



## The Story of the 2011 Structural Restoration of Pratt Hall's Gothic Tower.



Pratt Hall (aka Union Church & St. Bartholomew's)  
Summer 2006

### Background:

The Episcopalians were some of Montgomery's earliest settlers. They were the second congregation to organize but the first to erect a church. The original building was completed in 1835 and called the **Union Church**. It probably looked different than what is here now, being smaller and plainer, much like the original Congregationalist Church (which was in the Center) shown below.



Montgomery Congregational Church



Congregational Church circa 1923 with steps removed and tower/steeple entrance added.

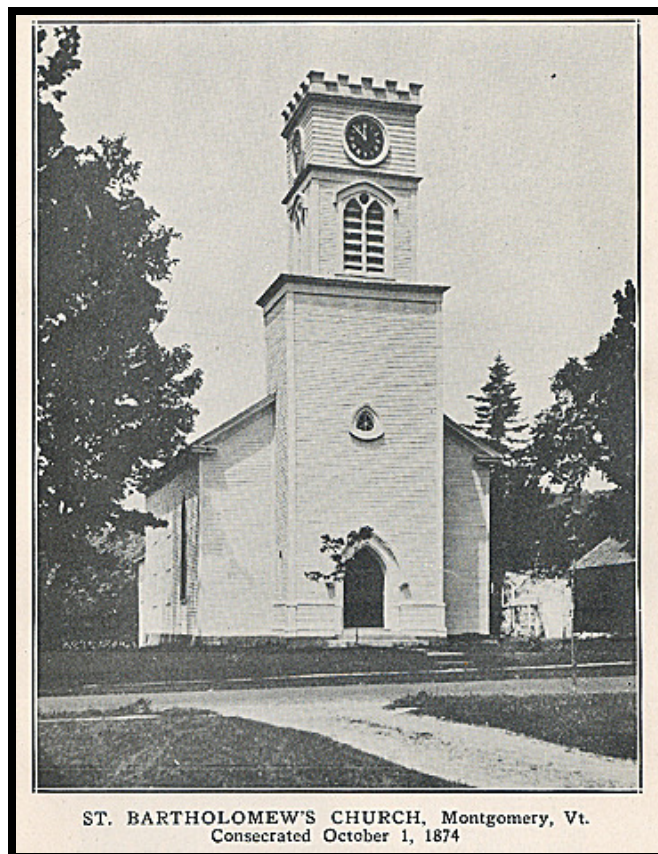
The Union Church was consecrated in 1835 by the Bishop for Vermont, John Henry Hopkins, a prominent proponent of gothic church design.

Major renovations, taking the better part of two years, were made to the Union Church beginning after the Civil War, and that is when it probably took its present form with stained glass windows, a tower retrofitted with a clock and bell, the gothic arched door, and crenellated tower top. It was re-consecrated as Union Church in 1874 after the renovations.



Union Church circa 1872. Tower being built, or retrofitted with clock and bell.  
Note the lancet window in the tower and the absence of the crenellation at the top.

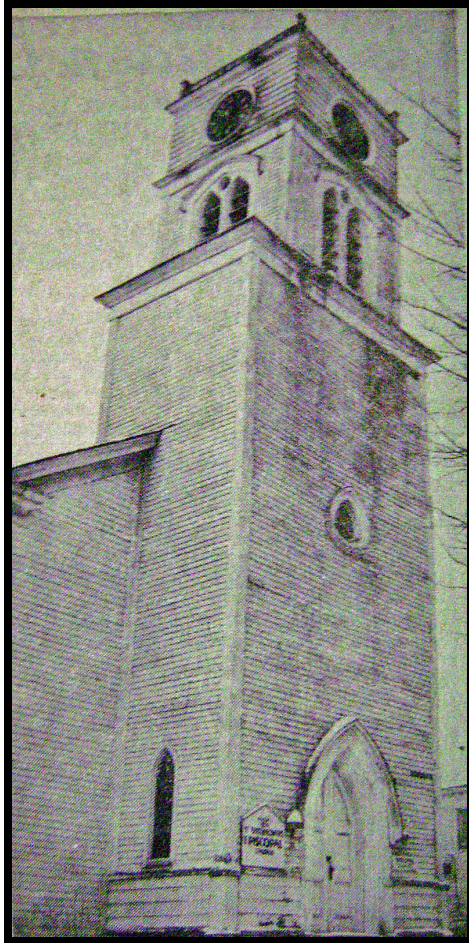
By 1890 the congregation had begun a “noted decline” according to diocese records. The church was re-consecrated in 1897 as **St. Bartholomew’s Church**, but continued to be used less and less. Services were reduced to once a year “Old Home Sundays” in 1927 but ended completely in the early 1960s.



St. Bartholomew’s circa 1917.

