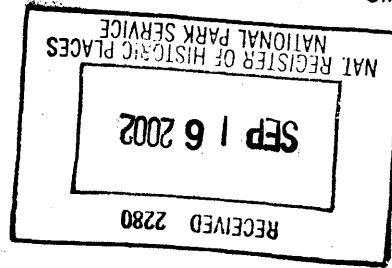


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



1270

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Caleb R. Ayer House

other names/site number Ayer - Swasey House

2. Location

street & number 7 Main Street  not for publication

city or town Cornish N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county York code 031 zip code 04020

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] SHPO 9/12/02  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] Beall 10/31/02  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	1	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Single Dwelling

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC / Single Dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY / Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone, Granite

walls Weatherboard

roof Tin, Asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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YORK CO., MAINE

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## DESCRIPTION

The Caleb R. Ayer House is a two-and-a-half story, side-gable Greek Revival structure attached to a one-and-a-half story cape, shed and barn, in Cornish, Maine. Located in the heart of the village on the southeast side of the Little River, the facade of the structure faces the driveway to the east, while the eave side of the Greek Revival section parallels Main Street. Each segment of the house and barn are sheathed in clapboards. With the exception of the barn, the entire complex is supported by cut granite foundation stones. The roofs are of metal: a charcoal colored standing seam tin roof is on the Greek Revival structure and the north side of the cape, and silver tin roofing is on the front of the cape and the barn. Although the cape and the main house are both finished on the exterior with wide corner pilasters, a broad entablature, pedimented attic cornice, and Greek-peak lintels over the windows, the complex visually separates into three distinct buildings, the cape, the main house and the barn.

### Cape

This part of the house predates the construction of the larger Greek Revival; documentary evidence suggests it may date to 1832, however, enough of the original material has been lost to make it difficult to be more specific. Indeed, the cape itself has been altered and expanded from its original form through the placement of a shed/connector to the west, and a subsequent widening of the mass to the west. There are seven bays across the facade of the cape. From north to south are located two six-over-six windows, a door in an enclosed, pedimented entryway, two more windows, another door set under a three-light transom, and finally, a fifth window. (All windows, unless otherwise noted are six-over-six sash.) The entryway encloses a four panel door surrounded by full length side and transom lights, all of which is slightly recessed from the square columns which support the entablature and clapboarded pediment. Two gabled dormers pierce the roof, one halfway between the entryway and the larger house to the north; the other halfway between the entryway and the barn to the south. The west side of the cape also has two dormers set directly behind those on the front. The fenestration pattern differs from the facade slightly: two windows on the north are next to a pair of new full length windows and French doors, followed by a door to the shed, and finally, adjacent to the barn, two nine-over-six sash. However, indications within the house suggest that this entire rear wall is not original to the cape.

On the interior, the cape consists of a small entry hall, off of which the modern kitchen stretches the entire width of the south side of the house before terminating at the french doors on the west exterior wall. On the west wall of the entry hall are a pair of shoulder height cupboards, with hand planed doors and applied molding. These cupboards were built into a shelf in a large center chimney which has been removed except for the fireplace base and arch in the cellar. To the north of the entry is a formal parlor with a tall, Greek Revival fireplace surround. The west wall of this room is substantially thicker than the other interior walls in the house. On the other side of this wall is a

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bedroom. Each of the doors in the room (and throughout the house) consist of two long panels over two shorter panels, with applied Greek ogee and bead moulding. The trim is of flat stock and they are topped with Greek peak lintels with curved moldings above the peak. The door to the back bedroom differs from the others in this room in that it does not have the peaked lintel, rather it is surmounted by a three-light transom, indicating that this was originally an exterior door, and that in its first incarnation the cape was only one room deep. To the south of the door with the transom is another door that leads into a gently curved butlers pantry before emerging in the back half of the modern kitchen. Again, the door way to the kitchen features a transom overhead, however, there is no corresponding thick exterior wall associated with this feature, and it is reasonable to suggest that it was moved when the back of the kitchen area was expanded to the full width of the building.

A door on the south side of the kitchen leads to the shed, which can also be accessed directly from the outside through the second (transomed) door on the facade, or from the barn. A partition wall divides the western ten feet of the shed from the rest of the space and creates a small pantry area with cupboards and unpainted tongue and groove horizontal boarding. The pantry is lighted with the two nine-over-six windows on the back of the house. The remainder of the shed is unfinished, and an exposed post and girt suggest that the southern wall of the kitchen (and probably that of the original cape) was six feet further south than currently located.

