

7. Christian Meetinghouse (1838) – The Grange



The Grange Hall originated as the Christian Meetinghouse in 1838. The builders were Josiah B. Sanborn, Dearborn T. Blake and William Gove who also constructed the Union Meetinghouse and the Kensington Town Hall. Sanborn and Blake had one of four carpentry shops in

town during this period, located on North Road. The masonry work on the two churches and the North School was done by John Blaisdell.

This was the second meetinghouse of the First Christian Society of Kensington, established in 1813. Christian or Baptist Churches were popular in New England during the early 1800s, being more democratic and less formal than the Orthodox Congregational Church. Camp meetings were held in Kensington around 1810, with baptisms in a local mill pond. The first church was occupied for a quarter century. Construction of the present building in 1838 coincided with new churches in the nearby towns of Stratham, Rye and Hampton Falls. The old church was moved to become a house on Cottage Road.

After fifty years, church membership had declined and by the 1880s, Christian Baptist services were held only occasionally. The church was sold in 1900, and a few years later, was acquired by the Kensington Grange No. 173 Patrons of Husbandry. Dedicated as the John F. Gill Grange Hall in 1906, it was used for meetings, lectures, dances and other local functions. The building retains original woodwork and trim, Greek Revival Style entries with transoms and 16/16 windows. With the end of farming in the late 20th century, Grange membership also declined. In 1990, the building was deeded to the Town of Kensington. Elsewhere in New Hampshire, the remaining Grange halls were placed on the *Seven to Save* list in 2013.

The “Lower Yard” cemetery dates from 1828 and was enlarged by the Dearborn Annex in 1888, when the present iron fencing was installed.

Kensington Town Center Self-Guided Walking Tour



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Kensington, New Hampshire

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Information from *History of Kensington, 1663-1945* by Rev. Roland D. Sawyer
Historic photographs courtesy of Kensington Public Library

Kensington Town Center Walking Tour



6. Hilliard-Prescott House (ca. 1795)

Amesbury Road was the principal route between Exeter and points south in Massachusetts, so Kensington boasted several taverns and stores. One of the first was a small shop kept in a lean-to of the Hilliard-Prescott House by the widow Amanda Johnson from 1795. During the early 1800s, Jonathan Hilliard and then widow Mary Hilliard owned the house. When shoemaking became the focus of Kensington's economy in the 1840s, Francis Hilliard (1825-1908) built an addition on his mothers' house and manufactured boots on the first floor. There was a meeting hall located upstairs. The Blake shop, which stood on the opposite corner of Trundlebed Lane, was the largest with forty employees. Businesses declined as Massachusetts shoe factories expanded and local farmers took in outwork on an individual basis. A store was opened in the



Hilliard shop in 1855 and Francis Hilliard became postmaster in the 1860s. Appointed by the Republican government, he ran the post office until 1886, when the Democrats returned to power. From the 1890s, relative Herbert Prescott (1873-1952) and his wife Alice hired the store, which they operated for several decades as post office, grocery store and lunch counter. The house passed from the Hilliard to Prescott family by marriage and is still owned by their descendants.

Kensington Town Center – Lower Village

5. Kensington Social Library (1894)

The Kensington Social Library was organized in the late 18th century. Housed in a private residence, the early library was open two afternoons a week. Members paying dues of twenty-five cents a year could take out one book at a time, while those who paid a dollar a year could take five books. Non-dues-paying members were allowed to borrow books for two cents a day. In 1849, the wife of the Unitarian minister organized the Ladies Sewing Society Library, which met once a fortnight and sewed while one member read aloud. The proceeds of the sewing projects were used to purchase new books and the group eventually had over 700 volumes. The Kensington Public Library was established by the Town in 1893 to take advantage of 100 free books offered by the State; the building is maintained by the Social Library through contributions and the town supplies the books and librarian.



The library building was a gift from Joseph C. Hilliard to the people of his native town. It took the name of the original social library and housed the collections the three local libraries, with a shared librarian. In 1900, this was Hilliard's niece Mary, whose father had kept the store across the road. Joseph Chase Hilliard

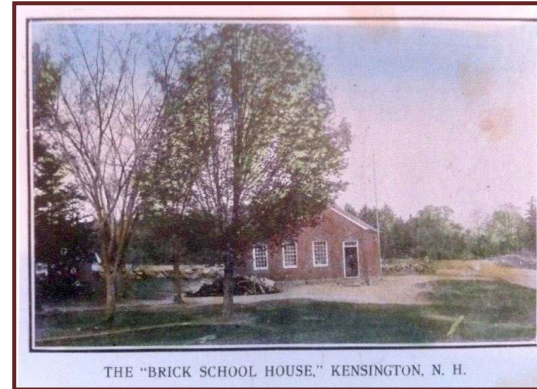
(1821-1905) made his money as an insurance agent, remained single and resided in hotels in Exeter and Boston. He hired architect George Tilden (1845-1919) of the Boston firm of Rotch & Tilden, who had been born in Concord, New Hampshire, attended Phillips Exeter and later studied in Paris at the Ecole de Beaux Arts. The building combines the Queen Anne and Classical Revival styles typical of Rotch & Tilden designs. It maintains its elegant interior details. In partnership from 1880 to Rotch's death in 1894, their work included several libraries, churches, collegiate, arboretum and observatory buildings. The 1970s library addition was designed by Earl Bolton who had been the supervising architect for the Kahn Library at Phillips Exeter Academy.