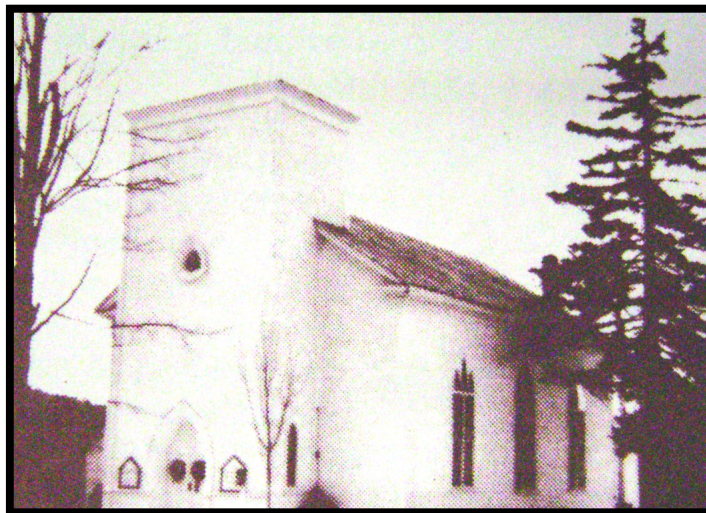
This photo probably reflects the building’s appearance after major renovations in the 1870s.

In 1974, after many years of neglect, the church (tower) was condemned, but saved from demolition by the formation of the Montgomery Historical Society (MHS).



St. Bart's 1974. Note evidence of water damage at the top of the first section of the tower. Also the crenellation had been replaced by a railing type design some time after 1934.

The Society purchased this community landmark from the Episcopal Diocese of VT for \$1.00. All repairs and restorations over the next 35 years were funded by private donations, including major efforts removing then rebuilding the top two stages of the clock tower, including the clock and bell, installing a new standing seam roof, and restoring the stained glass windows all at a cost of approximately \$75,000.



Pratt Hall in 1974 after the top two sections of the tower, clock, and bell were removed. Note condition of the roof.



1985 reconstruction of top two sections of the tower.  
One clock face and the bell have been set in place. Also note new standing seam roof.

The building was re-named **Pratt Hall** after an early founder and enthusiastic tour guide of the Society, Larry Pratt. The Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

The building is now home to a modest collection of artifacts, documents and ephemera, and houses periodic exhibits. It is also a “living artifact” serving as a venue for weddings, funerals, concerts, speakers, art shows, holiday caroling, school visits, and many other community events.

### **Prologue to 2011: How We Got To This Point In Time:**

In 2006 the Society had the entire building painted and based on feed back from the painters and a carpenter, knew we had issues with rotted siding, fascia, and other exterior surface woodwork. Additionally there were signs of water leaks in the nave ceiling area, wall cracks, and a spongy front entryway (tower) floor.

In 2007 the MHS Board of Directors decided to have Pratt Hall evaluated by experts to determine the condition of the building and to prioritize the repair or restoration work that needed to be done. Matching a \$500 grant from the Preservation Trust of Vermont, we hired an architect that specialized in historic buildings.

In 2008, after reviewing the architect’s report and in consultation with the Preservation Trust, we received another \$500 50/50 grant for a technical report from Jan Lewandoski, a nationally known timber framer and restoration builder. This was because the building was constructed using timber framing techniques and contained a unique cantilever truss to connect the tower to the main structure.

Based on these two reports the Society began a number of self help projects while starting to save money for the two larger, higher priority projects beyond our expertise or capability. One of the projects was to address the structural issues of the Tower’s lowest and largest section. The other involved a similar restoration/repair of the nave’s southwestern wall which contains three stained glass windows. This latter work was estimated at over \$110,000 in 2008.

In 2009 the Society applied for and received a \$7,500 50/50 grant from the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation to repair/restore the foundation and structural elements of the base of the bottom section of the Tower. The project was awarded in May of 2010 to Jan Lewandoski’s

Traditional and Restoration Building, and work started in January of 2011. This was the first State or Federal restoration (non-planning) grant the MHS has received.

In 2011 this grant was supplemented by additional grants from the Eastman Charitable Foundation, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and the TD Bank Affinity Membership Program. The remaining balance was funded by MHS membership dues and special contributions. St. Onge Construction also contributed demolition and debris removal of the front steps, Lutz's Automotive provided plowing of the work area, and Society volunteers cleaned and removed construction debris. Society volunteers also constructed new steps and platform, and primed the new work over the summer of 2011. Society volunteers will finish up with interior wall patches and painting, a new wheelchair ramp, and electrical work.

### **The 2011 Tower Project : Every Project Tells A Story:**

Once demolition was underway we learned that the load for the entire lower stage of the front wall was resting on the door, instead of the structural timber frame. This was a surprise since we were expecting most of the work to be on the foundation, sills, and bottoms of the vertical framing. The following photos explain the process, show the extent of some of the deterioration, the new timber frame structure, and other details.

#### **1.**

Demolition revealed the original front wall framing was probably for a conventional rectangular door. The pointed "gothic" door was added later but they had to cut out a center section of the plate above the door to allow for the point of the arch. This compromised the structural integrity of the middle part of the front wall. There was extensive rot and insect damage to the right corner post.



This photo shows the approximate location of these timbers and the completed demolition of the front steps.

2.

