

7/5

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received NOV 25 1986

date entered APR 15 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Stephen Coffin House/Skidompha Library

and or common Skidompha Library

2. Location

street & number Main Street not for publication

city, town Damariscotta, N/A vicinity of

state Maine code 23 county Lincoln code 015

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 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: library & bookstore

4. Owner of Property

name Skidompha Library Association

street & number Main Street

city, town Damariscotta, vicinity of state Maine

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Lincoln County Registry of Deeds

street & number

city, town Wiscasset, state Maine

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Stephen Coffin House is a square, two-story frame structure with shallow hipped roof. Attached to the rear west corner is a 2½-story frame wing with gable roof. Attached to the rear east side and corner is a contemporary (1974 and 1980) one-story frame addition with shallow gable roof. All sections are clapboarded.

The main portion has a symmetrical facade of five bays, with an elaborate Federal style surround for the centrally-located door. The surround consists of thin paired pilasters supporting a Doric entablature. The original door and lights had been replaced by the early 20th century with double Italianate doors with arched lights. These were in turn replaced in the mid-20th century with a recessed ensemble of eight-panelled door and thin sidelights. There is an early eight-panelled door with Federal surround in the center of the rear elevation.

The windows in both early sections are almost all early, with 6/6 unweighted sash. There is a shallow moulding around the exterior of the window casings, and small rope and cove mouldings under the eaves of the main section. Virtually all of the clapboards on both of the early sections are riven. On the rear wall of the house, the clapboards have a successively shorter reveal as they approach the sill.

The original floorplan of the main section was typical of the period, with square rooms placed on either side of a central hall, and a rectangular kitchen in the rear west corner. The west wing is entered through a narrow vestibule off the kitchen. The contemporary addition merges with the rear east-side room enveloping the original rear east corner of the house, and cutting a large opening into one wall of the front parlor. Upstairs, the walls separating the two front bedrooms from the hall have been penetrated by extremely wide openings, which essentially create one large room running along the facade. This was probably done in the early 20th century (c. 1922) when the upper story became home to the town's Woman's Club. The reproduction Federal mouldings around the wide openings show evidence of attachment with wire-cut nails.

The woodwork throughout most of the rooms, including most doors and their latches, appear to be early. All mouldings are simple and typical of the period. The right front parlor is slightly more elaborate than the other rooms, having panelled wainscotting, a more ambitious wooden mantel, and a wide crown moulding. Virtually all other rooms have plain wainscotting. The stair newel, balusters, and rail are simple and typical of the period. The corner posts are boxed on the interior.

The present gable roof of the west wing, one of whose slopes is longer than the other, shows evidence of having been added in the mid-19th century. The cornice and door mouldings are in the Greek Revival style. The tops of the original posts have

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

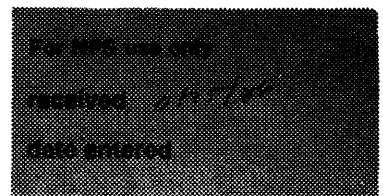
**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

STEPHEN COFFIN HOUSE/SKIDOMPHA LIBRARY

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2



been cut off below where they would have been tenoned into the original plate, and are attached to newer 6"X6", sash-sawn, scarfed plates by iron ties. Some newer posts were added at the same time and joined into the plates.

All of the roof rafters and boards are circular-sawn, and attached by square iron nails. The clapboards on the gable end facing the street are sawn, and have far less of a paint build-up than those on the rest of the store.

The first story of the west wing, a former store, is unfinished, but has been repeatedly whitewashed, and contains a number of crude board partitions. It is presently being used as a bookstore. The second story is a series of simply-finished rooms, the door and window framing plain and the posts boxed. The first story is entered from the gable end facing the street by a narrow door with a Greek Revival style surround. There is another door opening, 5½'X7½', in the center of the store, facing the back yard of the house. Both openings appear to be early, as the riven clapboards around them have not been disturbed.

The foundation of the main house is brick over rubble. The basement floor is partially paved with red brick, and a single course of bricks, laid on their sides, stands one foot from the facade foundation wall. This course turns into one side of a brick drain or raceway along the west side of the basement floor. This may have been part of an early cistern system, although its exact workings are not clear. The beams and joists of the floor above are whitewashed.

The cast-iron fence and gate about the front of the house was placed there sometime in the last few decades, after the house in Newcastle that it originally belonged to was destroyed by fire. It was cast in 1869 at the Damariscotta Mills Iron Foundry, with the name of its original owner, Algernon Austin, embossed on the gate.

