

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received FEB 7 1985

date entered MAR 7 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic WEBSTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

and/or common WEBSTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

2. Location

street & number On the north side of Long Street about 300'
east of its intersection with Battle Street. n/a not for publication

city, town Webster n/a vicinity of

state New Hampshire code 33 county Merrimack code 013

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Webster Congregational Church

Route 5

street & number Corser Hill

city, town Webster, n/a vicinity of state New Hampshire 03303

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Merrimack Registry of Deeds
Merrimack County Courthouse

street & number P.O. Box 248
163 North State Street

city, town Concord, state New Hampshire 03301

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Historic American Building Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1964 federal state county local

depository for survey records Library of Congress, Division of Prints & Photographs

city, town Washington, state DC 20540

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date N/A

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Webster Congregational Church is a clapboarded two-story frame structure with a foundation of split granite blocks, a gable roof covered with asphalt shingles, and a three-stage tower which rises from the roof at the front (south) end. The building is the product of local craftsmanship and has fine detailing of the late Federal style. It remains in essentially unchanged condition and is one of the finest church buildings of its period in the upper Merrimack Valley of New Hampshire.

The facade of the Webster Congregational Church is a gable end which faces south. The first floor has three doorways, each with a semicircular fanlight with a reeded soffit. The central doorway includes a pair of three-panel doors, sidelights, and a large fan with twenty-four lights of glass. The two flanking doors each have a single six-panel door and a twelve-light fan with no sidelights.

The second floor has three windows. That in the center is a Palladian window. Its arched central sash has curved muntins in the upper section; these intersect to form a tracery of pointed lights. The two flanking windows are identical to the arched center sash of the Palladian window. All openings of the facade have backband mouldings in the form of a cavetto and bead.

The cornice of the building returns fully across the front gable end to form a triangular pediment. In the tympanum of the pediment is a semielliptical window with radiating muntins and sixteen lights.

The lowest stage of the tower is a high, square, clapboarded section with square-edged corner boards and a full cornice with bed and crown mouldings. Its top, which serves as a bell deck, has a tall plinth at each corner, topped by an urn finial; between these plinths extends a balustrade with thin square balusters. This stage of the tower holds a clock which has one dial, on the front (south) face. The rear (north) face of this stage has a window.

The second stage of the tower is an open belfry supported by four square corner columns, each of which has a cavetto-moulded capital at about two-thirds of its height. Springing from these capitals and spanning the width of the belfry are elliptical arches with moulded archivolt. Together with the corner boards and the frieze board of this stage, these mouldings outline recessed spandrels above the arches. This stage of the tower also has a full cornice and is topped by a balustrade similar to that on the lowest stage, except that the center of the balustrade has a panel that corresponds in width to a louvered opening in the stage above.

The third stage of the tower is a square lantern with an arched louvered opening in each face. At the corners of this stage, flanking the openings, are pairs of fluted pilasters with Grecian ovolo capitals. These support a full entablature which encircles this stage of the tower and which bears a cornice similar to those of the lower stages. Above this cornice is a third balustrade with square balusters and corner finials; this surrounds a four-sided dome. At the apex of the dome is a ball, from which rises a tall circular spire which supports a smaller ball finial and a weathervane with elaborate wrought iron ornamentation and a banneret pointer. At the top of the vane is a three-pointed lightning rod which has wrought iron conductors that lead down the west side of the building to the ground.

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The side elevations of the building are identical to one another, with five rectangular windows on each floor. Each window has 12-over-9 sashes and casings ornamented with Grecian ogee backband mouldings.

The rear (north) elevation of the building has four 12-over-9 windows on each floor. These occur in pairs which flank two brick stove chimneys (constructed in 1868 and rebuilt in 1982) that rise along the rear wall of the building. In the gable are two small 9-over-6 windows. The cornices of the sides of the building do not return across the rear elevation, but terminate against tapered rake boards that fit tightly against the clapboarded wall. The windows on the rear have no backband mouldings.

