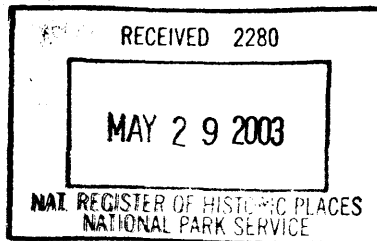


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form



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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 Bell Hill Meetinghouse

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 191 Bell Hill Road N/A not for publication

city or town Otisfield N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county Oxford code 017 zip code 04270

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.)

Carole S. [Signature] 5/22/03
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]
Signature of the Keeper

Edson H. Beall

Date of Action
7/16/03

BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE
Name of Property

OXFORD CO., 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	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	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)

RELIGION / Religious facility

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION / Religious facility

RECREATION CULTURE / Auditorium

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

EARLY REPUBLIC / Federal

MID - 19TH CENTURY / Greek Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE / Granite

walls SYNTHETICS / Vinyl

roof ASPHALT

other METAL / Tin

METAL / Brass

Narrative Description

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

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Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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DESCRIPTION

The Bell Hill Meetinghouse is a transitional Federal/Greek Revival church located on the top of Bell Hill in the rural Oxford County town of Otisfield. Facing west, the white structure is comprised of a story-and-a-half rectilinear mass with a with a one-story projecting pavilion on the western facade and a square bell tower astride the ridge at the western edge of the mass. The Meetinghouse is set on granite foundation stones and roofed with asphalt. Its most dominant feature is the faceted red metal dome which tops the square three-tier bell tower. The well proportioned, but restrained structure exudes additional dignity due to its position on the hill, surrounded by the green lawns, period houses and the historic Bell Hill Brick School .

Designed and built by master carpenter Nathan Nutting Jr. in 1838, the Meetinghouse exhibits a number of Federal style elements mixed with a plan and massing that draws on emerging Greek Revival elements. Each of the windows and doors are stylistically Federal, however the projecting central pavilion, the triangular pediments and the location of the bell tower over the gable are more commonly associated with Greek Revival churches of the period.

The front facade of the building contains a projecting middle pavilion with two, six-panel doors topped with louvered fans. Above the doors are six -over-six windows, again topped with louvered wooden fans. The pavilion has narrow corner boards which support a closed pediment. Behind the pavilion a similar pediment is present on the main mass of the structure, except where it is broken in the center by the roof line of the pavilion. On either side of the projection is a single twelve-over-twelve double-hung window and fan. Each of the fans, windows and doors are trimmed with a thickly reeded molding, thin, ogee moulded capitols, and wooden keystones. Wooden shutters flank all the windows on the Meetinghouse. The south and north elevations consist of three, equally spaced twelve-over-twelve windows, with fans, while the eastern elevation contains two more windows, but without the fan ornamentation. Large granite slabs stretch across the front of the projecting pavilion and provide steps to the two doors. Originally covered with painted clapboards, the building now has vinyl siding, however, it was skillfully applied and none of the original trim has been sacrificed.

Each layer of the bell tower is defined in part by the same ogee moulding that is found on the cornices of both the main mass and the projection. The first tier of the tower is a square and decorated at the corners with narrow corner boards. The second layer features an open balcony on four sides through which the church bell is visible. At each corner of the this tier are paired pilasters which support a narrow entablature, which in turn is capped by another ogee cornice. The final tier consists of the large dome, which rests upon an octagonal drum base, which in turn is surrounded by a narrow balustrade set between square columns at each corner. A copper weather vane finishes the top of the dome.

The interior of the Bell Hill Meeting house is comprised of a front entryway and a sanctuary. The walls of the entry are plaster above wide-board wainscoting. At each of the north and south ends of the entry a six-panel door with Norfolk latches leads to stairs to the balcony. Two similar doors access the sanctuary

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BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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to the east. As with the entry, the sanctuary is finished with wide board wainscot, in this case beaded, below plaster walls. Enclosed pews line two side aisles, while a transverse aisle in front of the alter area accesses boxed pews to the south and north of the alter. Each of the pews are constructed with slightly slanted backs, faced on the reverse with beaded wainscot. The side of the boxes are decorated with a series of flat panels with quirked ogee mouldings; the upper register of these panels are square, while below are longer rectangular panels. At each pew one of the panel units functions as a hinged door to the interior of the box; each door is fitted with its own small threshold, and numbered with a painted brass plaque. The floor is of painted pine covered with a fiber mat, now under carpeted aisle runners. The original arched plaster ceiling is covered with boards and battens. Six hanging lanterns, which were electrified in 1931, hang from the ceiling.

In the middle of the east wall is the alter area, consisting of a raised platform accessed by a pair of stairs. The alter itself is built onto the platform and is made of four, fluted, varnished columns which support a moulded entablature that forms the lectern. Wide Greek Revival moulding is affixed to the wall behind the platform and provides a simple frame for the alter space. At the other end of the sanctuary, is a balcony situated above the entry. In contrast with the strong sense of rectilinearity that characterizes the remainder of the room, the middle section of the balcony is gracefully curved, or cupped, in to the west. The front of the balcony is built of two wide boards, separated by layers of stepped moulding and capped with a cove and fillet cornice. The balcony is furnished with simple curved benches with horizontally boarded backs, and plain, movable wooden benches. In the 1960s two wooden support columns were added from floor to ceiling, directly in front of the balcony, to strengthen the bell tower framing.

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

1839

Significant Dates

1839

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Nutting, Nathan, Jr. (1804 - 1867)

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:

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bell Hill Meetinghouse is a fine example of a rural 19th century religious facility which pleasantly combines in its design both Federal and Greek Revival detailing on the exterior, while showcasing the abilities of a local master carpenter on the interior. Built to replace the towns original, 18th century meetinghouse, this more refined structure was a symbol of the towns prosperity at the end of the third decade of the 19th century. The Bell Hill Meetinghouse is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its architectural merits, and under Criterion Consideration A, as a building that is now occasionally used for religious services, mostly weddings.

