

Determination of Eligibility (DOE)

Inventory #: MLN0010

DOE Review Date: 5/22/2024

Date Received: 5/10/2024

Final DOE Approved: Yes

Property Name: West Milan Methodist Church

Area:

Address: 27 West Village Road

Town: Milan

County: Coos

Reviewed For: SR

DOE Program(s):

State Register

Determination of Eligibility:

National Register eligible, individually	Integrity: Yes	Level: Local
State Register eligible, individually		
Criteria:	A: Yes	B:
	C: Yes	D:
		E:

Areas of Significance(s):

Architecture

Social History

Period of Significance: 1897 to 1974

Boundary:

The current tax parcel serves as the NH State Register boundary.

Statement of Significance:

The West Milan Methodist Church is eligible for the NH State Register for its social role in a rural industrial village as supported by the lumber industry. It is also significant for its association to several early female preachers prior to women being officially permitted to preach in the Methodist Conference. The building is also significant for its eclectic architectural design, selected from a catalog of church plans developed between Philadelphia architect Benjamin D. Price and the Methodist conference at the end of the 19th century. Its Gothic Revival treatment, complete with an interior of varnished beadboard and stained glass windows defined the church as a modern space that contrasted with the Milan Community Church, from which the West Milan congregation split.

Comments:

Follow Up:

Notify appropriate parties

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Name, Location, Ownership

Historic name West Milan Methodist Church
Street and number 27 West Village Road
City or town Milan
County Coos
Current owner United Methodist Church

Function or Use

Current use(s) church

Historic use(s) church

Architectural Information

Style Victorian
Architect/builder Benjamin D. Price, architect
Aldrich Cole, builder
Source research
Construction date 1896-97
Source research
Alterations, with dates

Moved? no yes date:

Exterior Features

Foundation brick, field stone
Cladding wood clapboards
Roof material asphalt shingles
Chimney material brick
Type of roof gable
Chimney location interior, front, south slope
Number of stories 1
Entry location façade, off-center
Windows stained glass
Replacement? no yes date:

Site Features

Setting rural village
Outbuildings N/A



Photo #1 Direction: S
Date September 2023

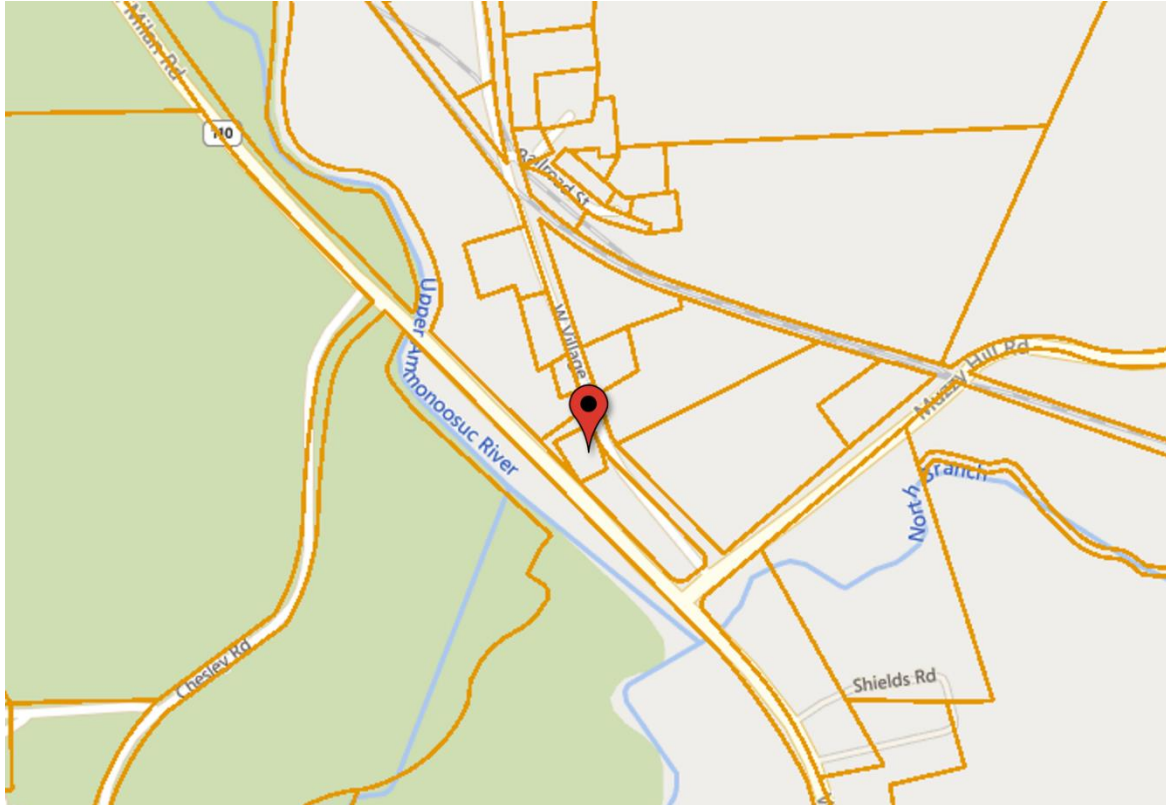
Landscape features N/A
Tax Map 131/66
Acreage 0.5 (less than one acre)
State Plane Feet (NAD83) X: 1079017.96, Y: 764353.96

Form prepared by
Name Andrew Cushing
Organization NH Preservation Alliance
Date of Survey September 2023