Demolition also revealed the front steps had been modified and enlarged at least three times. During repairs in the eighties a new concrete foundation was poured around the entire base of the tower except under the door because the steps were in the way. The front sill was completely rotten, as were a good portion of the floor joists and post/stud bases.

Work will include a new 10 X 10 post, sill, and plate: joists; and wall studs/posts. The foundation under the door will be rebuilt too. Everything will be buttoned up with matching siding, trim, moldings, and other details.



3.



Extensive rot at bottom, of the front right post.

4.



Exterior of front sill to the left of the door. Central portion of sill had disintegrated. Right portion of sill was identical to the above.

5.



New 10 X 10 sill spans the entire width of the tower. New floor joists in the entryway.

6.



Void where the remains of the old plate/girt above the door were removed. Joists/rafters suspended by cables. Posts/studs and bracing held in place only by sheathing.

7.



New plate hoisted in place.



8.



New plate with braces attached to new right front corner post.  
New vertical studs/post would be sistered to existing.

9.



Late March 2011. New sheathing installed after urgent structural repairs (above) were completed. Additional joinery completed inside shortly thereafter.

10.



New floor. Red Boards are from original floor.

11.



New siding and trim detail.

12.

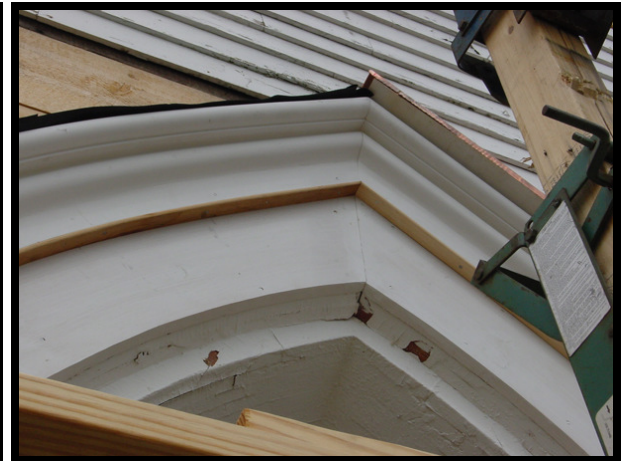


March 31, 2011

13.

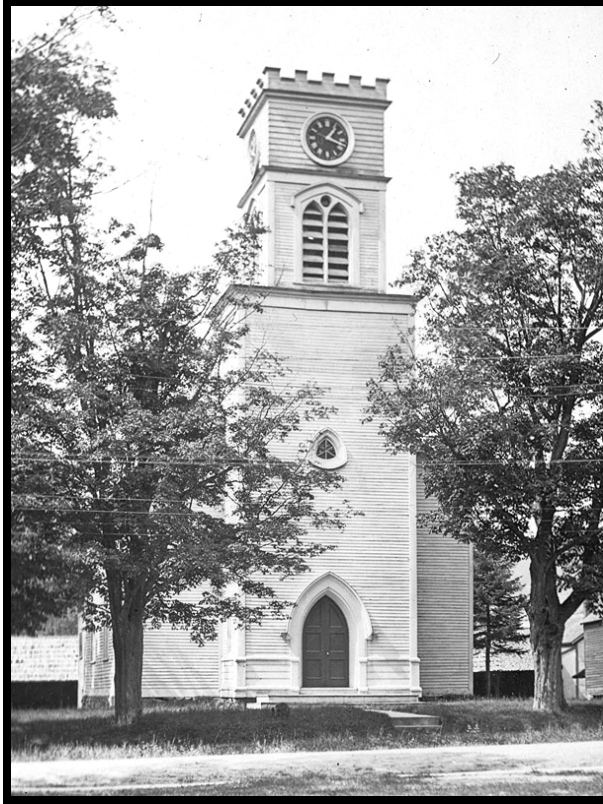
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14.



April 28, 2011. Note new replica door hood molding.

During the final phase replica gothic moldings were returned above the door and around the small triangular window approximating the likely appearance after renovations in the 1870s.



1917



2011



1917

New steps were constructed by Society volunteers based on the same 1870s design.



2005 Before



2011 After

## **Epilogue:**

The Pratt Hall Tower Project addressed serious structural deterioration of the timber frame of the lower part of the tower. This unique connection of the tower to the building with a cantilevered truss was restored and is now sound. Related structural repairs were made to the sill, joists, and foundation. Restorations to the exterior of the tower returned the appearance to a post Civil-war era appearance. Similar interior woodwork restoration was done in the entryway vestibule. While not 100% complete, the Tower project took about 6 months and cost about \$50,000, of which about \$30,000 was in cash. About \$13,500 was covered by grants with the remaining cash balance covered by membership donations and the TD Bank Affinity Program. Another \$20,000 worth of volunteer labor hours, and donations of materials and services were instrumental in our success.

The Society Board of Directors would like to thank:

Jan Lewandoski / Traditional and Restoration Building  
Preservation Trust of Vermont  
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation  
National Trust for Historic Preservation  
Eastman Charitable Trust  
TD Bank  
St Onge Construction  
Lutz Automotive  
Michael Gohl  
All our members and volunteers.

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