



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

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 Slate House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 123 Church Street N/A not for publication

city or town Brownville N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county Piscataquis code 021 zip code 04414

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.)

Edward S. [Signature] SHPO 1/31/95
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State of 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 the 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:)

fore *Edson H. Beall* fore Signature of the Keeper Entered in the National Register 3/10/95 Date of Action

Slate House
Name of Property

Piscataquis, Maine
County and State

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
<u>1</u>	
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
<u>1</u>	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

0

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)

Italianate

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Slate

walls Stone/Slate

roof Asphalt

other Attached ell/stable with board and batten siding

Narrative Description

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

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 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.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____

Industry _____

Period of Significance

c. 1860 - c. 1910 _____

Significant Dates

c. 1860 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A _____

Cultural Affiliation

N/A _____

Architect/Builder

Unknown _____

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

Slate House
Name of Property

Piscataquis, Maine
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 25 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 9	4 9 7 9 4 0	5 0 1 7 8 4 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	1 9	4 9 7 8 2 0	5 0 1 7 3 8 0

3	1 9	4 9 7 4 4 0	5 0 1 7 5 2 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	1 9	4 9 7 6 1 0	5 0 1 7 9 6 0

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk F. Mohny, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date January, 1995

street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/287-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333-0065

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 7 Page 2

The Slate House is a two-story, three-bay Italianate style dwelling that is covered by a low hip roof. A long attached shed and hip roofed carriage barn extend from the building's southeast corner. The house is distinguished by the fact that its foundation and steps are constructed entirely of native slate and its exterior walls are sheathed in the same material. It is located on a twenty-five acre site at the edge of the village of Brownville.

Facing west, the symmetrically composed front elevation has a wide central entrance whose two-leaf door is framed by flat surrounds and a shallow hood. Long, paired two-over-two double-hung sash with pedimented hoods and bracketed sills flank the entry. The second story features a round-arched two-over-two window in the center and flanking six-over-sixes which lack the pediments but retain the brackets. Four pairs of console brackets support the broad roof overhang; a pattern which continues around the house. Flat pilasters of medium width frame the elevation and rise from a water table of similar dimension. Two brick chimneys punctuate the roof, which was originally covered in slate. The slate shingles which cover this elevation - as well as those on the south and north sides - have a scalloped edge. In contrast, the foundation is comprised of thin stacked slabs of slate, whereas the front steps are formed from larger rectangular pieces.

The side elevations each contain two widely separated six-over-six windows on the first story and somewhat shorter units on the second story. Their detailing matches the facade. A side entry with a transom is located at the southeast corner and is reached by a second set of slate steps. The rear elevation, which is covered with large rectangular slate shingles, features two windows on the first story and four on the second, including one very small square unit.

Abutting the east-southeast corner of the house is the broad shed which extends to the two-story carriage barn. Both of these buildings are sheathed in board-and-batten siding, the north, west, and south sides of which have decorative round arches linking the battens below the eaves. Of further note are the numerous holes (now blocked) in the shed all which, according to tradition, were entrances to houses for the carrier pigeons that an earlier resident maintained. Most of the original nine-over-nine double-hung sash survive in the carriage barn, but the garage bay and entry doors are modern replacements.

Like the exterior, the interior of this house has survived virtually unaltered. Its central hall contains a long staircase featuring a bulbous newel post and turned balusters. Hall doorways framed with flat surrounds of varnished brown ash (similar trim appears throughout) open into the two front rooms as well as the kitchen in the southeast corner. The dining room and a narrow room are located in the northeast half of the ground floor. There is

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 7 Page 3

an enclosed back stair in the southeast corner of the kitchen. Four bedrooms are located on the second floor. Originally, slate mantel shelves were located in the rooms heated by stoves.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 8 Page 2

The Slate House in Brownville is a c. 1860 Italianate style dwelling which is noteworthy for its unique use of locally quarried slate in its foundation and entrance steps as well as for the sheathing of its exterior walls. It is the only known building in Maine that makes such a diverse use of this material. In addition to its architectural significance, the house has an important association with the local slate quarrying industry, one firm of which originally erected the house for its superintendent. Thus, it is eligible for nomination to the Register under criteria A and C.

Quarrying of slate on a commercial scale in Maine is generally believed to have begun in 1843 or 1844 at the so-called Crocker Quarry in Brownville. William Hughes and his partners Samuel E. Crocker, Joseph Sims and Isaac Pitman are credited with this initial undertaking, as well with as a second quarry opened in 1846. The following year, Crocker gained full control of the original quarry, whereas the second one was obtained by A. H. Merrill in 1848.