Adjoining the west side of the property, and across Main Street, is the Damariscotta Main Street Historic District, which consists almost exclusively of brick commercial structures three to four stories high. To the east and north of the library are residential buildings.

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. 1803 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Although the early history of the Coffin House is somewhat obscure, there is strong evidence that its smaller section is an example of rarely a surviving building type—a Federal period store attached to the merchant's house. The house itself is among the finest and earliest Federal style houses in Damariscotta.

Tradition dates the house at 1803, and claims that Jacob Sleeper was its housewright and original owner, but that it was sold soon after construction to Stephen Coffin, a merchant. A quit-claim deed given by Jacob to Mannassah Sleeper for a parcel with "house and shop" in the general area was recorded in 1806, and Coffin did purchase a lot in the area from Mannassah Sleeper in 1815, but the descriptions of the properties in the two deeds are not identical. No direct transaction between Jacob Sleeper and Coffin is recorded. To further complicate matters, Coffin purchased another lot in the same vicinity from a housewright named Witham in 1807. In that year Coffin was living in Newcastle. The first real evidence of Coffin's ownership of the house is a copy of a map of Damariscotta Village (then part of Nobleboro) drawn by Ira Chamberlain "when 95 years old", purporting to show the village in 1805. The copy dates from 1894. The house is labelled "Mr. Coffin traded in basement when he first came". As Coffin is described in the 1807 deed above as living in Newcastle, Chamberlain's memory may have been a few years off. Provided that it is otherwise accurate, Coffin probably erected the house on the Witham lot soon after 1807, and initially used the paved basement as his store.

If he had purchased the "house and shop" originally owned by the two Sleepers, and said "shop" is identical to the present ell, he would have had little reason to have had to use his basement as a store. It is more likely that the present ell was constructed as a store when Coffin's business outgrew his basement, sometime soon after he erected the house.

That the ell was always either a store or a shop seems almost certain. The side opening, although large, is not large enough to admit a horse and wagon. Neither the clapboards nor sheathing reflect any tampering with either opening. The Greek Revival style door in the gable end is probably too fine for that of a stable in any case, and, given the local chronology of style, is unlikely to have been executed much after 1850. The unusual roof configuration, however, undoubtedly post-dates the adjoining brick structure which was constructed in the 1870s.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Interview with owner.
2. Lincoln County News, Oct. 21, 1971, 'Skidompha Library'.
3. 'Fence Damaged', Lincoln County News, September 14, 1975.
4. "Map of Damariscotta Village in 1805 drawn by Ira Chamberlain when 95 years Old", copy, dated 1894 (Skidompha Library).
5. Lincoln county Deeds: Witham to Coffin (63, 84); Sleeper to Sleeper (59/31); Sleeper to Coffin (90/138)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Damariscotta

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A	<u>19</u>	<u>457420</u>	<u>4875400</u>	B	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	D	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
E	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	F	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
G	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	H	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Verbal boundary description and justification

Assessor's Map 6, lot 77

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gregory K. Clancey/Edited by Roger G. Reed, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date September, 1986

street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/289-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine 04333

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 *Eric S. Feltz*

title S.H.P.O.

date 11/17/86

For NPS use only

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

William B. Bushong
Keeper of the National Register

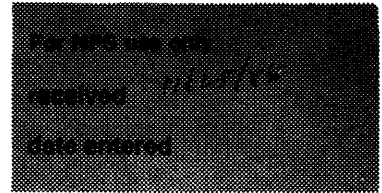
date 4/15/87

Attest: *Betty L. Savage*
Chief of Registration

date 4-15-87

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

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



STEPHEN COFFIN HOUSE/SKIDOMPHA LIBRARY
Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

2

In 1922 the Library Association and the Women's Club of Damariscotta purchased the house and remodelled it for use as a library to serve the three adjoining towns of Damariscotta, Newcastle and Nobleboro. The name "Skidompha" derives from a combination of letters from the names of the charter members of the original local literary club which was founded in the 1880s. The renovations opened up space on both the first and second floors, but were designed in a manner that retains or duplicates the original architectural features. The recent addition on the east side is quite sympathetic and barely visible from the street.

Chamberlain's "1805" map indicates that at least two other houses in the vicinity of Coffin's had basement stores in or around that date. It was from such small and domestic beginnings that the business districts of Damariscotta and most other Maine towns sprang in the early 19th century. Surrounded now by later 19th-century brick commercial blocks, the Coffin house and store survive as an important transitional line in the history of the state's "Main streets".