

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

For NPS use only

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

received **OCT 30 1986**

date entered **DEC 1 1986**

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

1. Name

historic First Free Will Baptist Church in Meredith, Oak Hill Meetinghouse

and/or common Meredith Historical Society Museum

2. Location

street & number Winona Road (1/2 mile North of Intersection of Winona Road & NH Rte. 104) N/A not for publication

city, town Meredith _____ vicinity of _____

state New Hampshire code 33 county Belknap code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Meredith Historical Society

street & number P.O. Box 920

city, town Meredith _____ vicinity of _____ state New Hampshire 03253

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Belknap County Courthouse (Book 320, Page 109 and Belknap County Registry of Deeds Book 321, Page 324)

street & number 64 Court Street

city, town Laconia _____ vicinity of _____ state New Hampshire 03246

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Meredith Historic Resources Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 _____ federal _____ state _____ county local

depository for survey records Lakes Region Planning Commission

city, town Meredith _____ vicinity of _____ state New Hampshire 03253

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Oak Hill Meetinghouse is a wooden building, erected as a Free Will Baptist meetinghouse, but now serving as a museum of the Meredith Historical Society. The Meetinghouse stands on its own lot on the northeast side of Winona Road in the town of Meredith, .6 mile north of Route 104. The building consists of three one story units, all rectangular in plan. The meetinghouse proper is a tall, gable roofed structure, set with its main facade, the southwest gable end, facing the road. Attached to the rear (northeast) gable end and overlapping it to the south is the shorter and smaller, gable roofed vestry. At the north end of the vestry's rear (northeast) gable end is found a small shed roofed privy. An open wooden deck-walkway covers the continuous northwest facades of the vestry and the privy.

The meetinghouse itself is set on a cut granite block foundation and is clapboarded with sillboards. Echoes of the Greek Revival appear in the wide cornerboards with simple mouldings at their tops and in the wide box cornice with mouldings, deep frieze and returns, that trims the three public sides of the asphalt shingled gable roof. (The rear northeast gable has close verges with a shallow frieze and simple returns.) The meetinghouse's main facade is the three bay wide southwest gable end. The two side bays each contain an entry- a four panel door with plain but wide side trim and a deep lintel crowned by a simple moulding. Each entry has a wide granite upper step and two stone and concrete lower steps. The lower steps and the short paved walks to the road are flanked by low fieldstone and concrete sidewalls. The southerly entry, now the only one in active use, also has a metal pipe handrail flanking the steps, and a modern pseudo-Colonial electric light flanking the doorway. In the central bay is a high, tall and large, twelve over twelve sash window with plain side trim and moulded lintel. Beneath this central window is mounted a large painted wooden sign identifying the "Meredith Historical Society". A smaller painted wooden sign announcing the museum hours is mounted beside the southerly entry. The northwest and southeast facades of the meetinghouse are virtually identical, each with three large and tall windows, like the central window of the main facade, twelve over twelve sash windows with plain side trim, simply moulded lintels, and louvred shutters. The rear (northeast) gable end is partially covered by the vestry and is divided into thirds by two tall, square exterior brick chimneys with tapered caps, the southerly chimney rising through the vestry roof. North of the north chimney on the main level is another large twelve over twelve sash window with the same plain side trim and moulded lintel seen on the other windows. In the rear gable is a window that once lit the attic but is now filled with plywood. The gable window still retains its frame with the usual moulded lintel.

As the land drops away slightly to the rear of the meetinghouse, the vestry is set on wooden posts, as well as a stone pier at the south corner. The dirt floored crawlspace beneath the vestry is partially open, as horizontal boarding encloses the crawlspace only on the southeast side and part of the northeast side. Three of the main level walls are clapboarded, but the rear (northeast) gable end is sheathed with wooden shingles. The facades are trimmed by cornerboards, with the boards at the south corner being further distinguished by a simple top moulding. The windows and doors all have plain frames. The gable roof is trimmed by a box cornice with mouldings, frieze, and returns, on the more public southwest and southeast sides, by close moulded eaves with frieze and modern metal gutter on the northwest facade, and by plain close verges on the seldom seen northeast gable. As already noted, the vestry's asphalt shingled roof is broken by the exterior chimney on the rear gable end of the meetinghouse. Most of the vestry's street (southwest) gable end is covered by the meetinghouse, but it does contain a four panel door (now covered on the exterior by a sheet of plywood) with a small flanking electric light

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and a board step. The southeast facade and the northeast gable end each contain two, two over two sash windows. The northwest facade retains a four panel door in its west bay. But the former two over two sash window in its east bay has been reduced to a two pane upper sash, the lower half of the window having been filled in with plywood when a new kitchen sink and counter was installed.