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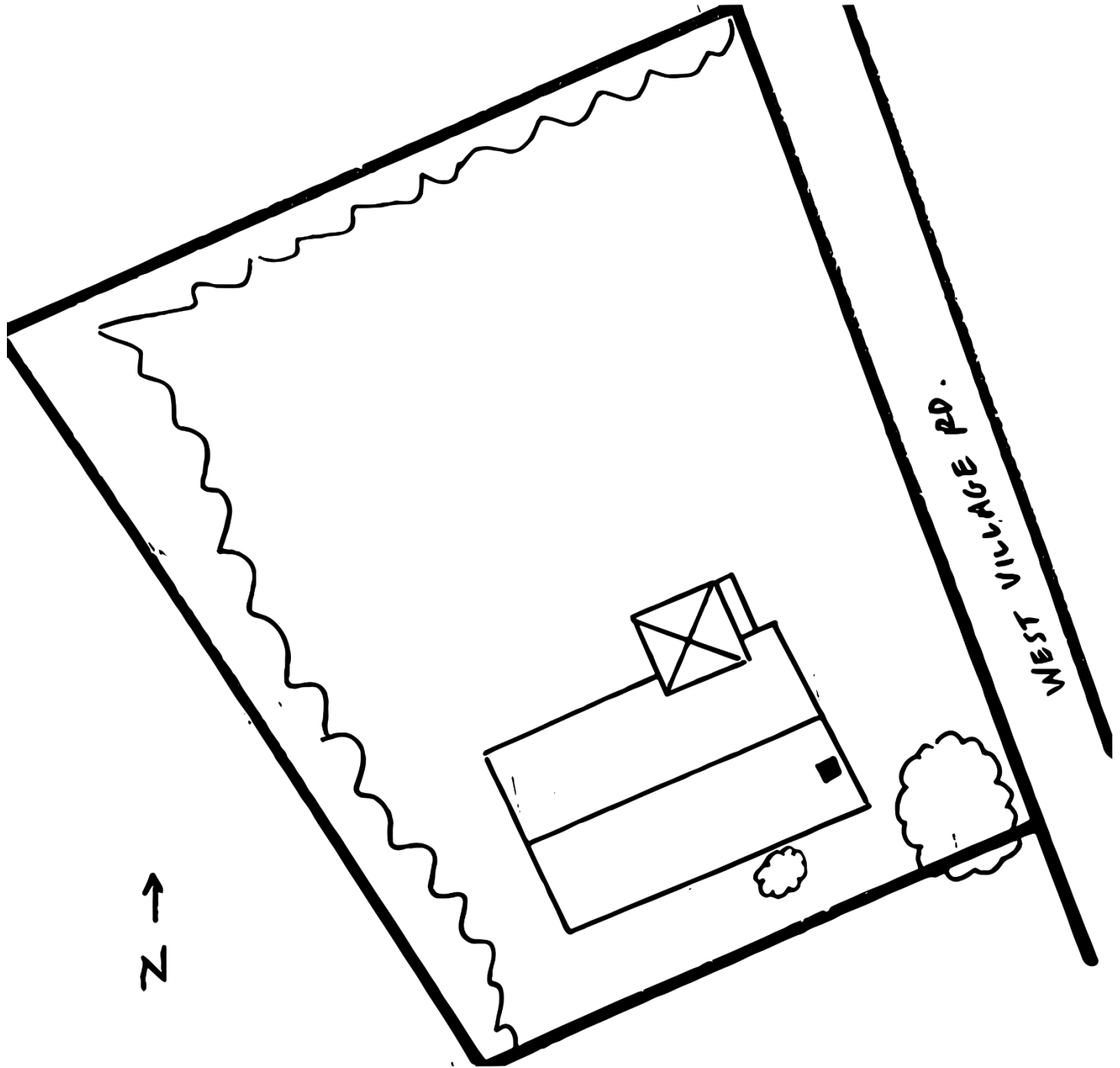
Location Map:



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Site Map: (Photo Key on last page)



Historical Background and Role in the Town or City's Development:

Milan was incorporated as a town in 1824, having first been chartered as Paulsburgh or Paulsbourg. In 1826 the town inventory showed 9 ½ acres of "mowing land" and 4 acres of pasture. The town numbered just 27 legal voters.¹ By the mid-19th century, the town grew with the advent of improved roads and arable land along the Androscoggin River (which is relatively placid compared to Berlin Falls further south, which stimulated that town's meteoric growth in the late 19th century). By 1850 the town had a population of nearly 500, with two villages developing seven miles apart: Milan Corner (East Milan or Milan Village) along the Androscoggin River in the eastern half of town and West Milan in the northwest corner of town near the border of Stark and Dummer.

Milan Corner was the more prominent of the two villages and it was here, starting in the 1830s where itinerant Baptist ministers would preach to residents. Rev. Leonard Kingsbury arrived in 1838 and started a Calvinist Baptist Church.² In 1843 a Freewill Baptist Church was founded with Elijah Griffin as the pastor, but it only lasted a few years. The Methodists had more luck. In 1840 the Methodist conference established a mission in Milan, part of a circuit that also included Gorham, Randolph, Stark, and Guidhall, VT. Early services were held in schoolhouses, residences, barns, and on Milan Hill.³

By the 1850s membership had grown enough to warrant a free-standing church building in the east side of town. A corporation of pewholders organized, consisting of Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, Adventists, and Universalists. The organization raised \$2,200 to construct a building under the leadership of Rev. Daniel W. Barber. The Milan Union Church's inaugural service, in August of 1856, was led by Rev. J.K. Chase of Rumney.⁴ In addition to serving multiple denominations, the church also provided worship space for those in Dummer and Berlin. Throughout the 19th century, the church increasingly became associated with the Methodist faith.

