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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 South Sutton Meeting House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 17 Meeting House Hill Road N/A not for publication

city or town South Sutton N/A vicinity

state New Hampshire code NH county Merrimack code 013 zip code 03273

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.)

Nancy C. Miller 4/22/93
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
NEW HAMPSHIRE
State of 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 the 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:) _____

entered in the
National Register

Signature of the Keeper Levon Byer Date of Action 5/27/93

South Sutton Meeting House
Name of Property

Merrimack County, NH
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	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	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

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY: Greek Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: Granite

walls WOOD: Weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

Narrative Description

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

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Description

The South Sutton Meeting House is a rectangular, wood-frame church building that stands in the center of one of three villages of the township of Sutton, New Hampshire. The building is placed at the top of a glacially-formed knoll that elevates the structure to the highest point in the village center. In front of the building, separated from it by a narrow public road, is a triangular green or common on which stands a Civil War soldiers' monument erected in 1891. Together, the monument, the green, and the church building define an axis in common with that of the road that approaches and passes through the village from the south. The building thus gains great visibility and a feeling of monumentality among the smaller wooden stores and dwellings of the village.

The meeting house is a gable-roofed structure with the gable end facing south, surmounted by a tower and serving as the facade. The building measures 40'-5" in width and 50'-6 1/2" in length, and is treated as a high one-story structure except in the front (south) bay; this is divided into two stories with a first-floor entry and a gallery above. The building stands on a foundation of split granite underpinning, and has a shallow basement that is accessible from a stairway in the southeast corner of the front entry. The basement was excavated well after the building was constructed (probably in the 1890s), permitting the installation of a large, wood-fueled warm-air furnace, the first central heating in the building.

The exterior walls of the building and the tower are clapboarded and have simple trim in keeping with the Greek Revival style. The front of the building has two doorways on the first-floor level, each with a seven-panel door of a characteristic Greek Revival pattern. The doors are flanked by four-light sidelights and surrounded by symmetrically-moulded casings with plinth blocks, faceted upper corner blocks, and faceted central panels derived from plates in Asher Benjamin's The Practice of Architecture (1833). Above these twin doorways is a single central three-part window lighting the gallery. The central window opening, with twelve-over-eight-light sashes, is separated by mullions from flanking three-over-two-light side windows. The entire three-part window is fitted with wide louvered exterior blinds.

A deeply-projecting cornice extends along both sides of the building and returns across the facade to define a closed pediment. In the center of the tympanum of this pediment is a semielliptical fan that screens an attic window.

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Description (continued)

Rising from the front roof bay of the meeting house is a three-stage tower. The clapboarded lower stage has simple corner boards and a bold cornice which, like that of the main building, is composed of a cyma crown moulding above a Grecian ovolo bed moulding. The cornice of this stage is surmounted by a lattice balustrade with a plinth and urn finial at each corner. The second stage of the tower has a pointed opening, flanked by two pairs of pilasters, on each of its four faces. The third stage is similar to the second, except that its scale is smaller and its pointed arches are filled with louvered blinds instead of being open. The four-sided dome above this stage has a pointed profile and is surmounted by a tall mast with a ball finial and an ornamented wrought iron weathervane.

The side elevations of the building both have three twenty-five-over-twenty-light sashes with narrow ovolo muntins, typical of Federal and Greek Revival work in northern New England. Two rows of panes in the upper sashes are covered with fixed louvered blinds, while the remainder of each window has hinged blinds on each side.

The rear (north) elevation of the building is treated very simply, with two twenty-five-over-twenty-light windows toward each outer corner and no other openings. The roof line of the rear wall has simple two-part rake boards instead of the projecting cornice that marks the front of the building.

The frame of the building combines hewn and sawn members. Except for the front entry bay (which is supported by a series of hewn and sawn common joists), the first floor frame is composed of two heavy beams running through the structure longitudinally and supporting the ends of sleepers fashioned from rounded tree boles, hewn flat on top to receive the floor boards. The wall posts of the structure are hidden within the thickness of the plastered walls.