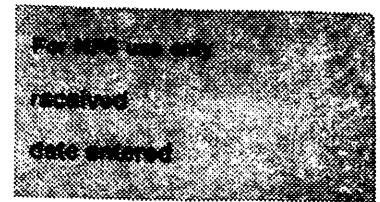
The privy at the north end of the vestry's northeast gable end is sheathed with clapboards on the northwest, and with wooden shingles on the northeast and southeast. The facades are trimmed by plain cornerboards. The asphalt shingled shed roof is trimmed by close verges on the "gables" and with open overhanging lateral eaves with exposed rafters and fascia boards on the northeast. Plain frames surround a four panel door in the northwest facade and a small four pane window in the southeast facade. Covering the continuous northwest facades of the vestry and the privy is an open wooden deck-walkway. The modern board floored deck-walkway is set on wooden posts and is enclosed by a simple wooden railing, save in front of the vestry's door.

The meetinghouse proper is devoted almost entirely to a large and tall auditorium, although two small vestibules for the entries occupy the west and south corners. The vestibules are actually only half the height of the auditorium, but their inner walls are continued upward to enclose the spaces above them. The space above the northerly vestibule is completely enclosed, while the space above the southerly vestibule contains the stairs to the attic. The two vestibules are virtually mirror images of each other. Each has a board floor, plaster walls with simple baseboards (and plain high rails for clothes hooks on three walls), and a plaster ceiling with a modern light fixture. Plain frames surround the doors, a four panel door in the exterior southwest wall, another four panel door to the auditorium in the interior northeast wall, and a half height two panel door in the other (northwest or southeast) wall to an unfinished, board floored storage space beneath the choir loft that occupies that part of the auditorium between the two vestibules. (The only significant difference between the two vestibules is that the northerly vestibule now has a shallow closet built over its northwest wall. The new inner wall of vertical boarding is topped by a simple ceiling moulding. A plain framed doorless opening allows access to the closet's board shelves.)

In plan, the auditorium is basically a rectangle with the two streetside corners notched out by the vestibules. The choir loft, whose floor is raised three and a half feet above the auditorium floor, occupies the space between the vestibules and projects four feet into the room's main space. The auditorium has a board floor, a plaster ceiling, and plaster walls above wide board wainscoatings whose simply moulded copings also serve as the stools for the windows. The wainscoating is the same height around the room, save on the choir loft walls, where it is raised to match the choir loft's greater height. (The wainscoating in the choir loft also has simple baseboards.) The room is lit by tall, large twelve over twelve sash windows with plain side trim and simply moulded lintels, a single high window in the southwest wall above the choir loft, three windows in each of the side (northwest and southeast) walls and another single window in the northerly bay of the northeast wall. (These windows are supplemented by eight electrified kerosene wall lamps on ornate hinged brackets.) Simply moulded lintels also top the two four panel doors to the vestibules in the southwest wall. But plain trim surrounds the four panel door to the vestry in the southerly bay of the east wall and the four panel door mounted high in the choir loft's southeast wall. (This last door, which is not reached by any permanent

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steps, serves the space above the southerly vestibule. This small space with board floor and unfinished walls with exposed beams and joists contains the plain attic stairs built of two stringers and board treads. ¹ The large, high, unfinished attic has an exposed framework of joists, beams, rafters and struts. ² The rear (northeast) gable window that once lit the main attic has been filled in with plywood. An untrimmed opening connects the meetinghouse attic with the vestry attic, another unfinished space with exposed joists, beams, and rafters, which is distinguished only by the brick chimney that raises through it.)

