

OCT 23 1981

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For HCRS use only

received MAR 15 1982

date entered APR 19 1982

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

**1. Name** South Meeting House

historic South Ward Room

and/or common South Meeting House (preferred)

**2. Location**

street & number Corner Marcy Street & Meeting House Hill  not for publication

city, town Portsmouth  vicinity of                      congressional district One

state New Hampshire code 33 county Rockingham code 15

**3. Classification**

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

**4. Owner of Property**

name City of Portsmouth

street & number 126 Daniel Street

city, town Portsmouth  vicinity of                      state New Hampshire 03801

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Rockingham County Registry of Deeds

street & number Hampton Road

city, town Exeter  vicinity of                      state New Hampshire 03833

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title An Inventory of Historic Structures  
Portsmouth, New Hampshire has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1972  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Planning Department

city, town Portsmouth  vicinity of                      state New Hampshire

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved    date _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Occupying the former site of a 1731 meeting house, this mid-Victorian ward house and school atop Meetinghouse Hill "has for a century been the major landmark in the South End" of Portsmouth. <sup>1</sup>

The South Meeting House is a rectangular wood frame building of two stories and attic, situated gable end to Marcy Street. It has a one story Doric porch on the front, a two story gable-roofed back stairway projecting from the rear, and a cupola rising in two stages from just behind the front of the roof ridge. The facade of the building is composed of three bays, the sides five each, and the rear originally had three before the twentieth century when the middle bay was covered by the rear stair tower. Fenestration consists of a 9 over 6 round-headed window in the upper facade gable, 9 over 6 round-headed windows throughout the second story, and rectangular 6 over 6 windows throughout the first story. A central double door forms the main entrance, facing east, while a single double door with transom lights occupies the second bay from the front on the south side and another is located on the south side of the rear stair-tower.

Stylistically the South Meeting House is Italianate with numerous Greek Revival features. The principal Italianate features include: strongly projecting cornices on the building and cupola; paired brackets supporting the upper cupola cornice; rounded openings with eyebrow cornices and keystones on the upper stage of the cupola; the bracing cornice of the lower stage of the cupola ( containing the three faced clock) over projecting corners which contain vertical lozenge panels; the round-headed window in the facade gable; and the verticle iron band of cresting which survives only above the south cornice of the original slate roof. The elongated proportions of the first story window lights (9 3/4" x 19 1/2") is also typical of the local Italianate style.

The major Greek Revival characteristics include: a four-column Doric porch with full Ionic entablature, the fluted columns set on circular stone plinths, and the recessed front doorway. The Greek Revival detailing also includes the ubiquitous use of ogee moldings in window and door casing backbands, for borders of door panels and elsewhere as well as the use of razorback window sticking, a motif based on the raised arris between flutes on a Doric column.

A few features look forward to the heavier features of the mid-Victorian details of the 1870s and 1880s, such as the massive newel posts inside and the bolection molding separating the architrave from the frieze in the porch entablature.

The interior contains shallow vestibules at the east end of both floors, connected by two sets of stairs doubling back and forming graceful spiral balustrades terminating in heavy newels at top and bottom of the north and south ends of the rooms. On the first floor, the vestibule leads to two rooms which may previously have been one. Pairs of cast iron columns in both rooms help support the ceiling and second story. The upper floor is one large room behind the vestibule or hallway, impressive for its 14½ foot ceiling and the ample daylight provided by five large windows on either side. All interiors in the building have match-board wainscoting 32" in height. An enclosed stairway to the attic winds up from the south end of the second

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1. Bryant F. Tolles, New Hampshire Architecture: An Illustrated Guide, (Hanover, N.H., 1979), pp. 22-23.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE SUPPLEMENTARY PAGE

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 9,900 sq. ft. (.22 acres)

Quadrangle name Portsmouth, NH - ME

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A 

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4	7	7	0	3	7	6
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**Verbal boundary description and justification** The property nominated is a rectangular lot, number 55 on Assessor's plan 7, fronting 64' on Marcy Street, 142' on Meetinghouse Hill Street, 71' on the rear lot line along Manning Street, and 149' on the south side back to the point of beginning. Tax Map #7, Lot #55.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Richard M. Candee and Woodard D. Openo

organization Portsmouth Advocates, Inc.