In West Milan, the construction of the Grand Trunk Railroad along the Upper Ammonoosuc River in 1850 spurred development, including stores, sawmills, and a railroad depot.⁵ By the late 1800s villagers embarked on two building campaigns at the same time: the construction of a Knights of Pythias hall and a church.

During the summer months of 1896, Rev. Willis Holmes of the Milan Methodist Church had hosted tent meetings in the village, building support for a permanent structure. In 1896 the land was acquired for \$100 from Benjamin T. Roberts, a former stork clerk in the village and a farmer, according to the 1880 census. The grantee, the Methodist Episcopal Church of West Milan, included the following trustees: Benjamin Roberts, W.S. Crockett, Reuben Jackson, Charles Fogg, and E.B. Chesley. The deed stipulated that the "party shall erect and maintain...a suitable house for worship, and build and maintain a suitable fence on the northerly and westerly side of the land hereby conveyed."⁶

The local contributor to the *Berlin Reporter* shared updates from the church's construction through 1896 and 1897. In November, the newspaper reported that "We expect that the ground will be broken for a new church soon. The matter is in the hands of a committee that have some push to them."⁷ Indeed, the following week the ground was broken – the same week as the Knights of Pythias hall. Later November articles mentioned that the builder was Aldrich Cole of Stark and all lumber was to be donated by the Androscoggin Lumber Company. Stephen Aldrich Cole (1833-1921) was born in Stark and lived there and Northumberland (Groveton). Census records in 1880 list him as a farmer. His marriage certificate in 1883 to his second wife, Emma Cook, listed him as a joiner. In 1900 and 1920 he was listed as a millwright at the pulp and paper mill in Groveton.

¹ Bicentennial Committee, *Historical Notes and Pictures of Milan, 1771-1971* (Littleton, NH: Courier Printing, 1971), 17.

² *Historical Notes and Pictures of Milan*, 193.

³ Florence Hamlin, "History of the Milan Community Church," unpublished.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Georgia Drew Merrill, ed. *History of Coos County, New Hampshire* (Syracuse, NY: W.A. Ferguson, 1888). 841.

⁶ Coos County Deeds, Book 89, Page 267.

⁷ *Berlin Reporter*, Nov. 5, 1896.

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By December, the frame had been erected and throughout December the church was sheathed and sided. An article from around Christmas stated that the crew was “about finished on the outside...[and] ready to dedicate in a month or two.”⁸ January 1897 was a snowy month, with snowfall totaling 40” according to the newspaper reports. Despite this, by January 6 the spire’s weathervane was installed and W.H. Veasie of Groveton was working on the interior. (This was likely William Veasie, who in the 1900 census was listed as a 52-year-old carpenter.)

The crew had installed the stained glass windows by February. “The stained glass windows in the new church show well from the street; in face the building as a whole is a beauty. The church will be ready to dedicated soon,” read the *Reporter* on February 3, 1897. The article continued, “Mrs. B.T. Roberts of West Milan and Mrs. G.W. Blanchard of Auburn, ME are to put in the twin windows. They are to be of colored glass, of beautiful design and will be places in the end of the church next to the road. They are to be memorial windows and will cost forty dollars each.”⁹ The two memorial windows were dedicated to Frank Roberts and Freeland and Adrianna Hutchinson. Benjamin T. Roberts (1841-1904) and Naomi Potter’s (1836-1903) son, Frank, died at the age of 15 in 1887 from meningitis. Freeland Hutchinson (1831-1884) died of typhoid and Adrianna (1836-1888) died a few years after. Their daughter, Theodora, married George W. Blanchard and the young couple were living with her parents at the time of the 1880 census.

George Blanchard was a key player in the church’s financing, and also instrumental in the construction of the Pythias hall (which burned in the 1930s). He was a spool manufacturer and later worked in the pulp and paper mill in Lewiston/Auburn, Maine. Blanchard was born in Andover, ME but moved to NH as a young man. He started working in a sawmill in Dummer and Milan, then purchased a large lot in Success, NH under the partnership Blanchard and Twitchell Lumber Co. To access this vast forestland, he built the Blanchard and Twitchell Railroad.¹⁰ The 1888 *History of Coos County* stated that Blanchard’s steam mill produced one to two million board feet of lumber each year.¹¹ In 1901 he bought out his partner and formed the George W. Blanchard and Son Lumber Company. During the early 1890s, he represented Milan in the NH House of Representatives and served as a director at Berlin Savings Bank. He and his family moved in 1896, but maintained connections to West Milan.¹²

In March 1897 the furnace was installed, the carpet was donated by the Village Working Society, and the 900-pound bell was rung for the first time. The newspaper reported that the church was just waiting on the pews to be delivered. The church’s grand opening was likely Easter service at the end of April 1897. That service included flowers and cages of birds “whose music added much to the interest and impressiveness of the occasion.”¹³

The church design was purchased from the “Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages,” a collaborative effort between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the architect, Benjamin D. Price of Philadelphia. The West Milan building committee selected Plan 5 C and opted for the tower on the opposite side as the drawing. (The instructions stated, “show by small pencil sketch on which side you want the corner tower...otherwise they will be sent as shown in the catalogue.”) The catalog estimated the church could seat 300 and be built for less than \$1,700.¹⁴ Price found a niche market with his catalog designs specifically for churches and parsonages. His catalog business sold thousands of plans nationwide between 1885 and 1906, with designs ranging from simple one room chapels to two-story ornate churches.¹⁵ In Coos County alone, his designs were adopted by the Universalists in Gorham and the Episcopalians in Whitefield.

