

Kingston Chronicles

The last of the Kingston Buildings listed in the National Registry of Historic Places to be featured in our Kingston Chronicles is the Sanborn Seminary Building on the old high school campus. This massive and impressive structure was “home” for thousands of students since its opening in 1888, and its importance transcends so many areas that it is hard to find a starting place – the historic features and architecture, the importance it played as the most prominent building for Seminary students, memories and stories that Seminary alumni love to tell, its vital role strictly as classrooms for Sanborn Regional High School since 1966, the generosity of its founder –Major Edward Stevens and the rumors of his “shady past”. Let’s start with the building itself.

Sanborn Seminary was founded in 1883, made possible by a generous gift of Major Edward Stevens Sanborn, although he never lived to see the completion of his dream. The building cost \$55,000 to build, but Sanborn also endowed it with \$175,000 “ ...as a token of his regard for his native town and his appreciation of the importance of education.” The architect is unknown, but this brick and limestone edifice was built by Oliver L. Giddings of Exeter (1836-1890) in the High Victorian Gothic Style, common in the late nineteenth century. To look at the building, a viewer must be struck by the symmetry of the decorative gable dormers, the arched windows all articulated by limestone corner blocks and keystones, the towers evenly spaced and the slate roof. The mammoth brick structure has four floors with numerous spires and iron latticework, high ceilings and burnished oak and mahogany stairways inside. Two huge stained glass windows with global pictures of the world adorn both front and back entranceways.

From Dr. Sanborn’s obituary: “The building is one of the finest structures for educational purposes in New Hampshire. Architecturally, it is a most attractive brick and granite building, finely furnished both inside and out. The hall, capable of seating about 500 is fitted with opera chairs of modern description and all the equipment of the building is first class. The spacious grounds outside are enclosed with a costly iron fence with heavy trimmed granite posts. Two quite pretentious entrances at opposite ends of the grounds are each elaborately arched with the old lettered inscription, ‘Sanborn Seminary’.”

At the 100th birthday celebration in 1983, Sanborn Seminary (at that time Sanborn Regional High School) was featured in many local newspaper articles. By Shawn Wickham: “The Main Building is an impressive site with its tree shaded walks, decorative spires and as New Hampshire Sunday News reporter Edward DeFlumere in 1950 termed it “gingerbread architecture.” Charles Samataro, Jr., (Seminary grad 1954) a former sports writer for the Eagle Tribune, may have been the first to receive an athletic scholarship to Sanborn Seminary. After his junior year in Salem, he was offered free tuition and a dormitory room if he would go to classes and play sports. When he first arrived on campus in the fall of 1953, he wrote “the Main Building loomed majestically like a castle in the sky.”

However one chooses to describe this magnificent treasure, the Seminary served the needs of many. The last Seminary graduates left in 1966 and they paid an appropriate tribute to the prestigious school and building. Recalling the words of Winston Churchill, the graduating class wrote. “This is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is rather the end of the beginning.”