

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 91000770 Date Listed: 6/21/91

Former First Baptist Church
Property Name:

Somerset ME
County: State:

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick W. Andrews
Signature of the Keeper

8/6/91
Date of Action

===== Amended Items in Nomination:

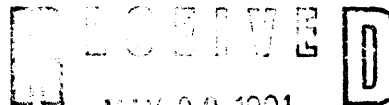
Kirk Mohny with the Maine SHPO has clarified that the Period of Significance should be defined as 1842-1870, and that 1926 should not be included as a Significant Date. The form is officially amended to include this information.

When the initial SLR was issued a minor technical problem was overlooked. Criteria exception A applies because the property has "religious structure" entered as a historic function. This was confirmed with Kirk Mohny, MESHPO.

for Betty A. Savage
Signature of the Keeper

6/10/92
Date of Action

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAY 09 1991

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name (Former) First Baptist Church
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number W Side of Main St., S of Rt. 104 N/A not for publication
city, town Skowhegan N/A vicinity
state Maine code ME county Somerset code 025 zip code 04976

3. Classification

<p>Ownership of Property</p> <input type="checkbox"/> private <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local <input type="checkbox"/> public-State <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<p>Category of Property</p> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) <input type="checkbox"/> district <input type="checkbox"/> site <input type="checkbox"/> structure <input type="checkbox"/> object	<p>Number of Resources within Property</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Contributing</td> <td>Noncontributing</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> <td style="text-align: center;">_____</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">0</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: right;">Total</td> </tr> </table>	Contributing	Noncontributing	1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	1	0		Total
Contributing	Noncontributing															
1	_____															
_____	_____															
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1	0															
	Total															
<p>Name of related multiple property listing: <u>N/A</u></p>		<p>Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register <u>0</u></p>														

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official: [Signature] Date: 5/2/91
 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.

Signature of commenting or other official: _____ Date: _____
 State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Patrick Andrus 6/21/91
 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:) _____

(for) Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Social/Meeting Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Gothic Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite

walls Brick

roof Metal/Tin

other Three Stage Wooden Tower

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The (former) First Baptist Church is a three-bay pedimented brick edifice with a vestibule addition at the front and a vestry addition at the rear, both in brick. A three stage tower surmounts the main block which rests on a granite foundation. The church is located along the west side of Route 104 and is adjacent to the brick Bloomfield Academy building (N.R. 2/19/82).

Facing east, the church's front elevation presents a sequence of wall planes by virtue of the projecting vestibule, the pedimented end wall, and the bold massing of the tower base. The three-bay vestibule, which apparently was added in the 1870s, is comprised of a pair of two-leaf doors surmounted by lancet-arched panels. A band of quatrefoils separates these two elements. Marble panels bearing the construction date of the original building are located above the entryways. Between them is a single double-hung lancet-arched window that is framed by a small gable, in the peak of which is a recessed panel and a cross. The vestibule was added over, and now largely conceals, the building's original five-bay facade. A documentary photograph shows that the original configuration employed wide, unornamented brick pilasters between recessed panels, the outer two of which were narrower than the inner three. A large lancet-arched window with louvered shutters was centrally located between the two entrances. The doorways and the marble panels were re-used in the vestibule, whereas the large window opening still exists, although the sash may not. Still evident is the broad unornamented cornice that carries across the facade and along both sides. The flush sheathed tympanum of the pediment features a shallow, recessed triangular panel that contains a glazed quatrefoil. Pilasters frame the corners of the tower base and rise to an entablature and overhanging pent roof. The open belfry stage is comprised of clustered Doric columns and square paneled posts, and a repeat of the entablature found on the base. A pyramidal spire framed by four spirelets crowns the tower. The original bell and weathervane have been removed.

The three-bay nave sidewalls contain a trio of lancet-arched twenty-over-twenty double-hung windows. Those on the north side retain their louvered shutters. There are no pilaster divisions along the sides although

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pilasters do exist at each corner. In addition, a gabled concrete block basement level entry and vestibule has been added to the north side, and a brick flue rises through the north slope of the roof at the west end. The one-story, gabled vestry which was also added in the 1870s, is slightly recessed from the sides of the main block. It features three six-over-six windows on the north side, two at the rear, and a door and two windows on the south side. A stove flue rises through the ridge of its roof.

Although the exterior of the building exhibits features which clearly define its historic function, interior modifications depict the structure's non-religious use beginning in 1926. At that time, or sometime shortly thereafter, the pews were removed, enframing balconies were built along the sides, and the nave walls up to and slightly above the balconies were covered in tongue-and-groove sheathing. Similar material was placed over the original window at the east end and lights with protective cages were installed in the ceiling. These alterations were made to accommodate the use of the space for basketball games. It is not clear how the present stage at the west end was concealed or when it was installed. Surprisingly, the Greek Revival style trim around the three extant doors was retained as were a number of the pews, now stored in the balconies. In 1931 the church became the Armory of the local National Guard company and in 1940 it was apparently deeded to the State. Subsequently it became the headquarters for the local VFW post. At this time the present suspended ceiling was installed and the kitchen added bringing the interior to its present configuration.