The roof is constructed with a massive frame derived from eighteenth-century precedents. The roof frame is composed of five sets of heavy, hewn principal rafters and tie beams. The three inner rafter couples, above the auditorium, have king posts extending from their apexes to their tie beams. From each king post, two diagonal struts rise to support the midpoint of each rafter. The kingposts are linked together by heavy longitudinal tie beams mortised into each post at mid-height. These ties are braced by diagonal struts mortised into the tops and bottoms of each tie and extending up or down to mortises in the king posts, thus providing a rigid frame running

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Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Description (continued)

longitudinally through the center of the building above the auditorium ceiling. The principal rafters support a series of sawn purlins which, in turn, support common rafters fashioned from spruce poles with their tops hewn flat to receive the roof sheathing. Sheathing boards are nailed longitudinally from common rafter to common rafter and covered with modern asphalt shingles.

The three-stage tower of the building rests on heavy horizontal members at each level, beginning at the tie beams of the front bays of the building. The hewn posts of each successive stage of the tower are well braced to their corresponding sawn plates and fit within the frame of the stage below. The uppermost stage of the tower and its wooden dome are supported by a post that rises through the center of the tower and emerges as a spire above the dome.

The interior of the meeting house is characterized by clarity of plan and simplicity of detailing. The two exterior doors open on a broad entry that extends across the entire front of the building. At the right-hand (east) end of the entry is a partition that encloses the stairs leading to the basement; at the left (west) end is a similar partition enclosing stairs that ascend to the gallery. Opposite the exterior doors, in a plastered partition that separates the entry from the auditorium, are two inner doorways with five-panel doors opening onto two broad carpeted aisles that lead to the dais at the northern end of the building.

The auditorium is a large wainscoted room with plastered upper walls and a coved ceiling. The window casings are composed of three simple stepped fillets meeting at square blocks in each upper corner. The coved ceiling is echoed by the concave curved front of the gallery, which is a simple plastered breastwork defined at its top and bottom by wooden architraves with flat Grecian ovolo mouldings.

The center of the room contains a double row of pine slip pews with open, curved arms at the aisle ends. Between the aisles and the outer walls of the room are single rows of the same pews. Two rows of pews at the north end of the room are set at right angles to the rest, facing a central dais. All pews and the wainscoting of the room retain painted graining imitating oak and maple and done during repairs in 1899; the two doors leading to the front entry are similarly decorated.

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Section number 7 Page 4

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Description (continued)

At the north end of the auditorium is a low dais constructed of vertical beaded pine sheathing. In keeping with New England custom established during the Greek Revival era, this dais is furnished with a simple reading desk, chairs, and a sofa.

The gallery has four single rows of pews of the same pattern as those on the main floor below, and a slanted floor that provides visibility for all gallery pews. At the southeast corner of the gallery is a plastered enclosure for the stairs leading to the building's attic and tower; this balances a similar enclosure for the upper run of the gallery stairs at the southwest corner.

The room is lighted by an eight-branch kerosene chandelier installed in 1899. The building has no electricity.

Original appearance. Both the exterior and the interior of the meeting house have changed slightly since the building was completed in 1839. Following damage by lightning in 1898, balustrades above the cornices of the two upper stages of the tower were removed. At the same time, the interior was altered by the lowering of the dais; as revealed by evidence in the flooring beneath it, the dais was widened somewhat at this time, resulting in removal of flanking pews on either side. Probably at the same time, Norfolk thumb latches on the building's two outer and two inner first-floor doors were replaced by mortise latches with ceramic knobs. When the furnace was installed in the building, possibly during the same repairs, a former stove chimney at the rear (north) of the building was removed and a second stove chimney, west of the ridge, was extended to the newly-dug cellar to serve the furnace.¹ Beyond these alterations, the meeting house remains in unaltered condition except for routine maintenance carried out over the years.

Notes

¹Kearsarge Independent (newspaper), August 26, 1898; November 25, 1898; May 10, 1899; August 4, 1899; December 29, 1899.

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.

