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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

MAY 23 1988

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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 East Harpswell Free Will Baptist Church  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number Cundys Harbor Road N/A not for publication  
city, town East Harpswell, N/A vicinity  
state Maine code ME county Cumberland code 005 zip code 04079

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>    </u>	<u>    </u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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.

Carol S. Phelps, S.H.P.O. 5/16/88  
Signature of certifying official 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.

\_\_\_\_\_  
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. Albert Byron 6-23-88  
 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 of the Keeper Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religious/Religious Structure

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Religious/Religious Structure

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granitewalls Wood/Weatherboard

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roof Asphaltother 

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Free Will Baptist Church in East Harpswell is a modest Greek Revival style edifice constructed of wood. Its pedimented rectangular configuration is two bays in width and two bays deep. The building is sheathed in weatherboards and rests on a granite foundation.

Facing east, the front elevation contains a pair of symmetrically placed entryways and three pilasters that rise to the pediment. The two-leaf, eight-panel doors, which rest below four-pane transoms, are framed by wide molded surrounds and an entablature that has an overall form resembling Federal period antecedents. The paneled pilasters meet a narrow entablature.

Both side elevations are divided into two equal bays that contain twelve-over-twelve double-hung sash windows and blinds. Symmetrically molded Greek Revival style surrounds with corner blocks frame these windows. A single twelve-over-eight unit punctuates the rear wall.

The interior arrangement of the church is its most significant feature. The front doors open into a narrow hallway that extends behind the sanctuary in this unusual reverse plan scheme. Two interior doors open into the nave that features a coved plaster ceiling. The aisles divide the seating into three distinct areas, each of which has the original boxed pews and paneled entry doors. At the rear (west) of the nave is a raised platform containing additional pews. The paneled enclosures of these pews retain their stained and grained finishes. A paneled pulpit and flanking detached stands occupy the raised platform that defines the sanctuary.

**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  
Religion

Period of Significance

1843

1843=c. 1930

Significant Dates

1843

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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

The East Harpswell Free Will Baptist Church is a modest and virtually intact Greek Revival style frame building constructed in 1843. Although the overall form and detailing resembles numerous Maine churches of the period, this particular example enjoys statewide significance because of its intact and now rare reverse plan interior arrangement. By virtue of its importance in illustrating a non-conformist expression of religious ideology as well as its architectural significance, the church is being nominated under criteria A and C and criteria consideration A.

In 1817 a number of the residents of Sebascodegan Island, who had long worshipped at the Island Meeting House (built in 1765), organized the Free Will Baptist Church and Society./1 The place of their meetings has not been positively determined although local historians have speculated that the congregation may have continued to utilize their former meeting house. It was not until April 12, 1843, that the present parcel of land was acquired "...in behalf of the proprietors of the Meeting House which we now contemplate building on Harpswell Island."/2 The present church was apparently erected during the following months. Between 1840 and the Civil War the society witnessed its greatest period of growth, but this momentum was hindered by the establishment in 1864 of the First Christian Church in Cundy's Harbor. Despite an initial expressed interest in sharing the costs to support a minister, the two congregations apparently drifted apart and the First Christians built a separate house of worship in 1877./3 By the early twentieth century the Free Will Baptist congregation was in steep decline. Services were discontinued and then revived in the 1930s when initial attempts to restore the building were made. The restoration project was taken up by the Sebascodegan Island Garden Club in the 1960s, and the efforts of this organization continue today with occasional religious and community use of the building.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Wheeler, George A. and Henry W. History of Brunswick, Topsham and Harpswell, Maine.  
Boston, 1875

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**

Acreage of property Less than 1

UTM References

A 

1	9
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5	2	7	6	2	0
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4	8	5	4	3	3	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 of less than one acre occupies the Town of Harpswell tax map U-44, lot 1.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the entire lot historically associated with the East Harpswell Free Will Baptist Church.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Kirk F. Mohny, Architectural Historian  
organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date April, 1988  
street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/289-2132  
city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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A comparison of the interior plans utilized in Maine's historic church buildings reveals the rarity of the reverse plan; an arrangement in which the sanctuary is located at the entrance end of the building. Approximately twelve churches that employed this plan have been tentatively identified statewide, and of these at least three have been totally reoriented on the interior and at least one is no longer standing. Of the remainder, the Free Will Baptist Church (N.R. 7/21/83) in Lincolnville, was built in 1820-21. Its decided Federal period form utilizes a two-story configuration that underscores the existence of an interior gallery.

While both the Lincolnville and East Harpswell churches share the fundamental reverse plan characteristic, their architectural clothing is obviously much different. In fact, they are virtually identical to their more conformist Federal and Greek Revival cousins. This similarity demonstrates the significance of the plan itself. Unfortunately, there seems to have been little scholarly study of this arrangement. One source suggests that the plan may have been developed in Connecticut about 1812./<sup>4</sup> It has not been proven, however, that the configuration was limited to one denomination, although in Maine it appears to have been particularly popular among Baptist congregations./<sup>5</sup> One plausible theory has been advanced to explain the plan: namely, that the shift from the standard eighteenth century New England meeting house form to a more formal traditional design that placed the sanctuary in the preeminent place visible upon entering the church was too much of a return to Anglicanism for many people./<sup>6</sup> In this context the "reverse plan" de-emphasized the symbolic position of the sanctuary since only upon entering one's pew would you then face it. Whatever its doctrinal origins may be, it remains a fact that existing churches in Maine employing such a configuration are extremely rare. Therefore, those that do survive assume special significance in the study of nineteenth century religious and architectural history.

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Endnotes

- /1. The early history of the Free Will Baptist Church is found in George A. and Henry W. Wheeler, History of Brunswick, Topsham and Harpswell, Maine (Boston, 1875).
- /2. Cumberland County Deeds, Book 183, page 242.
- /3. Harpswell Town Report, 1972, p. 37.
- /4. Stephen T. Whitney to Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr., November 16, 1981, Maine Churches file, Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta.
- /5. A study of reverse plan churches in Rockingham County, Massachusetts by Phil Zimmerman showed its use by Baptists, Congregationalists and Methodists. Typescript copy of this paper is on file at Boston University's American Studies Program, hereinafter referenced as Zimmerman Study.
- /6. Zimmerman Study, p. 39. Zimmerman rejected the ideas that the plan was either more economical to build, was developed as an adjustment to compass orientations (since the churches face in all directions), or that it allowed the minister to more easily see the comings and goings of the congregation.