The interior of the building is a large auditorium with a vestibule at the front (south). Stairs ascend at each corner of this vestibule to a second-floor entry which has two doors leading to a gallery. The second-floor entry and the gallery have curved plastered walls which present a concave surface to the pulpit at the opposite end of the auditorium. Each side of the gallery is supported by two turned columns which rise to meet an elaborate entablature which serves as the base of the gallery parapet; above this is a flat dado crowned by a second cornice. The lower cornice has curved wooden brackets as a bed moulding in the manner suggested by the books of Asher Benjamin, while the upper cornice has dentilled bed mouldings.

The main floor of the meeting house has four rows of long slip pews with flat-panelled ends and doors at the aisles. The room is entered through three six-panel doors in the vestibule wall, corresponding in location to the three exterior doors of the building. At the north end of the room is a dais which has a mahogany-veneered Empire style reading desk, installed in 1844, at its center. This is flanked by choir pews which extend across the end of the room, facing the pulpit; these were altered to their present configuration in 1865.

The gallery is entered by two doors in its curved southern wall, corresponding in location to the two outer arched windows of the facade. The Palladian window at the center of the facade pierces the center of the curved wall, lighting both the gallery and the auditorium below. Two cased channels for the weights of the tower clock extend downward from the ceiling to the gallery floor, and thence down the vestibule walls of the first story. These have ornamental wooden capitals where they meet the ceiling above the gallery.

There is no cornice at the juncture of the walls and ceilings either beneath the gallery or above the second floor windows.

The room is lighted by an elaborate eight-branch cast iron chandelier for kerosene lamps (installed in 1884 and electrified in 1930) which hangs from a rosette in the center of the auditorium ceiling. Single-lamp brackets are located on the three projecting posts of the frame which are visible along each side of the auditorium.

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The church is heated by two airtight stoves (new in 1982, replacing others) located in the vestibule. Pipes from these pierce the walls of the vestibule and extend along the auditorium beneath the gallery ceilings adjacent to the gallery columns, then entering the chimneys at the rear (north) wall of the building. These pipes provide the only heat in the auditorium.

Also located on the property is an open-ended woodshed which stands beyond the northeast corner of the church. This building is constructed of unpainted lumber.

The woodshed, which stands northeast of the meeting house, is a gable-roofed structure with one gable end facing southerly toward Long Street. This elevation of the building is open beneath the gable of the roof, providing a broad doorway. The other three sides are enclosed. The building measures 16-1/2 feet square, and is framed from second-hand hewn timbers. The walls are clad with vertical boards and battens; the roof, framed with purlins, has sheathing which runs from ridge to eaves and is covered with asphalt shingles. The interior of the building is unfloored and is used for the storage of firewood for the church. A small privy is built into the northwestern corner of the structure.

The grounds of the Webster Congregational Church are flat and have no plantings except for a few small shrubs and trees. The lot is separated from adjoining properties only by metes and bounds rather than by stone walls or other barriers. A semicircular gravel driveway extends from Long Street to the front doors of the meeting house and back to the road.

The Webster Congregational Church is one of the finest late Federal-style structures remaining in central New Hampshire, displaying excellent and largely unaltered detail and proportions. The building is the earliest of a surviving group of churches built by Col. William Abbot (1793-1837), and reflects in its design and detailing some features seen in other churches finished by this New Hampshire joiner. Its tower, for example, is closely related to those of Abbot's churches in Wentworth, N.H. (1829) and Henniker, N.H. (1834), and provided a prototype for these later steeples. Although still other churches were built by Abbot elsewhere and no longer survive or have been severely remodelled, the Webster Congregational Church remains as the earliest of a small group of important New Hampshire churches which are associated with Abbot and have long been recognized as among the best-designed late Federal-style buildings in New Hampshire. The Webster building is therefore an important and unaltered example of the work of a builder-architect who made an important contribution to New Hampshire's public and private architecture.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below		
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
			<input type="checkbox"/> science
			<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
			<input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian
			<input type="checkbox"/> theater
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1823 **Builder/Architect** George T. Pillsbury (1792-1836)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Webster Congregational Church is one of the most ambitious, least altered, and best documented religious structures of the upper Merrimack Valley of New Hampshire. It fully reflects the Federal style, which reached its maturity in this region in the 1820s under the influence of a number of local builders who worked in the rural towns of the area. The Webster church is the product of several of the most skillful of these builders. Continuously owned and maintained by the religious society that built it, the structure has undergone only insignificant change and its physical history is fully recorded in surviving church records.

