

A MaineLife Portfolio



Our Lady of Good Hope, Roman Catholic Church, Camden.

Churches of Maine

By Donato Pietrodangelo

The churches of Maine. Tradition. History. Dignity. Simplicity.

Places of worship, built in the 1800's for congregations rooted in the previous century. Standing before one you feel an immense sense of history and imagine: A seaman seeking protection before a voyage...a wife praying for a safe return...a mother in grief over a son lost in battle.

There are more than 1,500 churches in Maine, representing 26 denominations. Traveling along the state's coast, letting your eye lead you to a spire in the distance or a belfry on the horizon, gives you an idea of diversity of sect, architecture and style.

Maine's churches really can't be classified into one predominant architectural style. Their elements span the last 300 years of ecclesiastical design. If searching for roots, you would mostly find them in the English churches associated with Sir Christopher Wren and Sir James Gibb, influential London architects of the 17th century. The Americanized designs are somewhat squarish, with a meetinghouse appearance (many were), and a timber construction with clapboard facades. It is architecture

based on simplicity, shedding most of the intricate ornamentation of the traditional European church. Shedding most--but not all.

That's what makes for some of the most interesting Maine churches--the architectural hybrids.

While architects might divide the churches of Maine into particular styles--Colonial, neoclassical, Greek revival--and there are good examples of each, the hybrid has its own personality. And it makes you wonder.

Who decided to put these arched or "Romanesque" style windows on an otherwise gothic looking church? Why was the ornamental "Georgian" pediment included over the doorway? Whose idea was the clock in the steeple?

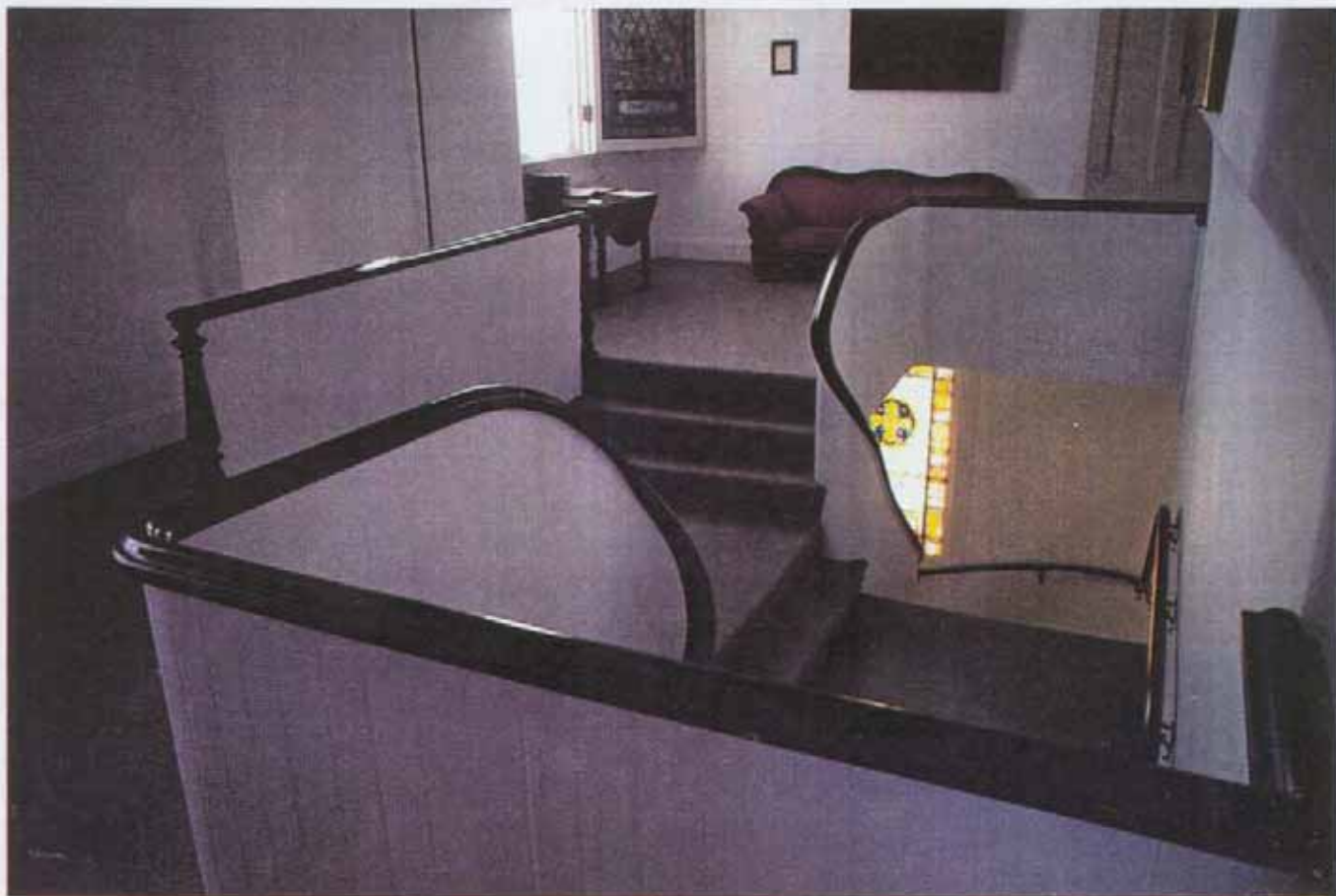
It makes you wonder. Was it something in a book at the time that caught the eye of a local designer or craftsman? Was it a small show of defiance--to break the rules--to do it differently?