⁸ *Berlin Reporter*, Dec. 23, 1896.

⁹ *Berlin Reporter*, Feb. 3, 1897.

¹⁰ *Historical Notes and Pictures of Milan*, 39-41.

¹¹ Merrill, ed. *History of Coos County*, 841.

¹² *Historical Notes and Pictures of Milan*, 39-41.

¹³ *Berlin Reporter*, April. 28, 1897.

¹⁴ Benjamin D. Price and Rev. A.J. Kynett, DD. “Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages,” 1889.

¹⁵ Sandra L. Tatman, “Benjamin D. Price,” Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, www.philadelphiabuildings.org.

Accessed April 5, 2024.

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The construction of the church was championed by the enthusiastic pastor, Rev. Holmes. "Mr. Holmes...is now working day and night in the interest of his charge here and his labors have been wonderfully blessed," wrote the newspaper. "When he came here last spring there was no organized religious society in the place. Now we have a church with good membership, a class of some fifty or sixty members and a church edifice nearly ready for occupancy. Too much cannot be said of our pastor's labors."¹⁶ Rev. Holmes did not start his career as a minister. According to 1880 census records, he was living in Whitefield and working as an engineer. He came to Milan in 1896 and left in October 1898. (Methodist pastors usually have 1-3 year stays with churches.) In 1910 he was living in Haverhill and in 1920 the census lists him as a "retired monk" living with his daughter's family in Landaff. At the 100th anniversary of the Milan Methodist Church, Lena Ellingwood recalled that Rev. Holmes would bicycle between the two churches:

"Once, when there were no services in the western part of town,
Milan's pastor, Mr. Holmes, decided something must be done!
Having no horse, but feeling that God would be his guide,
He decided his old bicycle must do for him to ride."¹⁷

West Milan's roster of ministers also included three women before 1930. Full clergy rights in the Methodist conference were not granted to women until 1956, but women had leadership positions in the church dating back to the 1860s. Early ordinations of women were revoked in the 1880s and replaced with deaconess programs. In 1920 the Methodist conference granted women the right to be local preachers, with limited clergy rights granted in 1924.¹⁸

But years before the conference allowed women to preach locally, West Milan welcomed Elizabeth S. Barker to deliver Sunday sermons between 1912 and 1915. Barker (1843-1929) was born in New Vineyard, ME. In 1880 the census recorded her as a milliner in Cumberland, ME. In 1910 she was a "traveling evangelist" living with her son in Stoneham, MA. It is possible that West Milan, being remote and perhaps desperate for a minister, offered Barker her first job. After West Milan, she preached in Milton, Haverhill, and Peterborough, where the 1920 census lists her as a minister.¹⁹ In 1921 the New Hampshire Methodist Episcopal conference admitted Barker as a member. She was the second woman admitted to the conference, but the first woman to obtain authority to preach, according to an article in the *Boston Globe*. The article continued, "Mrs. Barker, who is 79 years of age, was applauded as she took her seat at the conference session."²⁰ Barker died in Bristol in 1929 at the age of 86.

Between 1922 and 1927, a woman with local connections preached in both West Milan and Milan. Rev. Agnes Ellingwood was the daughter of Lena Ellingwood. Her services were remembered by her mother at the Milan Church's centennial celebration. In the same poem that recalled Rev. Holmes and his bicycle, Lena wrote:

"My daughter, ordained minister, was pastor for a time.
I came to visit her, my heart seemed filled with joy-bells chime."²¹

Rev. Ellingwood was followed by Doris Wadsworth in 1929. Wadsworth (1906-2005) was listed as a methodist minister in the 1930 census. She was a 23-year-old recent graduate of Boston University School of Religious Education and Social Work and boarded at the residence of Frank Hancock, a lumber estimator. Wadsworth eventually moved into teaching. In 1940 she was an elementary school teacher in Colebrook, where she married a pharmacist and started a family. She and her husband later moved to the Walpole area.

¹⁶ *Berlin Reporter*, March 1897.

¹⁷ Lena Ellingwood, "One Hundredth Anniversary of the Milan Church." Collection of the Milan Community Church.

¹⁸ "Timeline of Women in Methodism," <https://www.umc.org/en/content/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>. Accessed on April 5, 2024.

¹⁹ "Milton and Mother Barker," *Milton Observer*, <https://miltonobserver.com/2019/09/22/milton-and-mother-barker-1921/>. Accessed on April 5, 2024.

²⁰ "Methodists Admit Woman to Session," *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1921.

²¹ Lena Ellingwood, "One Hundredth Anniversary of the Milan Church." Collection of the Milan Community Church.

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The West Milan Church owned a parsonage between c.1906 and 1929. The possibility of a parsonage grew more possible when the mortgage for the church was burned in January 1904. The house was purportedly the company office for the Ammonoosuc Valley Lumber Co. Volunteers moved the building with horses, oxen, and block and tackle to its location adjacent to the church.²² Because the church sometimes shared ministers with Milan or Stark, the parsonage was not always occupied and instead rented. In 1929 the Milan and West Milan churches were merged and the congregation voted to sell the parsonage to Flora M. Fogg.²³

In 1916 the church struggled with membership after the closing of a nearby mill and a fire at another mill. "The finances of the church are in bad shape...the mill men have all moved away [and] the potato crop, the chief money crop, was short this year," wrote Rev. Olin during his brief tenure at the church.²⁴ Membership continued to ebb and flow throughout the 20th century. Years of strong membership, an active chorus, and vibrant Sunday School were followed by discussions of closing, particularly in 1966. Church notes reveal that the congregation persisted, though, and hosted picnics, Old Home Day services, exhibits at the local Hobby and Art Show, military funerals, concerts, baccalaureates, and field trips.