The second floor of the cape is reached via a very steep staircase positioned between the living room and the kitchen at the back of the original west wall of the cape. After one-quarter turn, the staircase emerges onto a second floor hall, painted in a dusty mustard color that may be original to this room. To the south of the hallway, a door leads into an unfinished garret space over the kitchen and shed which is lighted by a dormer on each side of the house. A small storage room is located to the west of the hall, and to the north a third door leads to a pair of finished bedrooms over the downstairs parlor and bedroom. There is no indication that the front bedroom ever contained a fireplace off the original chimney, but the back bedroom was heated by a stove that went through the wall to a chimney hidden in the small storage room. The upstairs bedrooms are finished in plaster, and contain the same doors and trim as the rooms below. Interestingly, when viewed from the unfinished garret, these second floor spaces are seen to have been constructed from a mixture of sawn and split lath, suggesting that they were finished at different times. Indeed the exposed rafters have been extended in length, again suggesting that the entire cape was widened and the roof height adjusted. The dormers were added during this period, and while there may have been one finished room on the second floor originally, the others were added once the cape reached its final form.

### Main House

The cape is the earliest of the structures on the property, but its present form is directly related to the construction of the two-and-a-half-story Greek Revival structure in the early 1850s. While the two buildings now form a unit, the contrast between the horizontally grounded cape and the stately,

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vertical, Gable-ended Greek styled structure is striking. The cape may have been dressed up on the inside and out to compliment the larger mass, but it certainly does not compare in terms of architectural composition and interior finish of what became the main house.

The main house was built onto the north end of the cape. As with the smaller building and the barn, the facade faces the driveway rather than the street. The house proper is three bays wide and set back approximately 8 feet from the front wall of the cape. An almost flat roofed porch set on granite stones projects eastward from the plane of the house to become even with the plane of the cape. Two fluted columns support the middle and north corner of the porch. Its southern most bay contains an enclosed entryway. The door to the interior opens along the north wall of this entry, and, as with the most formal entry on the cape, is surrounded with full length transom lights. In each of the remaining bays there is a large six-over-six window. On the second floor three more windows are positioned in each bay. On the north elevation four windows on each floor are equally spaced along the wall, with two additional windows placed under the peak of the gable. The west side of the house also contains three windows on each floor. All of the windows are flanked by shutters and crowned with peaked wooden lintels. As mentioned previously, the corners of the house are marked by wide, Doric pilasters, and the full cornice return is accentuated by wide, double, frieze boards, giving the structure strong, clean lines and a sense of solidness and grandeur.

In contrast to the incrementally developed floor plan of the cape, the interior of the main house is simple in plan. The front door opens into a wide and long hallway which contains a flying staircase, which after a long straight run curves gently to the right at the top of the stairs. The slightly swollen newel post supports a narrow railing and round bannisters, which round the top of the staircase and continue to the third floor. A door at the base of the stairs (on both levels) links the main house to the cape. At the rear of the hall is a bathroom, installed in 1927, and a closet under the stairs in which some original swirl-patterned linoleum remains. To the north of the hall is a double parlor. The parlors are separated or joined through a pair of sliding doors; the rooms contains matching fireplaces which project into each parlor at opposite ends of the house. The woodwork in this room includes the same Greek ogee-and-bead trim and baseboard found in the parlor of the cape, along with window peaks and cased posts. The windows are framed to the floor and ornamented below the sash with raised panels. The doorway between the rooms is decorated with narrow pilasters, similar to those on the exterior corners, and an elongated, peaked, header.

The second floor plan mimics that of the first. As with the parlors below, each bedroom contains a matching fireplace, however the wall between the rooms is firmly fixed. The windows in room are extended to the floor, and in the front room the names of two occupants were scratched into the glass in 1899. Due to the slope of the roof, the third floor is smaller than the lower levels, and it contains only a small room at the top of the stairs and a single large room over the second floor chambers. In many ways this is the most interesting room in the house. While the parlors and bedrooms show sign of having been carpeted historically, or covered in linoleum, this room has wide

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pine flooring. The doorways are capped with a molded lintel, and the baseboard is of flat stock. However, the two exterior windows are set into wide angled, paneled frames which create highly ornate and formal window seats. The entire room is painted in a dusty mustard color and probably represents the only coat of this room ever received.

**The Barn**

The two story timber framed barn is connect to the south side of the cape. It is a gable fronted barn with a sliding door on the south side of the facade, and an hay door directly above that. One six over six window is on the first floor and another is centered under the peak. Both the east and west elevations feature an overhanging roof with cornice returns. On the interior the barn currently contains a large open room on each floor, with a staircase accessing the upstairs in the southwest corner. Blocked up door ways on the south and north elevations suggest that the used of the barn changed over time. No animal stalls, pens or hay lofts survive. From the unfinished garret on the second floor of the cape (over the shed) it is obvious that the barn was not always attached to the house: weathered wooden roofing shingles are visible under the new roof of the cape. Historic photographs indicate that during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century another outbuilding was attached to the south end of the barn, however neither its form nor function has survived. It is likely that the barn was connected to the cape when the latter structure was widened and the roof altered.