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 grave.
- D** a 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1839

Significant Dates

1839, 1899

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

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:

South Sutton Meeting House
Name of Property

Merrimack County, NH
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approx. one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	19	261980	4800380
Zone	Easting	Northing	
2			

3			
Zone	Easting	Northing	
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title James L. Garvin, Architectural Historian

organization NH Division of Historical Resources date March 1993

street & number 19 Pillsbury Street -- PO BOX 2043 telephone (603) 271-3483

city or town Concord state NH zip code 03302-2043

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name South Sutton Meeting House Association, c/o George G. Wells

street & number PO Box 446 telephone (603) 927-4472

city or town South Sutton state NH zip code 03273

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Section number 8 Page 5

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Statement of Significance

The South Sutton Meeting House is significant under National Register Criterion C as a little-altered rural church that represents a widespread vernacular building type that appeared in New Hampshire when a new law encouraged religious diversification. The meeting house also reflects the application of the Greek Revival style to rural church buildings. The property retains integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association for the period of significance 1839, the date of construction. The building satisfies Criteria Consideration A because it is nominated for its architectural distinction rather than for its history of use as a religious structure.

The South Sutton Meeting House is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a type of rural church building that appeared in New Hampshire after 1820. Buildings of this type evolved in response to a proliferation of religious sects that followed the abolition of established, town-supported churches in New Hampshire.

Prior to 1819, most small New Hampshire towns maintained a meeting house that served both religious and secular needs. Such buildings were used on Sundays as meeting places for the adherents of one or more religious societies in the community. Most communities had a single "standing order" or "orthodox" church that possessed the sole right to use the meeting house for religious meetings and enjoyed a measure of town sponsorship through taxation to support its minister. In the majority of New Hampshire towns, the Congregational church was the "standing order;" in a few, a Presbyterian or Baptist church would be supported by town taxes.

As other denominations began to multiply in the late 1700s and early 1800s, however, their adherents objected to paying taxes to support an "orthodox" minister with whose tenets they did not agree. Many of these societies also wished to build separate meeting houses of their own, but were prevented from doing so by the burden of being taxed to maintain the town meeting house.

The eventual result was the passage of the "Toleration Act" in 1819.¹ This legislation severed the connection between church and town, making support of a religious organization a voluntary act.² Passage of this law frequently resulted in the physical as well as the legal separation of town and church,

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Section number 8 Page 6

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Statement of Significance (continued)

with the town often taking steps to acquire sole ownership of the old meeting house for use as a town hall. At the same time, all sects that could afford to do so, including the "orthodox" church, often built modern meeting houses to be used strictly for religious purposes. The architectural result, at least in prosperous communities, was a proliferation of religious buildings during the 1820s and 1830s and the appearance of a new form of church structure.

New Hampshire churches built from about 1800 up to this time had generally followed some variation of Asher Benjamin's "Design for a Meeting House," published in his 1798 The Country Builder's Assistant. This design illustrated a meeting house with a tower that rested partly on the main roof of the building and partly on the gable roof of a shallow pavilion projecting forward from the front of the main body of the structure.

In the early 1820s, however, William Abbot (1793-1837), a joiner and master builder from Boscawen, New Hampshire, constructed several meeting houses in various parts of the state. These buildings established the practice of supporting a three-stage tower fully on the roof of the building, leaving the facade uninterrupted and the gable free to suggest the triangular pediment of the classic temple. The South Sutton building follows this formula.

It is not known how Abbot adopted this design; perhaps he took the suggestion from a plate in the 1820 edition of Asher Benjamin's The American Builder's Companion, showing a temple-fronted church with a tower wholly supported in its roof.³ In 1823, Abbot and carpenter George T. Pillsbury (1792-1836), both from Webster, constructed a Congregational meeting house on Corser Hill in that town, some eleven miles from South Sutton. The Corser Hill building is Federal or neoclassical in style and has a closed triangular pediment topped by a three-stage tower. Abbot followed this building with several others that gradually evolved in their stylistic vocabulary to the Greek Revival, a style to which the pedimented facade of Abbot's design was especially well suited. In addition to the Corser Hill meeting house, other examples of Abbot's prototype group survive in Wentworth (1828) and Henniker (1834), New Hampshire.⁴

As the Greek Revival style supplanted the Federal, the pedimented meeting house design grew ever more popular. Many such structures were built by various sects during the 1830s and later, becoming almost a standard design

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National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 7

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Statement of Significance (continued)

for medium-sized meeting houses across New Hampshire, with an especially strong concentration in the Lake Sunapee region in the western part of the state. Among the meeting houses that share the general body and tower design seen in South Sutton are buildings in Acworth (1844), Bennington (1839), Bradford Center (1838), Bow Bog (1835), Candia (1846), Canterbury (1852), Chesterfield (1844), Chesterfield, Spofford Village (1853), East Concord (1841), East Croydon (1854), Croydon Flat (1854), Danbury (1828), Durham (1848), Gilmanton Lower Village (1842), Hudson Center (1841), Loudon Village (1827), Lyndeboro Center (1837), Mason (1837), Milford (1834), Stratham (1837), Tamworth (1832), Temple (1842), Warner (1833), Warner Lower Village (1844), Washington (1840), Webster (1839), East Wilton (1852), and Windham (1835).