One especially noteworthy original interior feature has survived. Visible now only by ascending to the balcony level is a most unusual plaster ceiling in the form of a flattened domical vault. This striking, albeit somewhat deteriorated, feature consists of a large circular main section that extends over most of the original nave area. This flat surface is bordered by paneled spandrels that form broad arches at each of the building's four walls. In a further display of imagination, the main vault intersects a shallow paneled barrel vault that spans the balcony on the east endwall. Finally, an elaborate medallion with an acanthus leaf border and centerpiece is located in the center of the ceiling. This dramatic interior effect was joined, probably in the 1870s, by decorative painting executed by Charles J. Schumacher of Portland. Unfortunately, this decoration has deteriorated and been largely covered.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1842-44

Significant Dates

1842-44
c.1870
c.1926

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Bigelow, Joseph, Architect

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The (former) First Baptist Church is a Greek Revival style brick edifice erected in 1842-44 by local architect/builder Joseph Bigelow. Despite a number of exterior and interior additions and alterations, the church building is significant as one of the few documented projects by Bigelow, and by virtue of its highly unusual plaster ceiling. For these reasons the church is eligible for nomination to the Register under criterion C.

The Baptist congregation responsible for the erection of this building traces its beginnings to 1796 when a free church organization was formed by residents of the surrounding towns of Canaan, Clinton, and Fairfield. This association apparently coalesced into the First Baptist Church of Canaan which was formed on October 20, 1803. Its first meeting house was built in 1812, and a decade later it was moved to the site of the existing structure. This building was destroyed by fire on November 11, 1841, thereby precipitating the construction of a new church. Designed by Joseph Bigelow, the edifice was built at a cost of \$5,000 and was dedicated in June, 1844.

During at least the next four decades the First Baptist Church remained a strong congregation, its numbers increasing to some 200 by the mid-1880s. Reflecting its healthy condition in this period the brick vestry was added to the rear and probably the vestibule was built on the facade. It is also likely that this remodeling campaign included the ornamental painting by Charles J. Schumacher of Portland; an artistic resource now virtually lost. A second remodeling took place in 1910, but the specific nature of the work performed at that time is unknown. In 1919, the Baptists merged with the Congregational Church, at which time the brick church was closed. This building became a community hall in 1926, and it was apparently then that the interior was remodeled for use as a basketball court. Subsequently, it became the headquarters for the local National Guard company and then a VFW hall. The Town of Skowhegan presently owns it, and is studying how it can restore the tower and possibly portions of the interior.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bigelow, Joseph, Architect File, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta.

Cobourn, Louise Helen. Skowhegan on the Kennebec. Skowhegan, Maine: Privately Printed, 1941.

National Register Nomination for the Bigelow-Page House. Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Less than 1

UTM References

A

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4	9	5	6	3	6	0
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 Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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 Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the Town of Skowhegan tax map 23, lot 47A.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the building and entire village lot historically associated with the (former) First Baptist Church.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk F. Mohney, Architectural Historian
 organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date 4/1991
 street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone (207) 289-2132
 city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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From an architectural standpoint, the church is significant for its association with Joseph Bigelow. [The following discussion about Bigelow is excerpted from the National Register nomination of the Bigelow-Page House, N.R. 4/20/88]. Little is as yet positively known about Bigelow's early life and training. According to the 1850 census, which gave his age as forty-six years, he was born in Maine. His first documented project was the design and construction of the subject First Baptist Church. In 1842 Bigelow was also employed by Isaac Farrar to superintend the construction of the brick Symphony House (N.R. 10/26/72) in Bangor from plans drawn by Richard Upjohn. The strong but unornamented pilasters that frame the corners of this house are reminiscent of those used on the First Baptist Church. This design relationship is certain, except in a reverse fashion, given the fact that Upjohn had prepared his plans years before Farrar actually began construction and that Farrar and Bigelow were known to have been friends for some period of time. Undoubtedly, Bigelow drew some inspiration from the designs of this renowned nineteenth century architect.

In 1845 Bigelow received a contract to build a house for Samuel F. Robinson in Skowhegan, and the following year he commenced construction of his own residence. The unmistakable Greek Revival form of this house is especially evident in the broad entablature and wide corner pilasters decorated with anthemions. This latter feature was a detail that Bigelow had handsomely executed in the Farrar house. Perhaps Bigelow's crowning Greek Revival achievement was the house built between 1848-49 in Skowhegan for Abner Coburn (N.R. 7/30/74), a building which stands a short distance from the Baptist Church. This temple-form dwelling employs a monumental portico with Ionic columns, flush board sheathing and a very broad entablature. Curiously, the main entrance is located on a side elevation within a handsome vestibule outfitted with columns, pilasters and a parapet.

Bigelow's other known projects, all of them in Skowhegan, were built during the 1860s. A house for Edmund Pearson II, constructed in 1868 on Madison Street, employed a rather unusual high hipped mansard roof form on a low one-story rectangular block. It resembles in spirit the pronounced hip roof employed on his own house.

The church building holds further architectural significance by virtue of the design of its plaster ceiling. Approximating the configuration of a domical vault (although its central portion is flat and not domed) which intersects a paneled barrel vault over the rear balcony, this ceiling is the only known example of its type in the State. Although it can now be viewed only from the early twentieth century balconies, the handsome arrangement of this feature must have been most impressive from the original nave. How and

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why Bigelow came to this solution may never be known. It is interesting to consider, however, his superintending role in the construction of the Symphony House which utilizes decorative plaster ornamentation. Whatever its origin Bigelow's design reflects a conception of interior decoration which resulted in a most remarkable architectural feature when judged in the context of its contemporaries.