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OLD YORK PURCHASES NEW COLLECTIONS STORAGE BUILDING

York, Maine—On April 29 the Old York Historical Society (OYHS) purchased the property at 96 Beech Ridge Road in York, formerly an Assemblies of God church. OYHS plans to renovate the 15,000-square-foot building to accommodate its archival and library collections, a public reading room, and storage for object collections. The new facility will open in 2023.

Since 2012, the trustees of OYHS have been looking for an appropriate building in the Town of York to house its extensive archival, library and object collections. OYHS attempted to buy the Beech Ridge church building in 2013, but when the sale couldn't be finalized, Old York purchased the former Kittery Family Practice building at 22 Shapleigh Road in Kittery. The Shapleigh Road facility provided desperately-needed space and appropriate climate control. Before then, objects had been stored in several locations, including the attics of historic buildings, outbuildings, and the former York Beach Post Office (which at 2,000 square feet was inadequate for the size of the collections).

The Shapleigh Road building has been sold to Fair Tide, a Kittery-based organization that finds long-term solutions for homeless individuals and families. In late 2021, Fair Tide submitted an offer to OYHS to purchase the 22 Shapleigh Road property. Fortunately, the Beech Ridge church building came on the market the next day. OYHS and Fair Tide coordinated efforts to secure the properties in a deal that is beneficial to both organizations. "We are delighted that these transactions were able to happen so smoothly," said Joel Lefever, OYHS executive director, "and as a result, both Fair Tide and Old York are better able to further their organizational missions."

THE BEECH RIDGE CHURCH BUILDING

The original church building, located at the corner of Beech Ridge Road and Betty Welch Road, was built in 1867 as the York and Kittery Christian Society. By the 1920s, the congregation had dwindled, and in 1963 the structure housed the First Pentecostal Church of York-Four Square Gospel Association, later renamed the Beech Ridge Road Assemblies of God. In 1985 a large new sanctuary and fellowship hall were constructed to the southeast of the original building.

Few of the original architectural elements of the 1867 building survive, but those that do will be retained in course of renovations. The wide plank pine flooring of the original sanctuary was discovered under later carpeting, and the gingerbread trim above the main entrance doors will continue to grace the exterior.

Renovations to the interior will include the removal of walls from the 1960s addition to create secure storage rooms; fire suppression and security systems; upgraded climate control systems; wiring for an integrated computer system; and new floor coverings in much of the building.

A public open house is planned for Saturday, June 11, from 10:00 am to noon, for community members interested in seeing progress on the new facility.

READING ROOM NAMED IN HONOR OF FORMER LIBRARIAN

OYHS is delighted to announce that the facility's new public reading room will be named The Virginia and Dexter Spiller Reading Room, to honor librarian emerita, Virginia Spiller, and her husband Dexter. Ginny was a dedicated librarian and genealogist at OYHS from 1990 to her retirement in 2013 at age 77. Her husband Dexter Spiller worked alongside her, volunteering countless hours researching historic York land transactions and identifying historic area photographs. Ginny passed away April 26, 2022, and the OYHS board of trustees passed a resolution at their May meeting to name the room in their honor. "Ginny was a fount of local genealogical knowledge, and a true legend in York," said Lefever, "and I hope that recognizing the Spillers for their dedication to local history will inspire future generations of historians."

ABOUT OLD YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY

OYHS is a vital part of the York, Maine, community. The organization maintains 16 buildings and 20 properties including the 17-acre Steedman Woods; employs 5 full-time and 25 part-time employees; houses more than 20,000 artifacts and 50,000 archival materials; and serves thousands of people year round through tours, educational programs, and special events. OYHS receives no Federal, State, or Municipal support, and relies on funding provided through private donations, a modest endowment, and a trust established by Elizabeth Perkins, as well as earned income from ticket sales, programs, memberships.

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