Of all these buildings, the South Sutton Meeting House is probably the least altered. The structure stands nearly as it did upon its completion in 1839; it is virtually unchanged following the repairs of 1899. By contrast, most other structures of the type have undergone renovations ranging from simple window alterations to complete redesign of many interior or exterior features. The Acworth building was moved in 1867 and had its tower, windows, and pews altered at that time; Bennington had an addition on the rear in 1884 and was remodeled on the interior in 1979; Bradford Center had its gallery remodeled into a vestry in 1881; Bow Bog had its gallery enclosed for a vestry and a pressed metal ceiling installed, but has been restored; Candia had its steeple altered for a tower clock in 1877; Canterbury was moved to become the chapel of a private school in 1964; Chesterfield lost the third stage of its tower; Chesterfield, Spofford Village had stained glass windows installed; East Concord had an addition on the rear in 1887, with new pews and stained glass windows at that time; East Croydon had its gallery enclosed as a vestry and a pressed metal ceiling installed; Croydon Flat had a pressed metal ceiling installed; Danbury was moved in 1855; Durham had an addition on the rear in 1923, with later remodelings; Gilmanton Lower Village had its gallery converted to a vestry before 1890 and pressed metal installed on walls and ceilings in the first decade of the twentieth century; Hudson Center had its auditorium remodeled in 1860 and an addition on the rear in 1897; Loudon had stained glass windows, and an addition on one side; Lyndeboro Center had its interior remodeled in 1886 and its exterior remodeled in 1896; Mason had a room built within its former choir area in 1887; Milford had its interior renewed after a fire in 1947; Stratham was remodeled in 1877 and redecorated

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South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Statement of Significance (continued)

in 1892; Tamworth was remodeled in 1860; Temple had its windows replaced by stained glass in 1890; Warner had its steeple removed and was converted to a Masonic temple in 1964; Warner Lower Village lost its steeple in a storm about 1893; Webster had its original windows replaced by stained glass; East Wilton had an addition on the rear in 1860 and its choir loft remodeled in 1870; and Windham had its windows altered, with other alterations, in 1874.

Both because of its original design and its extraordinary degree of integrity, the South Sutton Meeting House is an important document of the proliferation of religious buildings in New Hampshire during the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century. It both illustrates the dominant vernacular form for such structures and retains the architectural detailing given to church buildings during a period of major social change and religious diversification in New England society.

Notes

¹Laws of New Hampshire: Vol. 8, Second Constitutional Period, 1811-1820 (Concord, N.H.: 1920), pp. 820-821.

²Everett S. Stackpole, History of New Hampshire, 5 vols. (New York: American Historical Society, 1916-17), IV:230.

³Dexter Bailey Dawes II, "The 'Bulfinch' Church of Peterborough, New Hampshire: Destruction of a Town Myth," Old-Time New England 48 (1958), 107-110, iv.

⁴Charles Carleton Coffin, The History of Boscawen and Webster, from 1733 to 1878 (Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1878), pp. 430, 464-65, 595-96.

Bibliography

Coffin, Charles Carleton. The History of Boscawen and Webster, from 1733 to 1878. Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1878.

Kearsarge Independent (newspaper). Warner, N.H.: August 26, 1898-December 29, 1899.

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Section number 9,10 Page 9

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH

Bibliography (continued)

Worthen, Augusta Harvey, comp. The History of Sutton, New Hampshire, 2 vols.
Concord, N.H.: Republican Press Association, 1890.

Verbal boundary description

The boundaries of the nominated property are indicated by the heavy black line on the attached sketch map. The property is a portion of parcel 251-403.