Today the church remains open, although in-person services rotate between seven churches in Coos County, including in Milan, Pittsburg, Colebrook, Lancaster, Groveton, and Stark.

Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts (please list names from appendix C):

1200.Philanthropy, 1850-present.

1300.Religion in New Hampshire, 1623-present.

Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation:

The West Milan Methodist Church stands on West Village Road in the rural village of West Milan, Milan, Coos County. The half-acre lot is mostly grassy, with a gravel parking lot along the paved road and some shrubbery along the northern elevation. The church is the most prominent building in the village, which has lost many of its 19th century buildings that developed along the main road once railroad traffic slowed and NH Route 110 was constructed to the south.

The one-story front gabled building is eclectic in design, with Gothic Revival and Stick Style influences. An off-set 3-story bell tower stands to the north, serving as the main and sole entrance to the building. The church rests on a foundation of brick, has an asphalt roof, is sided with wood clapboards, and has a single brick chimney which extends from the southern roof slope, toward the façade. All windows are stained glass, mostly lancet, but with two circular windows at the front and back.

The facade, which faces east toward West Village Road, is comprised of the gable front sanctuary and the bell tower. The main sanctuary volume is dominated by a double lancet stained glass window topped with a round stained glass window, all set within a larger framed lancet. The lower 2/3 of the façade are finished with clapboards, but the gable peak is finished with vertical tongue-and-groove boards. At the bottom, the boards are cut in a saw pattern with quatrefoil cutouts at the corners, while at the very peak of the gable, a larger quatrefoil cutout from a diamond-shaped board applique rests above a band board with molded header. The cornice is stock molding, but the fascia is treated in a manner to look like small panels.

The main entrance is defined by a gable front porch supported by panelized columns with corniced capitals. The double doors have four panels and are set within a lancet entablature, partially obscured by the porch. In the gable end of the porch is a wooden screen, punctuated with five quatrefoil cutouts beneath a larger central quatrefoil in the peak. The raking trim is finished the same way as on the sanctuary gable. The second tier of the bell tower has a central pair of lancet windows (fixed, not double hung), set above a simple band. At the

²² "West Milan United Methodist Church, 100th Anniversary: 1896-1996." Booklet prepared by church trustees.

²³ Coos County Deeds. Book 255, Page 141.

²⁴ "West Milan United Methodist Church, 100th Anniversary: 1896-1996," 3.

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third tier, where the bell is, simple wide wooden slats are divided in half by perpendicular boards sawn with a wave pattern – complete with two quatrefoil cutouts at the top. The spire is a simple flared pyramid, topped with a weathervane. Though the architect plans show dormers at the spire level, this detail was omitted in West Milan.

The north and south, or side, elevations of the church are mostly identical. The south elevation is four bays wide with a stained glass window in each bay. The lower basement level has doors for firewood beneath the two westernmost bays. The northern elevation's eastern bay is occupied by the bell tower. On the first floor of the tower is a single double hung window with a lancet shaped upper sash. The second story and third story, like on the façade, contains a pair of windows and louvers for the bell. Beneath the sanctuary's two westernmost windows are fixed 2-light sash at the basement level.

The rear elevation is mostly windowless, except for a single round window near the gable. A central bump-out, occupying the central third of the rear gable end, extends roughly 6" proud of the main body. The round window rests in the upper section of this bump-out, just below the gable treatment of saw-toothed vertical boards seen on the façade. Like on the front, the cornice fascia is finished to look panelized. The rear elevation of the bell tower mirrors that of the other sides, except for a blank first floor.

Inside, the first room after entering is the lobby, which occupies the ground level of the tower. The room is finished with vertical beadboard wainscot, chair rail, and horizontal beadboard walls and ceiling, all naturally finished. One door – rectangular in shape – leads to the classroom space under the choir loft. This door is cased with molded trim and corner blocks with rosettes. The other larger door, a nine-paneled lancet shaped door, leads into the sanctuary. In the lobby, the floorboards are painted.

The sanctuary is finished like the lobby, with beadboard wainscot, walls, and ceiling. The space is lit by the lancet windows, with each pane a single color of stained glass – purple, yellow, blue, and orange. The ceiling is gambrel shaped, set below the actual roofline. A central aisle leads to the altar and slightly recessed apse, lit by the rear elevation's round window. From the interior, the window's muntins better illustrate the quatrefoil motif seen elsewhere on the church's exterior. The pews include rosettes and routed lancet designs at the ends and are orientated at an angle.

The eastern end of the sanctuary includes the classroom space and choir loft. On the ground floor, the classroom space is separated from the sanctuary by two wide openings and a series of cumbersome folding doors. At this end are the leaded stained glass memorial windows and chimney (encased in beadboard). The choir loft's balusters are solid pieces of wood with gothic cutouts.

The basement is unfinished space with a dirt floor. Access to the attic is through a hatch at the choir loft level.

The West Milan Methodist Church is architecturally unique in the Androscoggin Valley of Coos County. Compared to the Milan Community Church (1856) or Stark Union Church (1843), which both represent more traditional, mid-19th century designs that adhered to symmetry, the West Milan building is stylistically and materialistically more playful, eclectic, ornate, and intimate. This Victorian influence can be seen in Errol's Congregational Church (1898), even though that church's shingling and window sash are less integral to the overall design and layout of an essentially classic, symmetrical church.

National or State Register Criteria Statement of Significance:

The West Milan Methodist Church is significant under Social History and Architecture.