Architecture: The Webster Congregational Church was built between May and December, 1823, for the exclusive use of the local Congregational Church, which has owned and maintained the building ever since. In order to keep the net outlay of cash as low as possible, the building committee employed local workmen who would be likely to purchase pews in the completed church; this makes the building an especially coherent example of local workmanship. The final construction cost of the building, exclusive of the bell, was some \$4,800, of which much was recovered, as planned, by the sale of pews to a number of the workmen.

The building was framed by George T. Pillsbury (1792-1836), a local millwright and carpenter who was noted for his superior skill and who was a member of the building committee and a deacon in the church. Pillsbury was the first builder in the area to adopt the use of the carpenter's steel framing square in place of the old method of erecting frames by the "scribe rule" with each member fitted individually into its place.¹ The interior joiner's work on the structure was executed for \$516.81 (the highest sum paid to any single workman) by Col. William Abbot (1793-1837), noted both as a carpenter and joiner. Abbot designed and built a number of houses in the area, and was well known throughout the state; he built churches in the New Hampshire towns of Somersworth, Cornish, Wentworth, Unity, Thornton, Henniker, West Concord and Concord. In 1827, he built the brick Boscawen Academy in his native town, one of the finest rural academic buildings in the state.² The contributions of other local workmen are recorded in the construction accounts for the Congregational Church, preserved among the church records.

As a building project which deliberately drew upon local talent, the Webster Congregational Church is a nearly unaltered example of the late-flowering Federal style in the upper Merrimack River Valley of New Hampshire. Combining local insight and taste with the influences of the books of Asher Benjamin, the building stands as an excellent specimen of rural architecture, documenting the skill by which builders in rural New England were able to adapt the inventive detailing and the dramatic designs of the Federal style to their own needs.

¹Charles Carleton Coffin, The History of Boscawen and Webster from 1733 to 1878, pp. 430, 596.

²Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster, pp. 236-238, 290, 430, 464-465; William W. Burbank, Historical Sketch and Roll of Membership of the First Congregational Church, Webster, New Hampshire, pp. 8-16.

9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 2/3 acre

Quadrangle name Penacook, NH

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References

A	<u>19</u>	<u>279750</u>	<u>4800825</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

(see continuation sheet)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code
state	<u>N/A</u>	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dorothy R.W. Sandborn
*James Garvin

organization Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House August 1984
*New Hampshire Historical Society date *August 1984

street & number Box 7 (603) 796-2211
30 Park Street telephone (603) 225-3381

city or town Boscawen New Hampshire 03303
*Concord state *New Hampshire *03301

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature *Kathleen...* 1/24/85

title New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

for Melissa Byers Entered in the date 3-7-85
 Keeper of the National Register National Register

Attest:

Chief of Registration

date

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- Burbank, William W. Historical Sketch and Roll of Membership of the First Congregational Church, Webster, New Hampshire. Penacook, NH: W. B. Ranney, 1908.
- Buxton, Willis G. History of Boscawen-Webster, 1883-1933. Penacook, NH: W. B. Ranney, n.d.
- Coffin, Charles Carleton. The History of Boscawen and Webster, from 1733 to 1878. Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1878.
- Webster History Committee. Webster, New Hampshire, 1933-1983 History. Warner, NH: Webster History Committee, 1984.

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Beginning on a point on the north side fo Long Street at the southeast corner of land belonging to Edwin Buck, Thence N16^oW approximately 215' along the land of Edwin Buck to a point, thence east approximately 132' to a point at the land of John King, thence S16^oE approximately 215' along the land of John King to a point on Long Street, thence west on Long Street to the point begun at.