1. North School (1842)

The "Brick School" has been a prominent landmark since its construction in 1842 on a site occupied by a schoolhouse since 1798. It is the only remaining one-room school in Kensington not converted to residential use. The plan and the brick construction are somewhat rare for a rural one-room schoolhouse. The earlier school became a small house across the road.



Constructed in the Greek Revival or Grecian style, as it was known historically, the North School exhibits characteristic features such as the gable-front façade with regular fenestration, the brick corbelled cornice and cornice returns, and entry with transom light. On the interior are original and historic finishes such as plaster walls above horizontal board wainscoting, 12/12 sash windows, and raised field four-panel doors into the rear ell. Early twentieth-century alterations included the bank of windows



THE "BRICK SCHOOL HOUSE," KENSINGTON, N. H.

along the westerly wall (1918), fir flooring (1937), edge-and center-bead board ceiling, and suspended milk glass light fixtures (when the building was finally electrified in 1938). The 1920 added rear ell provided storage space and separate toilet facilities for the boys and girls, replacing the original brick outhouse

(removed by the early 1930s). The North School was used for 110 years, until Kensington Elementary School opened in 1952.

The Kensington Historical Society was formed in 1971 and took over maintenance of the building the following year, as a one-room schoolhouse museum. Items added to the collection under their stewardship included the desks, which were not original to the building. The North School was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.

Kensington Town Center – Upper Village



The center of the town, historically called “Meetinghouse Acre,” has been the ecclesiastical and civic center since the 1730s when the first Meetinghouse was erected where the Union Meetinghouse now sits.

2. Congregational Church (1865)

Kensington’s third Congregational Church was built after nearly fifty years of inactivity by the local Congregationalists. As first built, the new church was a simple 1½-story gable-front structure like other nearby buildings. A few years later, the distinctive front with double arched openings and steeple was added to create an Italianate appearance unique in Kensington.

On the interior, the plan of two side aisles and no center aisle embodies elements emphasized by the General Congregational Convention in their 1853 publication. The Italianate decorative detailing complements the many interior curved elements such as the segmented seating, curved stage beneath the pulpit, rounded wall corners, and slightly arched ceiling to facilitate the acoustics of the auditorium. The interior includes many historic finishes and furnishings such as oak curved slip pews, wainscoting, Gothic pulpit furniture, and decorative cast iron light fixtures.



3. Kensington Town House (1846)

The Kensington Town House replaced the 1770s meetinghouse, reusing some of the interior posts. It is a typical example of the purpose-built town halls erected in many rural New Hampshire communities during the second quarter of the nineteenth century after the separation of church and state. It housed annual town meetings for over 120 years until the population surpassed the hall’s capacity in the early 1970s. The town offices were relocated in 2011 and the building’s future has been in jeopardy.



Like Kensington’s other nineteenth-century institutional buildings it exhibits Greek Revival detailing including corner pilasters, cornice returns, and transoms and pedimented lintels above the paired front entries. The interior has undergone alterations, most recently with the reversible removal of the auditorium stage. The building was expanded in the late nineteenth century to house a kitchen. In 1980 it was moved back from the road roughly 25'. The Kensington Town House was listed as one of the NH’s *Seven to Save* in 2012, and with the adjacent Union Meetinghouse was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2013.

4. Union Meetinghouse (1840)

While the Congregational Church was inactive, the Union Meetinghouse was built for use by several Protestant denominations, and has been the Universalist Church since 1865. Architecturally, there are strong similarities to the Town House and Christian Church erected by the same builders: Josiah Sanborn, Dearborn Blake and William Gove. It is a characteristic rural church in the Greek Revival style with two front entries, pedimented gable, with a louvered fan and paneled corner pilasters; the belfry was added ca. 1860. The largely unchanged interior retains the majority of its plan including twin aisles and centered bowed sound bay that projects into the vestibule, and decorative finishes such as grained paneled doors with Norfolk latch hardware. Original furnishings include rectangular slip pews with original hardware and the mahogany painted Grecian-style furniture on the low-rise pulpit. In keeping with the strong tradition of summer churches in New Hampshire, the Universalist Church was used only seasonally from the early 20th century, and in later decades for just three Sunday services a year. Recently, temporary repairs were made to stabilize the belfry.



Immediately adjacent is the Upper Burying Yard, the town’s original cemetery, in use by 1735 and expanded several times, the last in 1773. It features excellent examples of slate markers.