For over 125 years, the West Milan Methodist Church has served as a home for the spiritual and community needs of the villagers. Its construction reflects the zenith of the rural industrial village and was provided for by the generosity of the Androscoggin Lumber Company and several families who made their

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money in the lumber business. The church’s significance is furthered by its connections to several early female preachers, in some cases years before the Methodist conference officially permitted the practice.

The building is also significant for its eclectic architectural design, selected from a catalog of church plans developed between Philadelphia architect Benjamin D. Price and the Methodist conference at the end of the 19th century. Its Gothic Revival treatment, complete with an interior of varnished beadboard and stained glass windows defined the church as a modern space that contrasted with the Milan Community Church, from which the West Milan congregation split.

Period of Significance:

1897-1974 (50 year cut-off)

Statement of Integrity:

The West Milan Methodist Church retains all aspects of integrity, to an exceptional degree. Its setting and location in West Milan Village remain largely unaltered – partially spared by the rerouting of NH Route 110. The building’s materials, design, and workmanship remain nearly untouched since its construction over a century ago. The building’s exterior and interior provide a strong sense of feeling and association.

Boundary Description and Justification:

The recommended boundary follows the property lines, as shown in the map on page 3.

Bibliography and/or References:

Berlin Reporter. West Milan News. Various dates, 1896-1900.

Bicentennial Committee. *Historical Notes and Pictures of Milan, 1771-1971*. Littleton, NH: Courier Printing, 1971.

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Ellingwood, Lena. “One Hundredth Anniversary of the Milan Church.” Collection of the Milan Community Church.

Hamlin, Florence. “History of the Milan Community Church.” Unpublished. ND.

Merrill, ed. Georgia Drew. *History of Coos County, New Hampshire*. Syracuse, NY: W.A. Ferguson, 1888.

“Methodists Admit Woman to Session.” *Boston Globe*. April 8, 1921.

“Milton and Mother Barker.” *Milton Observer*. <https://miltonobserver.com/2019/09/22/milton-and-mother-barker-1921/>. Accessed on April 5, 2024.

Surveyor’s Evaluation:

NR listed: individual _____
within district _____

Integrity: yes _____
no _____

NR eligible: individual _____
within district _____
not eligible _____
more info needed _____

NR Criteria: A _____
B _____
C _____
D _____
E _____

Price, Benjamin D. and Rev. A.J. Kynett, DD. "Catalogue of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages." 1889.

Tatman, Sandra L. "Benjamin D. Price." Philadelphia Architects and Buildings. www.philadelphiabuildings.org. Accessed April 5, 2024.

"Timeline of Women in Methodism." <https://www.umc.org/en/content/timeline-of-women-in-methodism>. Accessed on April 5, 2024.

US Census Records, Milan, Stark, and Groveton, 1880-1930.

"West Milan United Methodist Church, 100th Anniversary: 1896-1996." Booklet prepared by church trustees.