Boundary Justification: This is the lot historically occupied by the Webster Congregational Church since its construction (church building) in 1823.

Map and Parcel Number: Map 3; Lot 66

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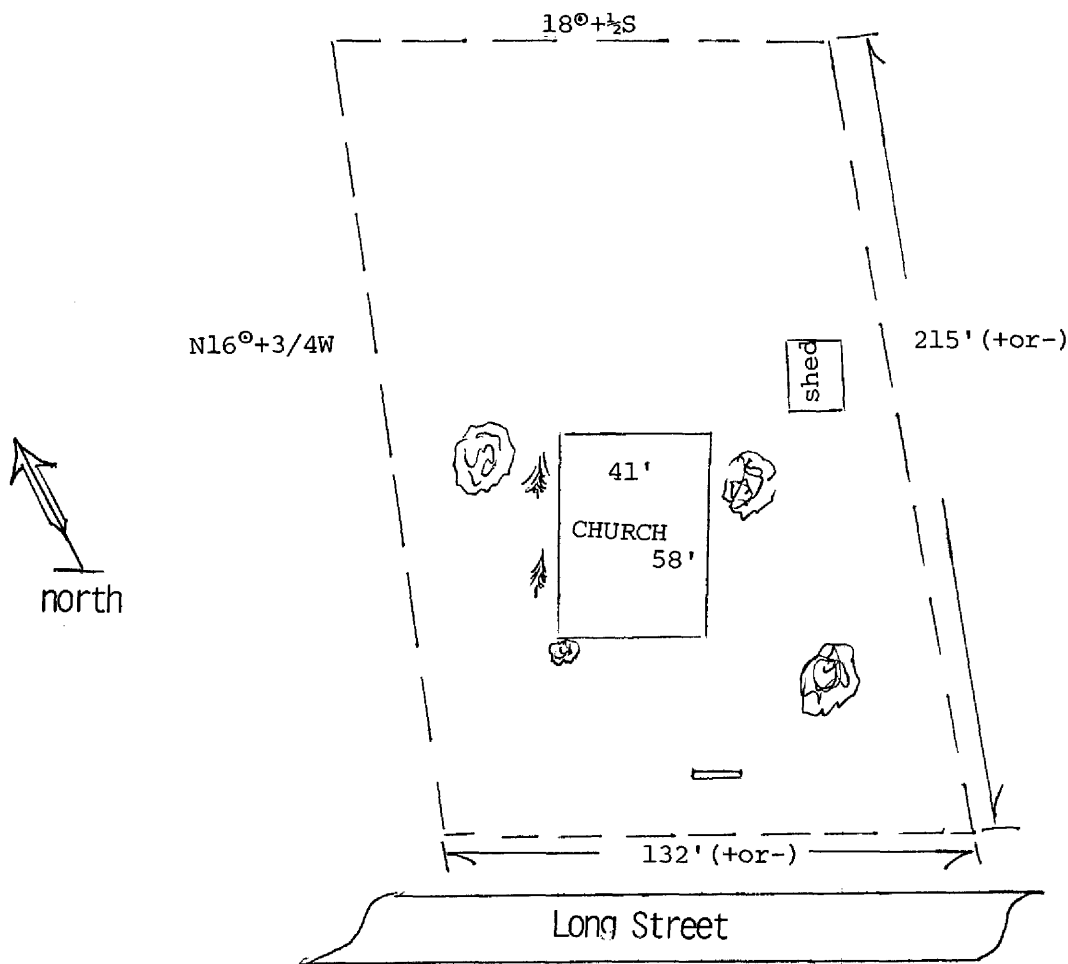
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WEBSTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

Webster, N.H.

1" = 50' (approx.)
(not to scale)

Deeds: Vol 5 p169
Vol 5 p170

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This is to certify that the appearance of the photographs taken
in support of the Webster Congregational Church have not changed.