date April 16, 1981

street & number P.O. Box 4066

telephone (207) 439-4653

city or town Portsmouth

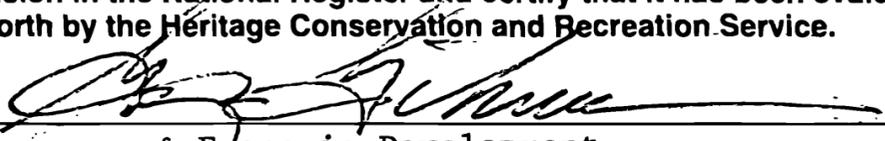
state New Hampshire 03801

# 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

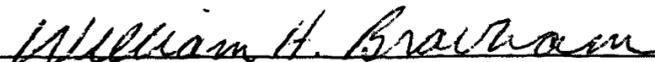
Commissioner, NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Development

title NH State Historic Preservation Officer

date February 23, 1982

For HCRS use only

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



date 4.19.82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

7. story vestibule, arching over the south stairway from the first floor.

The building was restored in the late 1960s and leased for several years to Strawberry Banke. During this renovation the central chandelier of 5 foot diameter in the second story room, an unusual and graceful nineteenth century lighting fixture originally located in the Second Christian Church of Kittery, Maine, may have been installed. In 1979 the city contracted to have the cupola fully repaired and repainted.

8. within a largely wooden residential ward. While nearing completion in October 1866 the local paper noted that its belfrey formed "another prominent object in the landscape" of the city.<sup>7</sup> This clock tower and Italianate cupola continues to dominate and serve as a visual focal point for the surrounding historic neighborhood. The originality of its vernacular design and construction contribute to the character of the area and evoke a feeling for the era in which it was built.

Politics/Government: The South Meeting House is also significant as a locally unique example of a mid-nineteenth century public building type, the ward hall. In this it reflects the evolution of municipal governmental structure. Portsmouth adopted a City Charter in 1849 providing for a nine member Board of Aldermen and twenty-one on a Common Council elected from three wards. By the 1860s the Aldermen were being petitioned for a place of public assembly for a ward room in the third ward which covered the South End of the city.<sup>8</sup> From its erection in 1866 the upper floor of the South Meeting House provided the site for public and political assembly, caucuses, and ward elections. It continued to serve as a polling place well into the present century.

As originally designed the lower story also served another public function by providing a school room which supplemented the increasingly limited space in the nearby Haven School (1846) at various different times throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to its political and governmental functions, from the earliest years the city granted permission to use the building for religious meetings of a variety of sects without a permanent church. As early as 1865, in fact, the "City Missionary" began holding Sunday religious services, while in 1868 another group shared the space for Friday evening services. By the turn of the century, C.S. Gurney identified the building as "The Peoples Church and South Ward Room" indicating the continued linkage between its political and religious usage.<sup>10</sup>

7. Daily Morning Chronicle, Oct. 2, 1866.

8. Ray Brighton, Frank Jones, King of Alemakers, p. 83; City Records, Vol. 4, p. 94 ff.

9. Gurney, p. 154.

10. Gurney, p. 141.

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Continuation sheet

Item number

9

Page

1

9. C.S. Gurney, Portsmouth...Historic and Picturesque (Portsmouth, 1902) pp. 140-141.
- John Mead Howells, The Architectural History of the Piscataqua, (1965 reprint), p. 194 (fig. 260).
- Bryant F. Tolles, New Hampshire Architecture: An Illustrated Guide, (Hanover, N.H. 1979), pp. 22-23
- City Records, Vols. 3-4 (minutes of the Board of Aldermen 1863-1866), City Clerk's Office, City Hall, Portsmouth.
- Ledger, Bills Approved, 1866
- Portsmouth Journal, July 28, 1866 through Sept. 22, 1866 and Feb. 13, 1864.
- Daily Morning Chronicle, July 26, 1866 through Oct. 3, 1866 and April 18, 1864.
- Receipts and Expenditures of the City of Portsmouth with a Statement of the City Debt .....1864, pp. 32, 52; 1864 p. 38; 1866 pp. 45-48.
- The Thoresen Group, South Meeting House Re-Use Feasibility Study for Portsmouth Advocates, Inc. 1981.