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

C. 1832  
\_\_\_\_\_  
C. 1852  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

C. 1832  
\_\_\_\_\_  
C. 1852  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Caleb R. Ayer house is a beautifully designed and constructed Greek Revival home located on a hill above Main Street in the center of the Village of Cornish Maine. Named for the man under whose tenure the structure obtained its current form, the structure consists of an attached barn, one-and-a-half story cape (c. 1830-40) and two-and-a-half Greek Revival eave fronted main house from c. 1855. The plan of the cape, which was originally a one-story, center-chimney single pile structure, is conceptually linked to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but when the main house was built it was structurally and decoratively combined with the high-style Greek Revival structure. The Ayer house is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C as a local example of high style Greek Revival architecture.

Honorable Caleb R. Ayer was a prominent lawyer and politician. After marrying a women from Cornish in 1841, he established a law practice in a small office two doors down from the property he later purchased. Although there were several other lawyers in the small town Ayer distinguished himself through politics and regional legal service. Elected to the Maine State Senate in 1847 he was chosen President of the Senate the following year. In 1856 he served as Secretary of Sate under Governor Wells, and from 1868 to 1870 he held the position of County Attorney for York County. In 1852 Ayer purchased a lot of land from Edward D. Boynton for \$300, "with the buildings thereon". Boynton, the son of an early settler of Cornish, had purchased the same lot of land twenty years earlier from another native son, Benjamin Thompson, however this transaction did not refer to any structures on the property. While this is does not guarantee that the property was undeveloped, when the purchase price in 1832 is compared to the selling price in 1852 there is a strong suggestion that during this period the two room cape with partially finished attic was constructed.

Similarly, there is only circumstantial evidence that Ayer built the main house upon his purchase of the property. Local histories identify the house as being built Ayer, but neither an architect nor builder has been identified. The property was eventually deeded by Ayer's widow Mary to her son-in-law, Dr. William B. Swasey, in 1886. By this time the Greek Revival had fallen out of style, and it is unlikely that the Swasey's would have chosen to build a house of this size in this style in the center of town.

Certainly the style and scale of the house befits a man of Ayer's political stature. The Greek Revival became popular in Maine in the decade after the Greek Civil war and as the Federalist postures of the early century gave way to a more populist conception of democracy the Greek architectural forms came to represent increasingly accessible democratic ideals. Throughout Maine civic structures, churches, and residences built in the new style, some just by affixing a few details from an Asher Benjamin plan book to their structures, while others built colonnaded edifices on a grander scale. Domestic structures were often built on traditional center hall plans, however a large number of one and two story gable fronted side-hall houses were also constructed. Although not



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entirely unique, the side gable, two and a half story double-parlor Greek Revival home occurred much less frequently than the other examples of the style. The design for the Ayer house may have been influenced by the siting of the earlier cape: rather than having a gabled facade that would necessitate perpendicular ridge lines, the structure was positioned to mimic the orientation of the smaller building. This however resulted in the longer, four-bay elevation with the pedimented gable facing the road, causing the structure to look more massive than it was. And by updating the entrance on the cape, replacing all the windows, widening the single pile structure, and trimming the entire building with peaked lintels and wide frieze and corner boards, the two structures were unified.

The interior of the cape was also redecorated to match the newer structure. Doors, door trim and window trim are consistent throughout the structure, with the exception of the two transom lights over previously exterior doors. In the main house double parlor and both chamber received a high level of decoration, from the floor to ceiling window frames, to the projecting fireplaces with mantles that extend around three sides. Very little has changed since Ayer's residency in the house. Dr. Swasey used what is now the modern kitchen as his medical office for almost forty years. The only remaining sign of this history is a pair of small built-in cupboards for storing medicine and instruments in the kitchen wall. Other than this change, and the installation of a pair of bathrooms, new carpet on the first floor, and a late 19<sup>th</sup> century tin ceiling in the stair hall the house retains its mid-nineteenth century details and character.

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## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## **Continuation Sheet**

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### **VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

The nominated property is fully described by the Town of Cornish tax map U3, lot 71.

### **BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION**

The nominated boundaries represents all the property historically associated with the Ayer House in Cornish, Maine.

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### **PHOTOGRAPHS**

Photograph 1 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
11 June 2002  
North elevation; facing southeast.

Photograph 2 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
11 June 2002  
East facade, showing barn, cape and main house; facing northwest.

Photograph 3 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
11 June 2002  
Front door, main house; facing south.

Photograph 4 of 4  
Christi A. Mitchell  
Maine Historic Preservation Commission  
11 June 2002  
Interior, east parlor; facing east.