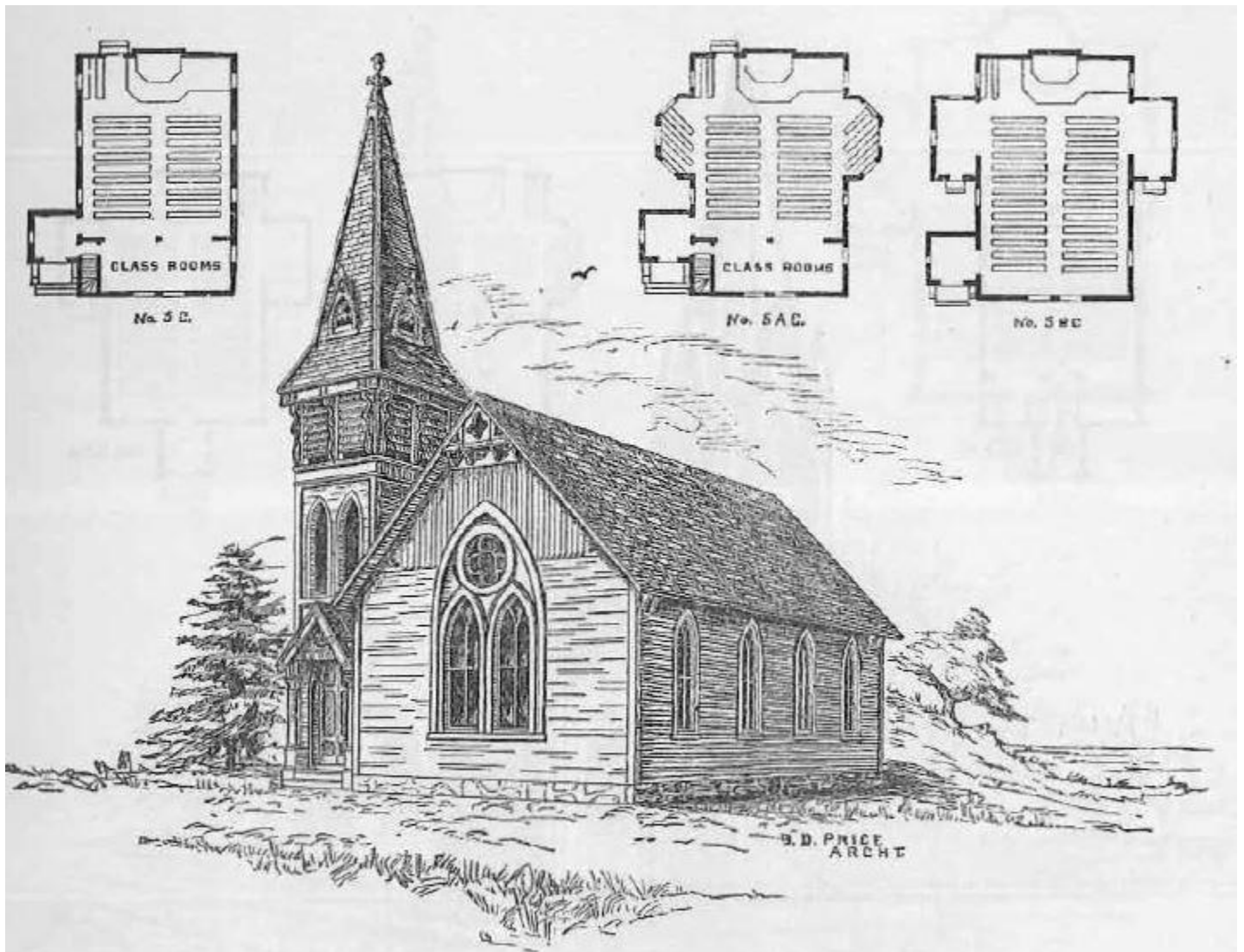


Figure 1. Plan 5C from "Catalog of Architectural Plans for Churches and Parsonages," 1889.

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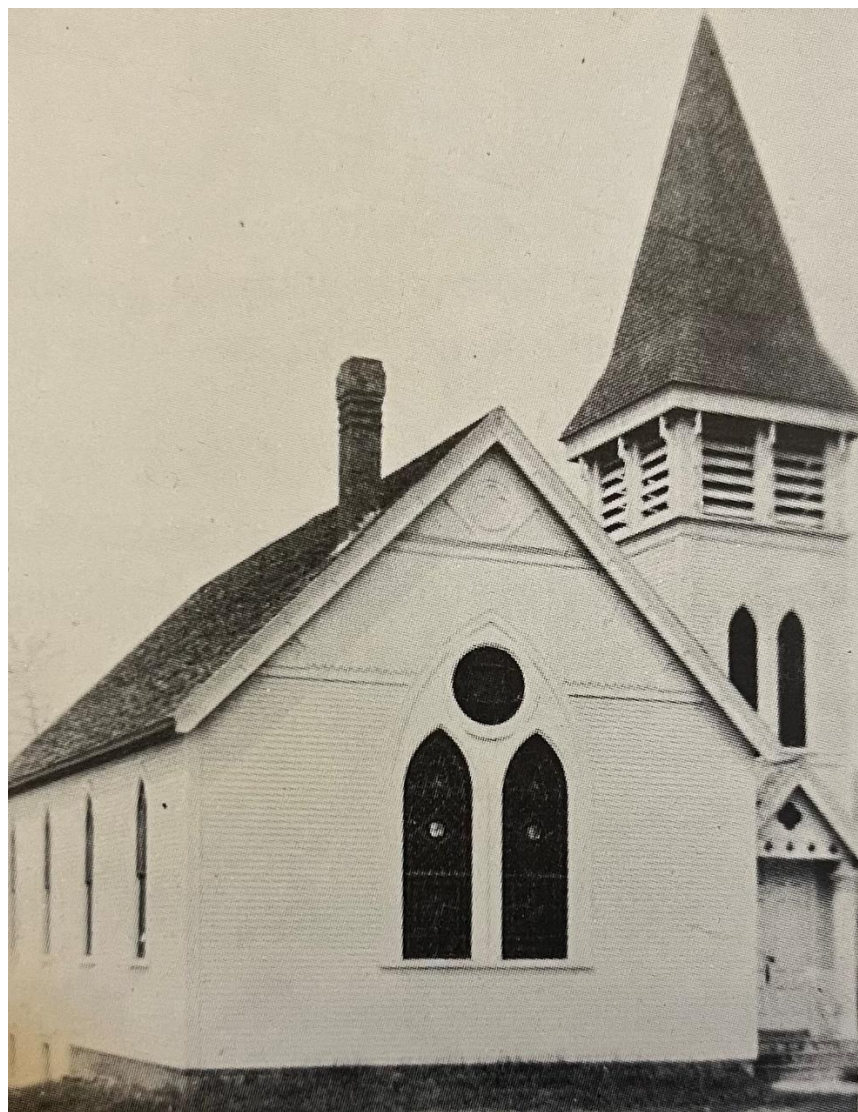


Figure 2. Historic photograph of the West Milan Church, c.1970.

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Photo # 2. Looking SW from West Village Road.



Photo # 3. Looking NE, showing the rear and southern elevation.

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Photo # 4. Context, showing the former parsonage. Looking NW.



Photo # 5. Façade.