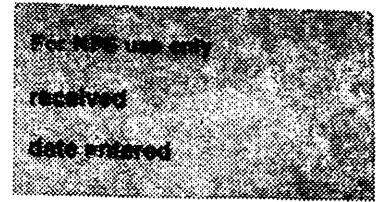
The choir loft's projection is some six feet high as it includes a low partition around the choir loft. On the exterior, the projection's wall is plastered above the usual board wainscoating with simply moulded coping. These outer plaster walls are distinguished by plain cornerboards, and are trimmed by moulded coping and, on the sides, by simple baseboards. (The seldom seen inner side of the choir loft's partition is sheathed with horizontal boards and topped by a simple coping.) At each end of the choir loft's front (northeast) partition is a shallow builtin cabinet with a paneled door, whose plain frame fills the space between the wainscoating and the moulded coping. In the center of the front partition is the plain framed opening for the narrow steps to the board floored choir loft. The five steps, three exterior steps, and two recessed inner steps, are simple in design, with plain board risers and treads. At the northeast end of the auditorium is found the pulpit platform, a board floored platform raised only one step above the main floor. Portions of the northwest and southeast sides of the platform are protected by low board sheathed partitions with simple copings. The pulpit and the pews that once filled the auditorium have been removed. The only permanent fixtures are two large woodstoves, whose two stovepipes traverse the room to exit through the northeast wall and connect to the two exterior chimneys.

The vestry is essentially one large room divided by a partition into two spaces, a kitchen at the northwest end and the larger main space to its southeast. The two spaces share a hardwood floor, walls and ceiling of beaded boarding. The walls are trimmed by a simple base moulding and a somewhat more elaborate ceiling moulding. Modern electric light fixtures are mounted on the ceiling. Plain frames surround the windows and doors in the main space, two, two over two sash windows in both the southeast and northeast walls, and two four panel doors in the southwest wall (one to the auditorium, one to the outside). The partition between the two spaces, which stops about a foot short of the ceiling, is built of the same vertical beaded boarding as is found on the walls, and is trimmed by mouldings at the base and the top. Plain frames surround the partition's central doorless opening and a countertop opening with a linoleum covered counter to the north of the door. The kitchen area has an exposed brick chimney set against the southwest wall, and a four panel door and a two pane window (both with plain frames) in the northeast wall. The window was originally larger, but a modern counter, including a

1. The timbers of the outer walls of this stairwell still show signs of the plaster lathes they once carried. Similar marks reveal that the auditorium's plaster ceiling once continued over this entire space.
2. The auditorium's plaster ceiling still continues over the space above the northerly vestibule, suggesting that that space was once part of the building's main room.

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kitchen sink, was built on the northeast wall, which cut off the lower portion of the window. This counter, and another counter built against the partition to the north of the door, feature beaded boarding and linoleum countertops and incorporate drawers and cabinet doors. Wall mounted cabinets of similar design are also hung on the outer northeast wall above the new counter.

The privy, which has its own separate entry from the outside, is a small room with a board floor, and unfinished walls with exposed studs and rafters. The wooden shingled wall of the vestry's rear gable end serves as one wall of the privy. At the southeast end of the room is a two holer privy with board front, top, and seats. The small four pane window in the southeast wall and the four panel door in the northwest wall are both untrimmed. A board shelf is mounted on the northeast wall.

The lot is relatively flat with a very slight slope to the rear (northeast) and to the southeast. Stone walls mark the northwest and northeast boundaries of the meetinghouse lot. Shrubs and trees grow along the stone walls. Shrubs are also found on the southeast boundary, on the southeast facade of the vestry, and at the roadside corners of the meetinghouse. A case iron drinking fountain, transplanted from Meredith village by the Historical Society, stands in front of the meetinghouse.

The nominated property represents one contributing building.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates c. 1802, c. 1848 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Oak Hill Meetinghouse is significant architecturally as a fine example of a simple mid 19th century rural New Hampshire church, showing the influence of the Greek Revival style on the vernacular building tradition.

The history of the building is, unfortunately, relatively obscure. The first Free Will Baptist meeting in Meredith was held in the Oak Hill section on August 1, 1800. This meeting and subsequent meetings were so successful, that in October, a Free Will Baptist church (or Monthly Meeting, as it was then called) was organized and recognized by the New Durham Quarterly Meeting of the Free Will Baptists. The Meredith Monthly Meeting grew rapidly. By the end of two years, the membership had grown to 134 persons, including residents not only of Meredith, but also of Centre Harbor and of portions of Holderness, New Hampton, and Moultonboro. This prosperous new church soon built a meetinghouse. But, as the early records of the church cannot be located, there is little known about its construction. On April 8, 1802, James Peas leased the meetinghouse lot to the church for 999 years, in exchange for \$10. The lease speaks of the meetinghouse as already standing on the lot. A pastor of the church, writing for a county history in 1885, simply remarked, "A house of worship was built between 1800 and 1804, not long after the establishment of the meeting. In later years, it was remodeled into the form it now has." ¹ We know almost nothing about the original appearance of the building, and there is little documentary evidence on the later changes to the building. The Meredith Historical Society has noted traditions that the building was "remodeled twice, one in 1848 and again in 1898." ² But neither the traditions nor the records describe these remodelings. The later church records contain only one brief reference to building alteration- "Fall of 1909 work began on church chimneys and vestry." ³ But, whether this records the building or simply the remodeling of the vestry remains unclear.