The Bell Hill Meeting House was constructed in 1838-1839 by the Otisfield resident Nathan Nutting, Jr. Nutting was a master craftsman who was raised on his family's farm before studying architecture in Boston starting in 1820. Prior to 1835 he worked primarily on domestic architecture, frequently incorporating features illustrated in Asher Benjamin's *County Builder's Assistant*, and *The American Builder's Companion*. He built the addition to his family's c. 1796 cape upon his return to the area in 1824, (The Nutting Homestead NR 74000163) and his hand can be seen in a number of local residences based on the profiles of the moulding planes he created and used repeatedly. (Johnson, p.1). In 1836 he was commissioned to design six churches for surrounding communities over the next 10 years. The first was at Waterford Flat (Waterford Historic District NR: 80000247) where his design incorporated a projecting center pavilion and three-part domed tower which straddled both the main mass of the building and the pavilion, and again may have been inspired by a plate in Benjamin's 1806 *American Builder's Companion*. While this church burned in 1928 (and was subsequently rebuilt to almost exactly the same specifications as the original), historic interior photographs demonstrate Nutting's use of paneled boxed pews, and mouldings to frame the alter area, just as at Bell Hill. Indeed, with a few modifications, the Bell Hill Meetinghouse is very similar to the Waterford example. Started just two years after the earlier church, Nutting chose to shift the bell tower squarely over the gable end of the main mass, while at the same time simplifying its exterior ornamentation slightly.

It has been asserted that Nutting was a conservative architect. The two-story home he built for his brother, Lyman Nutting, c. 1825 revolved around a central chimney. While not unheard of, especially in the more rural portions of western Maine, this plan had quickly been replaced by central hallways in more progressive centers of the state. Perhaps the town also shared this conservative view, and based on the Waterford example, the town requested Nutting duplicate his earlier effort. Mary Pride Knight, local resident and avid recorder of life in Otisfield, described the progress of the new Meetinghouse from its start in August, 1838 until its dedication in October of 1839. During this time, she notes that 'half of old meetinghouse roof has blown off' in a January 1839 storm. (Knight, January 26, 1839). The earlier meeting house, built in 1797, was located on the same flat plain at the top of the hill as the new structure. Knight's journal entry suggests the earlier structure was in a deteriorated condition, perhaps to the point that the town found it expedient, and possible less expensive, to have Nutting quickly erect the new Meetinghouse on the Waterford plan. The 18th century structure was temporarily repaired, and remained on the hill until

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BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

Section number 8 Page 3

1845, when the top half of the old building was moved down the hill and used as the new Town House, and the lower story made into stalls and sheds. While Knight never mentions Nutting specifically, she comments several times on how 'smart' the new building is, and her pride in the new building is evident, especially in the bell. "O how pleasant the sound of the bell is to me - it is a nice one that is like wise to see up there." (Knight, September 30, 1839). Nutting's craftsmanship is clearly evident on the interior of the Bell Hill Meetinghouse. Although the walls and windows are simply decorated with plaster and wainscoting, the real beauty of the sanctuary is found in the rows of finely executed box pews, and the gently curving balcony, both of which lends a subtle elegance to the light filled room.

The church was dedicated in 1839, but by 1887 the Congregational Society had shifted their services to a newer building at Sprurrs Corner. Used again for an annual service starting in 1913, the building has been under the care of the Bell Mill Meeting House Association since 1927. This community group was formed in order to preserve the church and ensure that it is occasionally used for religious services. As a result of its abandonment and subsequent infrequent use, the Bell Hill Meetinghouse has been spared the renovations and 'improvements' that have occurred in more continuously occupied structures. It stands today much as it was in 1839, and conveys to the surrounding community a tangible link to Otisfield's nineteenth century history.

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BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annual Report of the Municipal Offices of the town of Otisfield. (Otisfield), 1976.

Bennett, Randall H. Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to its Historic Architecture. (Bethel, Maine: Oxford County Historic Resource Survey), 1984.

Clayton, W.W. History of Cumberland Co., Maine. With illustrations and biographical sketches of its prominent men and pioneers. (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck), 1880.

Hankins, Jean and David. A Short History of Otisfield, Maine. (Otisfield Historical Society), 1998.

(Hankins, Nellie). "The Bell Hill Meeting House". Pamphlet, c. 1976. Copy on file at Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine.

Johnson, Thomas B. 'A Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine: Nathan Nutting, Jr., 1804 - 1867'. Volume 7 (Portland, Maine: Maine Citizens for Historic Preservation), 1995.

Knight, Mary Pride. [Journals, 1811 - 1897, nine volumes]. Transcribed by Marguerite E. H. Lovewell, Braintree, MA, 1928. Collection number 1441: Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine.

BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE
Name of Property

OXFORD CO., MAINE
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.0 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 19 375119 4882616
Zone Easting Northing

3 19
Zone Easting Northing

2 19
Zone Easting Northing

4 19
Zone Easting Northing

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 CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 16 April 2003

street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town AUGUSTA state ME 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Bell Hill Meetinghouse property is fully described by the Town of Otisfield tax map R8, lot 23.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated boundaries contains all the property historically associated with the Bell Hill Meetinghouse.

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Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL MEETINGHOUSE

OXFORD CO., MAINE

Section number _____ Page _____

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
14 March 2003
West facade and south elevation; facing northeast.

Photograph 2 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
14 March 2003
Interior, meeting room; facing east.

Photograph 3 of 3
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
14 March 2003
Interior detail of pews, facing northwest.