Chances are, when you discover these little variations, you won't usually find the explanation.

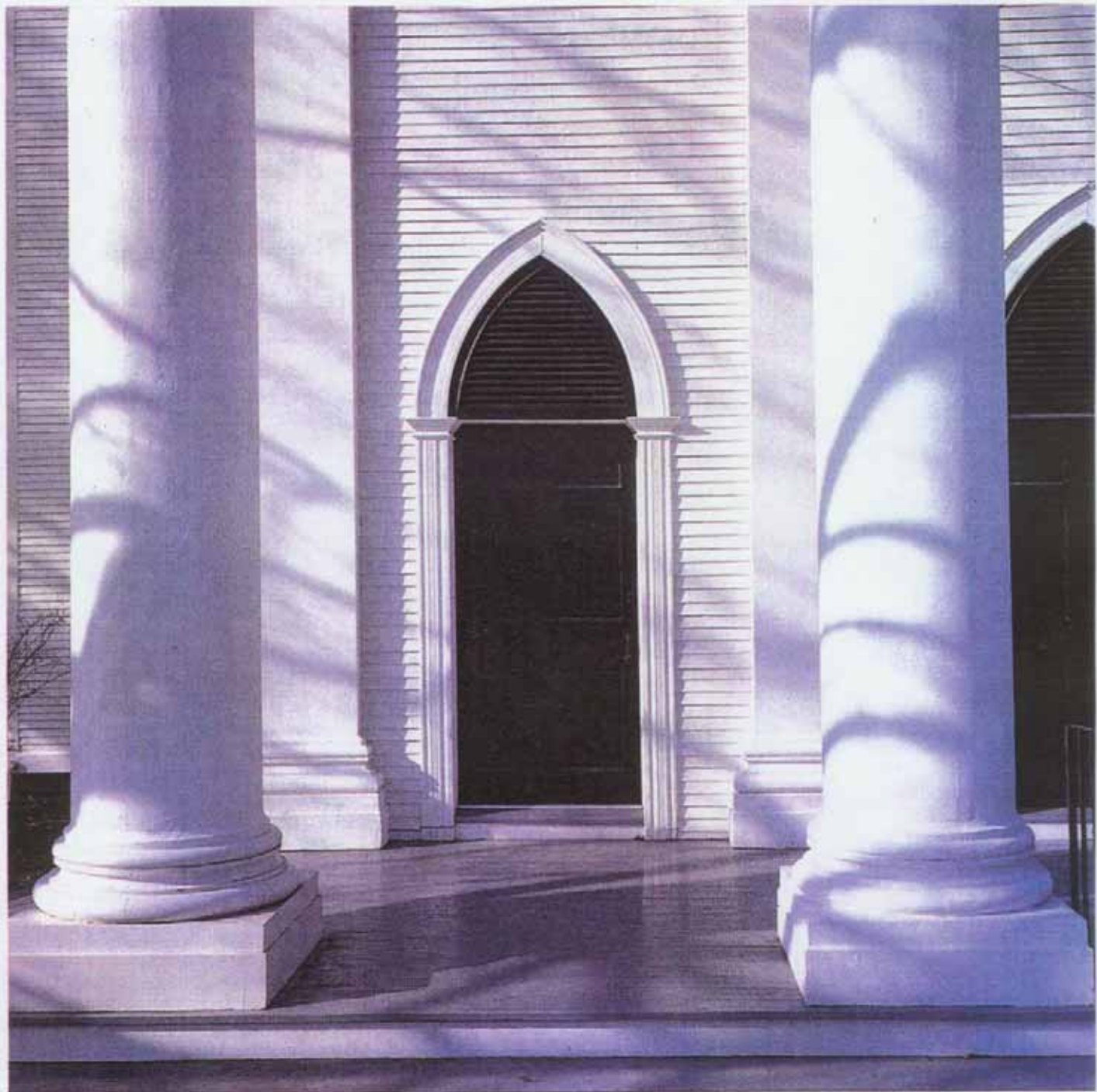
No matter. It only adds a bit of intrigue to the culture, spirit and visual delights of the churches of Maine. □



Interior of the First Congregational Church of Blue Hill; built in 1843.



Interior of the South Congregational Church, Kennebunkport.



South Congregational Church, Kennebunkport; built in 1824.