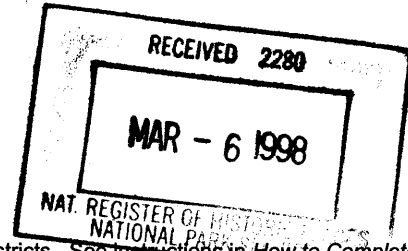


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Cole Block

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 19 Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Bethel N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county Oxford code 017 zip code 04217

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.)

[Signature] 2/25/98
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] 4-1-98
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Cole Block
Name of Property

Oxford, 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

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/Business

Commerce/Trade/Financial Institution

Recreation and Culture/Auditorium

Government/Government Office

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/Business

Government/City Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite

walls Wood/Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

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

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

COLE BLOCK

OXFORD, MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

The Cole Block is a large, four-story, Queen Anne style wooden frame building that is sheathed in clapboards. It stands in the middle of Bethel's commercial district.

Facing northwest, the front (which for ease of description shall be called the west) elevation contains two storefronts and three doorways on the first story. The central bay features a recessed, two-leaf paneled door surmounted by a transom that leads to the main stairway. Narrow walls separate this entrance from those on either side that provide access to the first floor rooms, one of which houses the town offices. The southernmost door is recessed to the same point as the central doors whereas the northernmost door is flush with the storefront. Both doors feature multi-pane transoms that match the one over the center door as well as those located above the plate glass windows. The doors and windows are separated by iron posts with simple paneled capitals that rise to an unadorned cornice. The upper part of the facade is divided into three bays. On the second story, three sided bay windows supported by brackets and decorated with balustrades flank the center bay that features a trio of double hung windows separated from each other by a three panel wall. The outer windows have a twelve-over-one configuration, and the center window is an eighteen-over-one. A paneled wall surface containing a plaque with the name COLE BLOCK 1891 separates this group of windows from those on the second story. Between the center bay window composition on the second and third story and the three separate fourth story windows (whose sash pattern is similar to the ones below) is a long rectangular plaque bearing the name ODEON HALL. In contrast to the bay windows on the second story, the outer bays on the third and fourth stories contain paired twelve-over-one double hung sash, with those on the fourth story somewhat shorter. A wide bracketed cornice carries across the elevation.

Unlike the symmetrically organized and decorative composition of the front elevation, the side and rear walls are strictly utilitarian in their treatment. The south elevation has three doors and five windows on the first story and two widely separated twelve-over-ones in the northwest third of the second and third stories. The balance of the wall is punctuated by six tall double hung windows with transoms that denote the location of the auditorium. This fenestration pattern is repeated on the north elevation, except that there are no doors and four windows on the first story. A shed roofed addition extends across the rear elevation and about mid way up the wall.

Inside, the Cole Block contains the original two store spaces and an office on the first story, two offices at the northeast and northwest corners of the second story (behind the bay windows), and the 200 seat auditorium and balcony in the balance of the interior. The first floor spaces retain their ornamental steel ceilings, but little more remains from the original finishes. On the upper floors, the integrity is much greater. The central staircase rises to a landing and transverse hall on the second floor where a two-leaf door opens into the auditorium. The hall, which features wainscoting and plaster over lath walls, extends along both sides of the stairs to the office doors and a second staircase that is located above the main one.

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Continuation Sheet

COLE BLOCK

OXFORD, MAINE

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The expansive and remarkably well preserved auditorium features narrow tongue and groove wainscot along three walls, a projecting stage at the rear of which is an elliptical proscenium arch, and a balcony wall comprised of three bands of tongue and groove wainscot below a movable wall formed of large paneled sliding doors. A wide cornice carries around the room which has a decorative steel ceiling and what appear to be the five original gas chandeliers.

Modifications to the exterior of the building have come primarily in the relocation of the entrances to the first floor commercial spaces. As originally planned, the entrances -- which were comprised of two-leaf doors with a tall pane of glass in the upper two-thirds and three panels below -- were located in the center of each storefront. A photograph of the building taken sometime soon after its completion verifies that this was the original configuration. Both entrances were subsequently relocated to their present positions, although the design of the storefronts was retained in the alterations.

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1891

Significant Dates

1891

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Coombs, George M., Architect

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** 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 # _____

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****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet****COLE BLOCK****OXFORD, MAINE****Section number 8 Page 2**

Constructed in 1891, the Cole Block is a four-story Queen Anne style frame building that was designed by the Lewiston architect George M. Coombs. It is the most architecturally prominent commercial block in Bethel. The building, which is owned by the Town of Bethel and contains its municipal offices, is eligible for nomination to the National Register under Criterion C for its architectural significance.

The Cole Block was constructed for brothers Fred and Elmer Cole of East Bethel. According to local tradition, they had originally planned to build a brick building in East Bethel, but subsequently changed their plans and built a less costly wooden block on Bethel Hill. However, it appears that even this undertaking was too ambitious, and soon after the completion of the building the Coles could not make payments on their mortgage and lost the property to the Bethel Savings Bank. The bank was the original occupant of most of the southern half of the first floor, and remained there until 1974. A variety of businesses have been located in the north storefront including a millinery shop, a jewelry store, a second banking institution, and presently the town offices. At the rear of the block were rooms that housed the town's succession of newspapers, as well a photography studio and law office. The second floor had, from the 1890s until 1968, been used in part by the selectmen, assessors, and overseers of the poor. Odeon Hall, which occupied the remainder of the interior, was the center of Bethel's social life well into the twentieth century. It hosted Gould Academy graduations, countless dances, plays, socials, minstrel shows, concerts, political caucuses, Chataqua meetings, and both silent and sound movies. In the 1960s, it was used for Roman Catholic religious services.

The Cole Block is the one of the most architecturally significant and least altered commercial buildings in Bethel. In both its scale and detailing, the building is a visual landmark along Main Street, which is bordered by a mix of historic residential, religious, and commercial properties, principally of frame construction. Contrasting with the Cole Block, the remainder of the nineteenth century commercial buildings are more modest one or two-story gable roofed blocks with storefronts that have typically been modified during the second half of the twentieth century.

George M. Coombs (1852-1909) was among the most prolific architect in Maine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His commissions cover a wide range of building types including residential, religious, commercial, and institutional properties. Coombs' architectural practice began in 1873 when he formed a brief partnership with Charles H. Kimball, whereafter he was a partner in the firm of Stevens & Coombs. In 1880 he founded his own firm, which he sustained until 1896 when he took on the partners Eugene J. Gibbs and Harry C. Wilkinson. Coombs had an extensive business in Central and Western Maine, and in 1891 -- the year in which he designed the Cole Block -- surviving records indicate that he was involved in drawing the plans for at least twenty-two other projects. The building's original plans are preserved in the Coombs Collection at the Maine Historical Society in Portland.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

COLE BLOCK

OXFORD, MAINE

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Bennett, Randall H. *Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to Its Historic Architecture*. Bethel, ME: Oxford County Historic Resource Survey. 1984.

“Centenary of the Cole Block.” *Bethel Courier*, Winter, 1991.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

COLE BLOCK

OXFORD, MAINE

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the Town of Bethel tax map 25, lot 162.

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the entire village lot that is historically associated with the Cole Block.