1. Rev. J. Erskine "The Free Will Baptist Church" in the "Meredith" section of Ed. D. Hamilton Hurd HISTORY OF MERRIMACK AND BELKNAP COUNTIES, NEW HAMPSHIRE (Philadelphia, 1885) p. 849
2. Harold Wyatt, "History of Meredith Historical Society Museum" (manuscript, Meredith Historical Society, Meredith, N.H.) p. 2
3. "First Meredith F. (Free Will) Baptist Church Records 1852-1910" (manuscript, American Baptist Churches of New Hampshire, Concord, N.H.) unpagged

9. Major Bibliographical References

Rev. J. Erskine "The Free Will Baptist Church" in the "Meredith" section, ed. D. Hamilton Hurd HISTORY OF MERRIMACK AND BELKNAP COUNTIES, NEW HAMPSHIRE (Philadelphia, 1885)

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property .16 acre

Quadrangle name Holderness, NH

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UTM References

A

1	9	2	9	15	3	15	10	4	18	3	15	5	15	10
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated property is a four sided lot, bounded on southwest by Winona Road, on the northwest and northeast by stone walls, and on the southeast by a line perpendicular to Winona Road. The nominated property includes the Oak Hill Meetinghouse and meetinghouse lot on which it has stood since construction. (Meredith Property Map S-26, Parcel 1)

Property is highlighted in yellow on attached sketch map
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 David Ruell

organization Lakes Region Planning Commission date April 24, 1986

street & number Main Street telephone 279-8171

city or town Meredith state New Hampshire 03253

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Shirley G. Adamovich

title New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer date 10/23/86

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

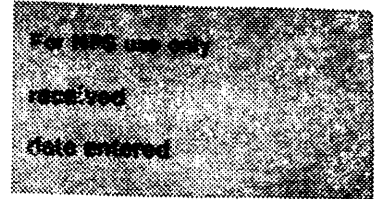
Shirley G. Adamovich
Keeper of the National Register

date 12/1/86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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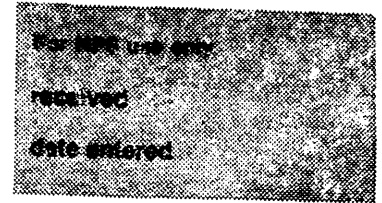
The lack of documentary evidence leaves us only with speculation, derived largely from the building itself. The meetinghouse proper is basically mid 19th century in style. Its appearance must therefore date largely from the 1848 remodeling. The only evidence of its earlier form is the remaining signs of outer plaster walls and a plaster ceiling in the space above the southerly vestibule, and the plaster ceiling still covering the space above the northerly vestibule. These suggest that the two spaces, and presumably the vestibules themselves, were later additions, again probably dating from the 1848 alterations. In the first years of the 19th century, religious buildings in the area still followed the traditional 18th century meetinghouse plan, with an entry in the center of a lateral facade, and the pulpit against the opposite wall. For example, the town meeting house in Bridgewater, built in 1804-1806, was just such a building, a traditional two story meetinghouse. Of greater relevance to the Meredith church would be the Dana Meeting House, built in 1800-1802 by the Free Will Baptists of the neighboring town of New Hampton. A one story building, the Dana Meeting House has the usual main entry in the lateral facade, a pulpit against the opposite wall, and in interior filled with box pews. It is easy to assume that the Oak Hill Meetinghouse originally had a similar layout. But, we cannot now prove or disprove that assumption.

Whatever its original appearance, the present appearance of the meetinghouse dates from the mid 19th century. The layout of the meetinghouse, with the entries in one gable end, vestibules at the entries, and a large auditorium with the pulpit platform against the rear wall, its typical of virtually all mid 19th century New England churches. The composition of the main facades, with two side entries and a central window in the main facade and three large windows in each side facade, was also common in this period, particularly for rural churches. The exterior details, the wide cornerboards with moulded tops, the box cornice with deep frieze and returns, and the wide trim of door frames, all show the influence of the Greek Revival style, with its generous dimensions. The interior spaces are relatively simple, more typical of the unadorned mid 19th century vernacular. The meetinghouse does, in fact, appear today as if it were built in the 1840's, instead of c.1802.