On June 29, 1855, Samuel Crocker, then of Boston, sold his operation to the newly organized Bangor and Piscataquis Slate Company for \$200,000. In the succeeding two years, the company's Annual Returns to the Secretary of State reveal that of the 8,000 shares in the company, over 7,000 were held by members of the Crocker family. By 1857, in fact, Samuel E. Crocker held 7,678 shares. According to the Industrial Schedule of the 1860 Census, the Bangor and Piscataquis Slate Company employed an average of thirty men who produced 7,000 squares of roofing slate valued at \$21,000. At the time, this was the larger of the two quarries in Brownville (based on output), but within a decade the Merrill quarry would surpass it both in the number of employees and volume of product. As in all of the Maine slate quarries, the work force appears to have been comprised largely of Welsh immigrants who brought a knowledge of this particular type of quarry work with them from an internationally known slate region in Wales.

Local historian William Sawtell states that the Bangor and Piscataquis Slate Company folded in 1871 and that the quarry ceased to operate between 1876 and 1890. However, the company continued to be listed in the annual Maine Business Directory until 1879 and the Maine Register through 1887. The quarry appears to have been subsequently operated until about 1910 by the Brownville Maine Slate Company whose receivers transferred it on August 19, 1918, to the Norcross Brothers Company of Worcester, Massachusetts. There is no record, however, that the quarry was re-opened after 1910.

According to local tradition, the Slate House was first occupied by William Sparrow (1811-1901) who became superintendent of the Crocker quarry in the early 1860s. Sparrow was a member of a large Portland family among whom was his architect brother Thomas J. Sparrow (who was visiting his

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 8 Page 3

brother in Brownville at the time of his death on Christmas eve, 1870). Although its date of construction has been stated to be as early as 1848, the architectural characteristics of the house and the known history of the Crocker quarry would seem to support an 1860s period of construction. One interesting reference to its origin appeared in A Handbook of Brownville's History (1935) in which it was stated that the slate used in the foundation came from several early quarry-related stone buildings. Speculation as to the reasons surrounding its construction include the plausible conclusion that it was a demonstration house displaying a variety of ways in which slate could be utilized in building. A description of the house which appeared in the September 26, 1868, edition of the Portland Transcript supports this theory, noting that "The ornamental as well as the useful purposes to which it [slate] may be put are exhibited in the elegant mansion inhabited by Mr. Sparrow." This article went on to state that:

It is a slate edifice, fire-proof and indestructible. The slates are put on to the boarding of the walls with only paper between. They are in the form of segments of a circle, overlapping each other, and have a very ornamental effect. The natural color of the slate is pleasing to the eye, and no paint is needed. If it were the slate would furnish it, for when ground it makes an excellent paint, which Mr. Sparrow has used on his barn with good effect. The whole establishment is elegant in appearance and shows what can be done with native materials. The front steps are of beautiful slabs of slate; the sinks, mantles, shelves, are of slate; the woodwork is of brown ash, a native wood, which makes a handsome finish. In short this is a real State of Maine house, and shows the wealth of her resources. The slate costs little if any more than clapboards. When the railroad brings this material to us, slate houses must become fashionable.

Although slate for roofing was very popular locally (a 1987 estimate of extant houses with slate roofs in Brownville put the number at eighty [Sawtell, p. 69]), the inventive way in which it was employed on the Slate House is not known to have been repeated. In all likelihood this was due to the assumedly greater initial cost of construction and the expense of heating such a house which, prior to the introduction of insulation into the sidewalls in the 1970s, reportedly required thirty-five cords of wood annually. As an aside, it is worthy of note that entire buildings constructed of slate slabs exist in the quarry areas of Vermont, although they lack the decorative exterior finish of the Brownville house.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 8 Page 4

With its purchase of the Brownville Maine Slate Company in 1918, the Slate House became the property of the Norcross Brothers Company. On November 19, 1924, this firm sold the house and an accompanying twenty-five acre parcel of land to William H. Thomas. He lived here until his death, and his widow then sold it to Ralph and Josephine Harbron in 1969. They occupied the house until 1977 when they transferred it to the present owners.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 9 Page 2

Annual Returns to the Secretary of State. Bangor and Piscataquis Slate Company. 1856, 1857. Maine State Archives, Augusta.

Eighth and Ninth Census of the United States, 1860, 1870, Piscataquis County, Maine. Industrial Schedule. Microfilm copy of National Archives manuscript copy, Maine State Archives, Augusta.

For information about slate buildings in Vermont see:

The Historic Architecture of Rutland County. Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. 1988.

Lewis, Susan M., comp. A Handbook of Brownville History. Bangor, Maine: Frost Printing Company, 1935.

Sawtell, William R. Early Brownville and Her Slate Quarries. Privately published, 1987.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

SLATE HOUSE

Section number 10 Page 2

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property of 25 acres occupies the Town of Brownville Tax Map 1, Lot 79.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary is drawn to embrace the entire 25 acre parcel of property which has been historically associated with the Slate House since its separation from the quarry property in 1924. Prior to that time, the house was an integral element of the much larger company landing holdings and was not treated as a separate property.