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Old Groton Meeting House Essay

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A Symbol of Our Community

The Old Groton Meeting House is a historically significant meeting place that has served the community for 266 years and continues to be essential to our town's identity. Throughout generations, the meetinghouse has been a welcoming place that has established the town and provided multiple religious and civic purposes for the citizens of Groton. Despite renovations and times of uncertainty for the community, this building has been a constant symbol that distinguishes the town. Preserving the Old Groton Meeting House for future generations is vital to maintaining our town's identity and continuing the traditions that have been upheld by community members over the years.

The four versions of the Groton meetinghouse have served the town throughout major historical events, including the establishment of Massachusetts after the American Revolutionary War. After being built in 1666 by the first settlers of Groton, the meetinghouse was burned down by Native Americans during King Philip's War about ten years later. It was reconstructed in 1678 by settlers who returned to the town, however, Groton's population continued to grow until the space was no longer large enough to accommodate the community's needs. A significantly larger meeting house was built in 1714, and the first bell was purchased by the town in 1730. As the town continued to grow over the next twenty years, it was determined that the Groton meetinghouse needed to become larger. This started the efforts to build a fourth version of the building, in the same location. Groton's First Declaration of Independence was established in 1765 when community members assembled at the meeting house to discuss separation from Great Britain after feeling that their rights were being threatened under an unconstitutional

colonial government. From 1776 until 1787, the meetinghouse was utilized as a space for the General Sessions Court, where justices of the peace met to review civil and disturbance of the peace cases. When lightning struck and damaged the building in 1795, the community members worked to repair the damage. In 1809, a large public clock, which can still be located at the meetinghouse today, was installed and ten years later the Paul Revere and Son firm in Boston manufactured a 1,128-pound bell for the building. There was division over the community members' religious affiliations, so in 1825 a small group of orthodox followers separated to form the Union Church of Christ in Groton. The Unitarian followers who remained converted the meetinghouse into the First Parish Church of Groton. From 1839 until 1840, architectural design became increasingly popular and major renovations were made to the building. With the construction of the Groton Town Hall in 1859, the town's business and religion were officially segregated and no longer took place within the same establishment. Luther Park led a substantial renovation project in 1916 to completely remodel the meetinghouse, which included replacing the benches inside with box pews. This distinguished building continues to be utilized by our community today for the Groton Free Community Dinner, meetings, weddings, and funerals. Throughout all of these years, the Groton Meeting House remained a central gathering place for community members and has greatly contributed to the historical identity of the town.

The traditions that have been established by the Old Groton Meeting House and the sense of community that the building has provided to Groton citizens through generations have built the foundation of our town. During periods of hardships and war, the meetinghouse offered stability and a place for the community to unite. Preserving the building is crucial to continuing traditions and maintaining the identity of Groton, which was established by the town's founding members.

Citations

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