The mid 19th century character of the meetinghouse is very well preserved. The only major addition has been the vestry, which, whether it was built in 1898 or 1909, is typical of the turn of the century, with its hardwood floor, beaded board walls and ceiling. The vestry takes a modest position behind the meetinghouse, with its public facades copying the simple clapboarded walls of the older structure. The vestry does not intrude on the original building. Nor does the later privy. The building was probably saved from further modernization by the decline of its congregation. Other Free Will Baptist churches were organized to serve portions of the large territory once belonging to the First Free Will Baptist Church in Meredith. The new Free Will Baptist church established in 1854 in Meredith village, only two miles away, undoubtedly drew much of the potential congregation away from the Oak Hill Meetinghouse. Despite its declining rural congregation, the Oak Hill church survived until 1946. The pews and pulpit were removed from the church, apparently in the late 1940's. But the building was

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saved from further change in 1950, when it was purchased from the United Baptist Convention of New Hampshire by the newly organized Meredith Historical Society. 4

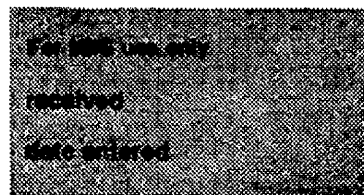
The Historical Society has since used the building as a museum and as a meeting place, and has made only some relatively inconspicuous changes, notable the installation of electricity and electric lights, a shallow closet in one vestibule, new kitchen cabinets and counters, the open walkway serving the privy, and the cast iron drinking fountain in front of the building. (A few other 20th century changes, such as the closing of the attic window, the plywood on the vestry door, and the stone sidewalls of the front walks, probably predate the Historical Society.) Basically, the meetinghouse has the same exterior, and, save for the loss of the pews and the pulpit, the same interior, as it did in the mid 19th century.

Most mid 19th century churches in Belknap County are somewhat more elaborate than the Oak Hill Meetinghouse, as such churches are typically crowned by belfry towers. Only three "simple" churches, gable roofed buildings without added towers, survive in the county. The Lochmere Community Hall, originally the East Tilton Methodist Church (built in 1835) was similar in composition to the Oak Hill Meetinghouse, with three large windows in each side facade, two side entries and a central window in the roadside gable end. But, the Community Hall has been drastically altered. Besides being sheathed with aluminum siding, which has obscured most of its original detailing, including window and door frames, and the box cornice, the Tilton building has seen the remodeling of its main facade with a bland central door, sheltered by a porch, and two small side windows. The Smith Meetinghouse in Gilmanton, built in 1839, is much better preserved, but it is a somewhat plainer building than the Oak Hill Meetinghouse. Built in the vernacular tradition, the Gilmanton church has relatively simple details, plain narrower cornerboards, unadorned window and door frames, moulded lateral box cornices with friezes, but only close verges with returns of the lateral cornices. The composition of its facades, particularly the main facade, which has two side entries flanking a high group of three small windows, is less successful than that of the Meredith meetinghouse. The Oak Hill meetinghouse, with its fine proportions, simple but well designed facades, dignified although restrained Greek Revival inspired ornament, can arguable be ranked as the best surviving towerless mid 19th century church in Belknap County. This modest but attractive building is a fine example of the rural church architecture of mid 19th century New Hampshire and is certainly deserving of National Register recognition.

4. In the same year, the Meredith Historical Society obtained a quitclaim deed for the land from the successors of James Peas, thus acquiring full ownership of the property.

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"First Meredith F. (Free Will) Baptist Church Records, 1852-1910" (manuscript, American Baptist Churches of New Hampshire, Concord, NH.)

ed. Mary E. Neal Hanaford MEREDITH, N.H. ANNALS AND GENEALOGIES (Concord, N.H. 1932)

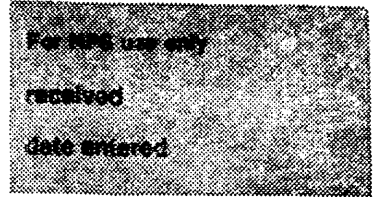
"History of the Meredith Historical Society" (manuscript, Meredith Historical Society, Meredith, N.H.)