Verbal boundary justification

The boundaries of the nominated property include the meeting house itself and its immediate setting.

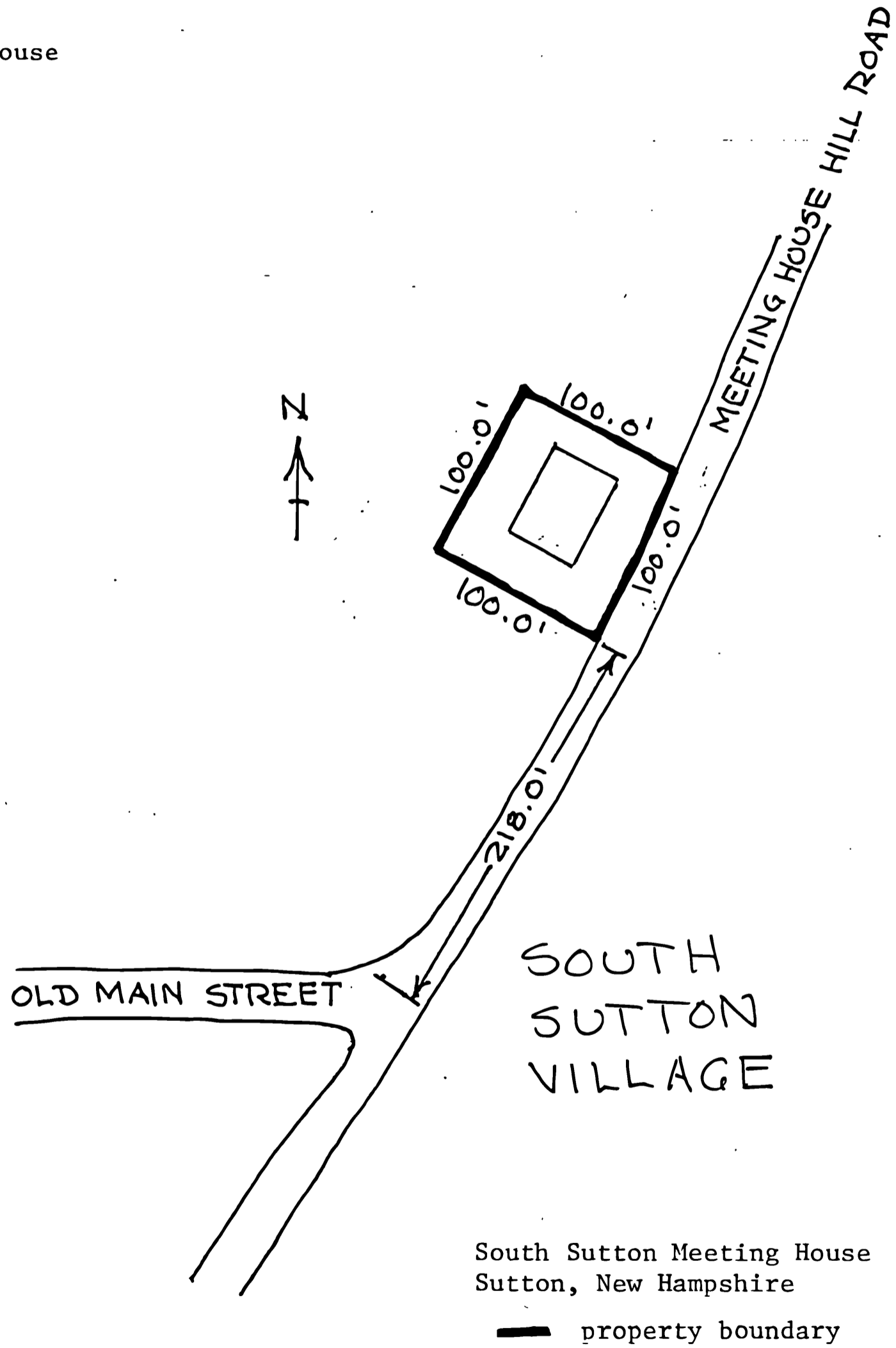
This certifies that the appearance has not changed since these photographs were taken.

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Section number 10 Page 10

South Sutton Meeting House
Merrimack County, NH



South Sutton Meeting House
Sutton, New Hampshire

— property boundary