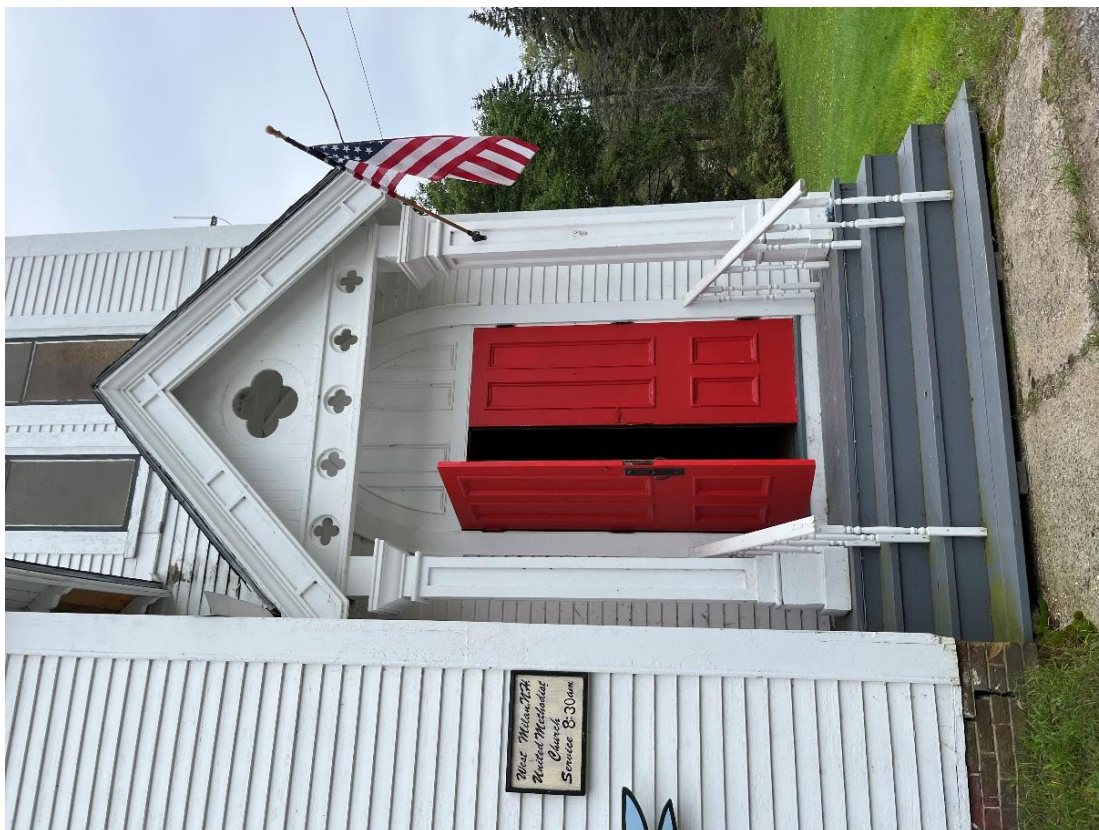


Photo # 6. Entrance and front porch.



Photo # 7. Interior, looking W toward altar.



Photo # 8. Interior, looking E toward classrooms and choir loft.



Photo # 9. Lobby/entrance, looking south toward sanctuary.



Photo # 10. Classrooms, looking SE.

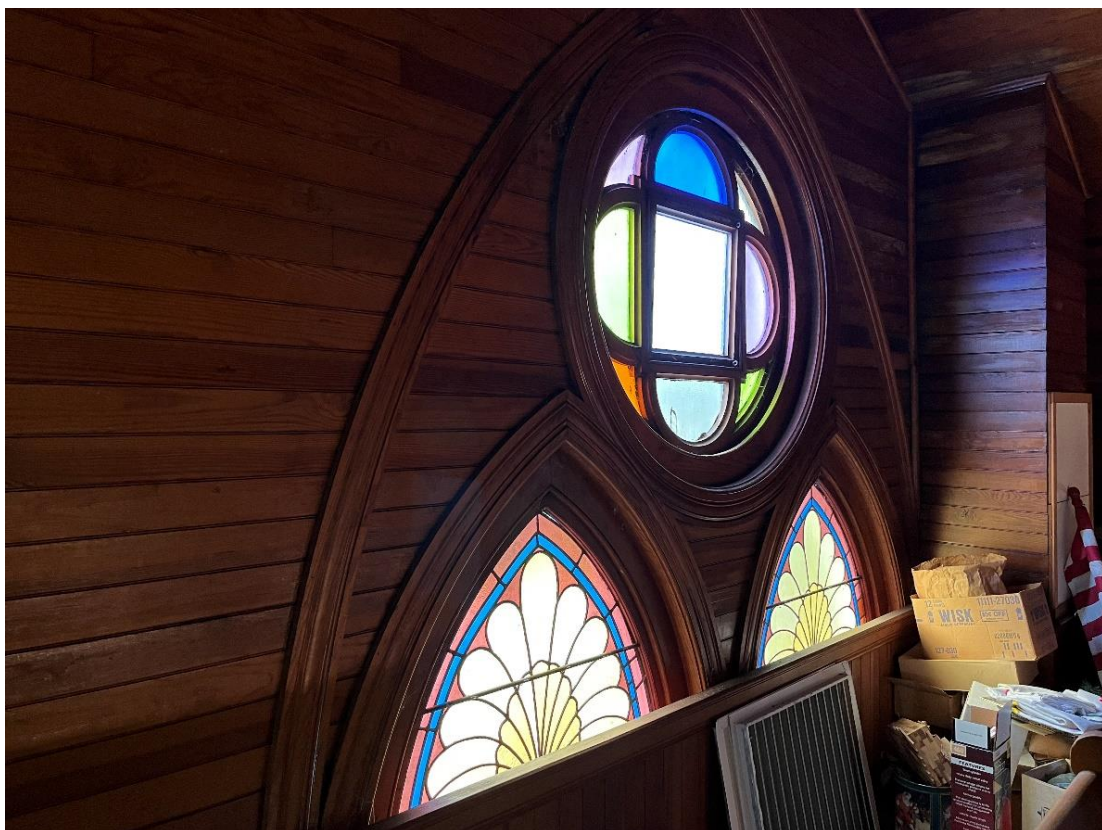


Photo # 11. Detail of the choir loft and the façade memorial windows.

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Photo # 12. Milan Community Church (1856). Comparable.



Photo # 13. Errol Congregational Church (1898). Comparable.

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PHOTO KEY

