

January 14, 2006

To the Trustees of the Trinity Churchyard Cemetery Association

From David Ruell, Ashland

Re: Recent changes to the roof of Trinity Church

Since writing the National Register nomination for Trinity Church, I have been interested in the preservation of the building. The recent reshingling of the church was necessary for the continued maintenance of the building. So, I was pleased that you are making efforts to keep up the building. However, I was disturbed by the extension of the gable eaves that was included in the project, as I think it was both unnecessary and, from an architectural and historical viewpoint, unfortunate.

I presume that the eaves were extended, with the best of intentions, to protect the gable end walls from water damage. However, the actual effect is probably marginal at best. Water always flows downhill. Any water from rain or snowmelt on a simple gable roof will flow down the slope and not over the gable ends, unless diverted by some obstacle, like a chimney or a dormer. This is graphically illustrated by the formation of icicles in the winter, which are always found on the lateral eaves of a gable roof and almost never on the gable eaves. Because of this difference, many buildings, both old and new, have been built, like Trinity Church, with projecting lateral eaves, but close gable eaves, often just simple boards along the rakes of the gables. In the 18th and early 19th centuries, this arrangement, with close gable eaves, was very common, even on the largest and most expensive buildings. These buildings show no damage from this eaves design. Certainly, Trinity Church has managed to survive two centuries without significant problems resulting from the close gable eaves. I would therefore suggest that the eaves extension was functionally unnecessary, and will do little to protect the building.

From an historical viewpoint, the change is unfortunate, because it modifies the design of the building. Trinity Church is unique in New Hampshire as the only 18th century church that basically retains its original appearance. It has remained virtually unchanged since it was built in 1797. The close gable eaves seen on Trinity Church are, as I noted, typical of the period. Open gable eaves, like the new gable eaves, are simply not seen on major late 18th century buildings, and rarely on early to mid 19th century buildings, certainly not on a church. These particular eaves are definitely modern looking. Their construction introduces an anachronistic modern element into the church's exterior appearance. It may seem a modest change of little consequence. But, Trinity Church is a modest and relatively simple building, particularly on the exterior. So, what might be a minor change on a more elaborate building becomes a significant and quite noticeable change on this simpler building. On an important historic building like Trinity Church, it is important to avoid making architectural changes that obscure the original design, unless they are absolutely needed. I would suggest that this change is not needed and that it reduces the architectural and historic integrity of the building. Therefore I would ask you to seriously consider reversing the change and returning the eaves to their original appearance.