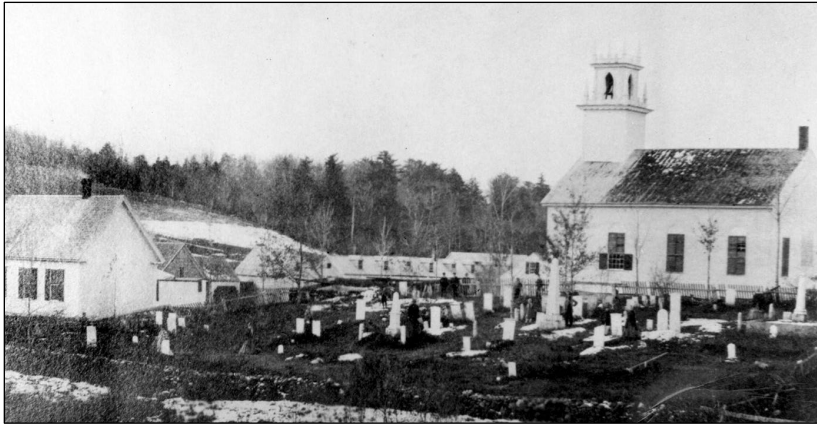


Sunapee's Historic Buildings & Places – by Barbara B. Chalmers  
**Lower Village Graveyard and North Meeting House**  
6 North Road



**Year Cemetery Established:**  
circa 1810

**Year Church Built:**  
1831

c1870 photo of North Meeting House aka Union Church and Village Graveyard from Sunapee Historical Society Collection

**Property History:** This Sunapee church and graveyard was located in part of Lot 6 of the 1<sup>st</sup> North Range granted in 1771 by England's King George to Saville proprietor John Wendell, a Portsmouth real estate attorney, who actively worked to settle the township. In 1791 he sold this lot for 50 pounds to Ichabod Perkins (1732-1816), a settler from Methuen. Five years later, Ichabod sold this parcel to his son Nathaniel Perkins (1769-1850), who set up a blacksmith shop near the river. The Lower Village graveyard is located on Nathaniel Perkins' land. The five earliest known graves here are Abigail Rogers Cooper, age 26, who died after the birth of her first child in 1800, two-year-old Polly Gardner in 1814, and the 1826 graves of Elizabeth Scranton, Abigail Rogers, and Daniel Gardner. Abigail Cooper's headstone may mark her grave or may have been erected later as a memorial to her. The burial ground pre-dates the church for in 1830 a building committee comprised of Nathaniel Perkins Jr. (1796-1837), John Young (1789-1859), and Charles Sargent (1802-1865) was formed to build the meeting house at the site of today's middle school parking lot. The circa 1870s photo above shows a row of young maple saplings between the church and graveyard. These trees are also visible in the photos at left. Seven of those ten trees exist in 2022. Land for the church was donated by Nathaniel Perkins (56 sq. rods) and by Elijah George 2<sup>nd</sup> (80 sq. rods) "in consideration of the good will [we] have for a house of public worship." Those who purchased pews to fund the building were allowed to pay half in money and half in grain. Organizers believed that religious instruction promoted the best interests of society and that everyone had the right to worship according to their own conscience, therefore the meeting house was free for use by all denominations of the Christian faith. Regular services were held by Baptists, Congregationalists, Universalists, and Methodists at the so-called Union Church apportioned in accordance with the number of followers of each faith.



top: c1908 and bottom c1900 photos of the Village Graveyard, Union Church, and below right, the Hearse House.

The graveyard expanded in 1850 when Caleb Stevens, the owner of the farm adjacent to the graveyard's north side, began to sell cemetery plots. He also sold land to the town where the hearse house was built next to the northwest corner of the graveyard. The town provided townsfolk use of a horse-drawn hearse carriage from the 1850s into the 1920s. In 1852 Stevens sold a two-thirds interest in 13,500 sq ft of unsold burial lots for \$170 to Erasmus Cooper and Cornelius Gardner. Five years later ownership of the unsold lots was transferred solely to Erasmus Cooper for \$200. He sold family size burial plots for \$10 each until 1867 when his widow sold the remaining unsold plots to her brother-in-law, John Cooper for \$18. John then purchased land to expand the cemetery along its south border, just before the town voted in 1867 to build a tomb at the southwest corner of the cemetery. In 1877 William Currier owned the farm on the north side of the cemetery and sold more burial plots from his land, including establishing the large Currier family plot. Plot owners were required by deed to share in the cost of maintaining a suitable perimeter fence, but there was no mention of "perpetual care", an idea which did not come about until the early 1900s when Sunapee's cemeteries were in poor condition.

Over time the Union Church fell out of use, as the largest denomination, the Methodists, had built their own church. The building was kept in repair and through the 1880s continued to hold a meeting of proprietors on the first Wednesday of each year as required by its constitution. But from then onward, the Union Church sat empty, only rarely hosting a funeral service, the last in 1901. From time to time, local boys broke in to ring the bell. In 1906 a court decision sold the former church to William Currier who owned the adjacent farm. He tore down the church horse sheds, and added a big barn door to the north wall (shown in the photo on the prior page) probably to use the building for storage. The former church's south lawn had become the defacto Lower Village green. By 1924 its overgrown condition motivated neighbors to cut its grass, plant flowers, and in July 1925, erect a flagpole. In 1926 Moses Knowlton gave the Lower Village graveyard a big boost when he gave \$1,000 to a perpetual care fund to help maintain it. But in 1931 William Currier's daughter, who then owned her father's property, had the former church demolished. The bell was sold to the owner of the Red Top Snuff Company of Byfield, Massachusetts for use in a Byfield church then being built.



The old granite post and picket fence on the north, west, and south sides of the cemetery was replaced in 1966 with inappropriate chain-link fencing. The 1868 granite block tomb, built by the town for use when the ground was frozen, still remains but has been unused for about 100-years. Its granite blocks were likely quarried at Samuel Bailey's quarry. There are 245 known graves in the Lower Village Cemetery, mainly members of the Abbott, Bailey, Colby, Cooper, Currier, Gardner, Muzzey, Lamb, Sargent, Turner, Winn, and Young families. Two burials have occurred here in modern times, that of Peter Cooper, a veteran of the First World War, in 1950 and Eva Cooper Galucia in 1967. The Lower Village Cemetery is a quiet place to ponder Sunapee's fascinating history.



2018 photos of the tomb and Lower Village Cemetery from the Sunapee Historical Society Collection