The church stood on the village side of the Payne place, afterwards the home of Charles Buswell, and more recently, Eugene Cooley.

Rev. E. G. Carpenter established a Congregational Church in 1843 at East Exeter. It was used by Congregationalists and Baptists. This building was bought many years later by the town and used as a schoolhouse. The original school, built in 1820, was across the road more towards the Crawford farm.

The Exeter Circuit was formed by the Methodists in 1816. This consisted of a preacher who rode horseback from town to town preaching the gospel. The towns in the Circuit consisted of Exeter and ten surrounding towns. The first of many preachers was Rev. Joseph Lull, and each circuit ride took 8 weeks to complete. The Circuit

Rider fades away about 1850. The Methodists also formed the Exeter Circuit Temperance Society in 1833. Sunday school was taught, with the 1834 records showing an attendance of 113, with 9 teachers, and a library of 213 volumes.

The Exeter Free-Will Baptist Church had dissolved in 1833 after the church burned at Exeter Corners, but was re-organized in 1837. They had a membership of 98, but problems caused a continued decline in attendance, and no further records can be found after 1854.

The Christian Adventist first used School No. 9 for their services, but thanks to Pickman & Zenus Chamberlain, a church building was constructed in 1840, and will forever be known as the Chamberlain Meeting House. The interior was not finished, and pews were not built, until 1864, so prior to this they referred to it as the Lord's Barn. This church was demolished in the 1990's. The belltower was salvaged by a local resident, but the bell was sold years ago to a farmer in Stetson.



The Universalist Society organized in 1834, holding their services in school houses which were well attended. They later held services at the Exeter Mills Hall after it was built in 1876.

The Episcopal Church was built at Exeter Corners in 1874. Services were held two years prior at the Methodist Church. Two of the pastors are buried in the churchyard cemetery. Summer school was conducted by the church at the Avery farm starting in 1934, with a very large attendance. The church closed and is now a private home, with all the original decor, minus the steeple. The pews & lights are now in churches in Palmyra & Pittsfield.



Rockwell's Grove was the site of tent revivals in the early '30's. In the late '30's revivals were held at the former creamery on Cider Hill Road, by the Church of God. After a lull, new revivals were held at the Town House in the summer of 1943, then moved to the creamery in the fall. The present Full Gospel Church of Exeter was built in 1949, with the first service in Jan. 1950.