



## The Ripton Community Church, U.M.

In 1829 the Methodist Episcopal Church was officially organized in Ripton with seven members under the leadership of Rev. Nathan Stearns. At this time there were only 18 families living in town. Prior to this, Methodist worshipers were served by visits from men like Rev. Nathaniel Alden, a Methodist pastor with family in Ripton. Nathaniel had been licensed to preach in 1810 by the Middlebury Methodist Episcopal Church. It took another 35 years after organization before the Methodists finally had a church of their own. Until then they continued to meet in their homes and in the town's schools.

The first walls of the church were erected on October 11, 1862. Due to finances and manpower constraints brought on by recruitment of soldiers for the Civil War construction took the Methodist Episcopalians more than one and one-half years. The building was completed and dedicated on March 24, 1864. By comparison, the Community House was started in 1865 and completed in 1866 as a replacement for the original Congregational Church. The Town Hall is that original Congregational Church which was built in 1838 with the help of Daniel Chipman. It was moved a short distance to its present location after the Congregationalists completed their new church. All three village buildings are recognized as State Historic Structures by the Vermont Department of Historic Preservation, and are listed on the State Register of Historic Sites.

The Ripton Church has a longstanding alliance with the United Methodist churches of East Middlebury and Middlebury. Ministry for these three churches is provided by Rev. Jill Robinson. While being a proud partner in this alliance Ripton also has a unique identity and role in its own community. Over its more than 146 years of existence the Ripton church's name has evolved—from Methodist Episcopal to Methodist, and then to United Methodist. In 2009 the name was changed to The Ripton Community Church, United Methodist to reflect its historic role as the town's only spiritual center, and to signify its evolving role as a center for the arts & humanities and other community activities. The church welcomes community members of all faiths to celebrate their life events and other occasions in this historic building. The standing room only Christmas Eve service is a good example of this diverse community coming together under one roof to share the Christmas spirit.

The Friends of the Ripton Community Church is a group of about ten people tasked with organizing the activities and restoration of the church. Formed in 2006, FRCC has overseen the restoration of the foundation, upgrade of electrical circuits, installation of a propane fueled furnace, and the construction of an addition to provide a small meeting room, fire exit, handicapped access and the installation an ADA accessible bathroom. On behalf of the Ripton Community Church this group sponsors lectures, concerts, art shows, a community pancake breakfast and a town-wide garage sale. The church is also home to the Ripton Historical Society, and plans are in the early stages to provide internet access for historical and genealogical research. Some newly installed book shelves will provide space for Ripton historical documents, as well as a special book collection. Books by and about Robert Frost will be one emphasis of this small library. Musicians have found the church to be a friendly space for their activities and several now provide voice and piano lessons here. Anyone interested in using the church or in joining FRCC should call 388-1634 or 388-3471.