Harold Wyatt "History of the Meredith Historical Society Museum" (manuscript Meredith Historical Society, Meredith, N.H.)

interviews, Harold and Esther Wyatt, December 19 and 28, 1985

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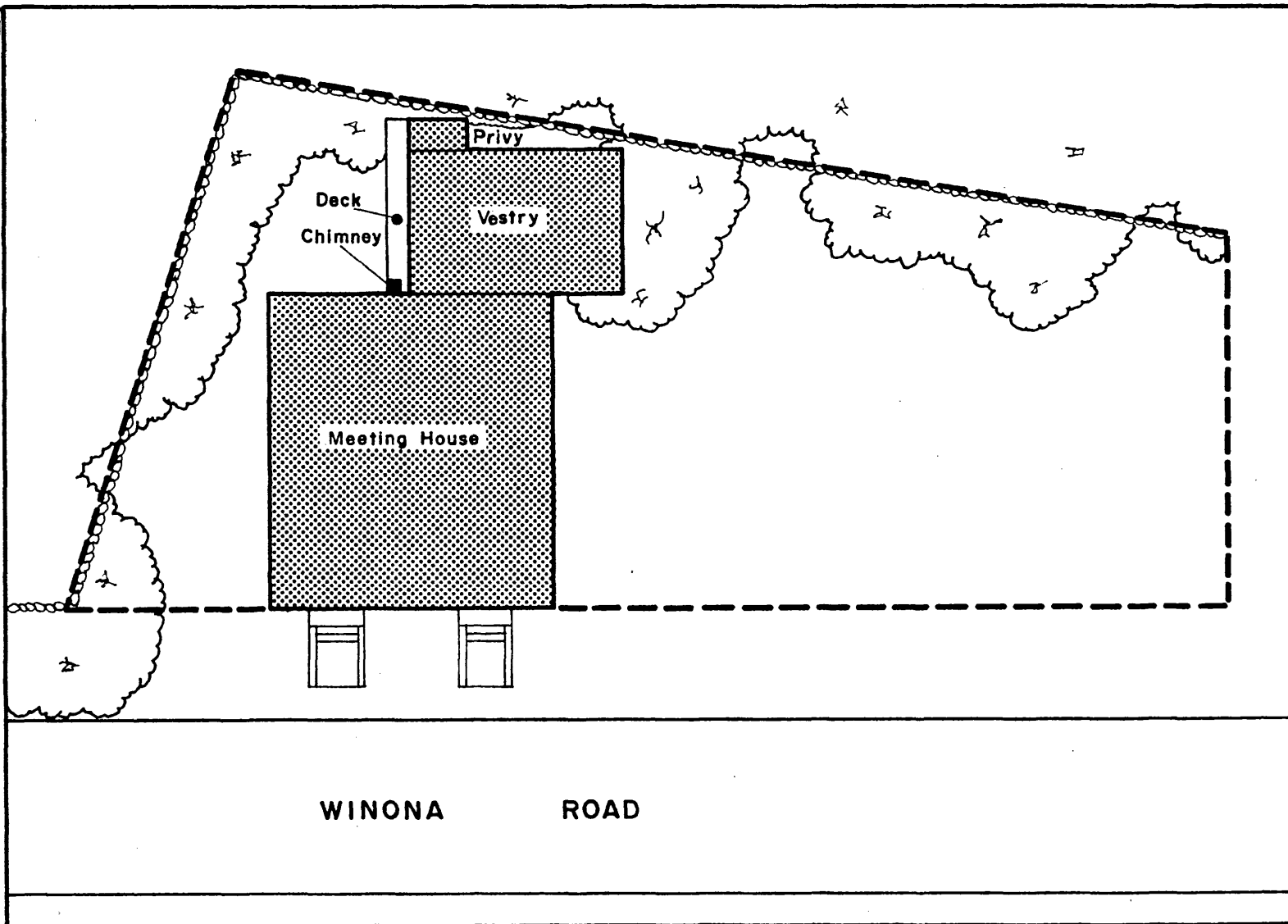


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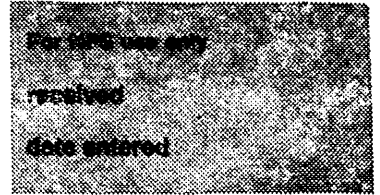


OAK HILL MEETING HOUSE MEREDITH, N.H.



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This certifies that the appearance has not changed since these photographs were taken.