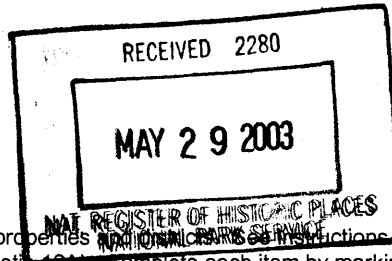


619

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. ~~NATIONAL PARK SERVICE~~ *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 Bell Hill School
other names/site number District Number One School

2. Location

street & number 185 Bell Hill Road N/A not for publication
city or town Otisfield N/A vicinity
state Maine code ME county Oxford code 017 zip code 04270

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.)

James Fitzgerald 5/22/03
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
JHF

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): _____

Edson M. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

7/10/03
Date of Action

BELL HILL SCHOOL
Name of Property

OXFORD CO., 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	
_____	_____	_____ buildings
_____	_____	_____ sites
_____	_____	_____ structures
_____	_____	_____ objects
_____	_____	_____ 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)

EDUCATION /School

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

MUSEUM

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY / Greek Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite
walls Brick

roof Asphalt
other Granite lintels

Narrative Description

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

United States Department of the Interior
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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

DESCRIPTION

The Bell Hill School is a small, brick, one-story, one-room schoolhouse located atop Bell Hill, in the rural Oxford County Town of Otisfield, Maine. Constructed in 1839, the gable-fronted structure is situated about 30 feet from the road, and faces west to the White Mountains. The simple building is rectangular in form, measures approximately 18 x 30 feet, and sits on a granite foundation. The low pitched roof, now covered with asphalt shingles, is supported by narrow box cornices with ogee moulding on the eave walls. This same decorative detail is present in the rake on the western facade, however, the rear of the building has flat, tapered rake trim. Very diminutive wooden cornices return across the brick corners. The main facade is divided into three bays, consisting of a central, wooden, four-panel door with applied, beveled molding, flanked on either side by a six-over-six double hung windows. Both the north and west elevations support three evenly spaced six-over-six windows, while another pair are located on either side of the external brick chimney in the center of the east elevation. Each of these windows is topped with a polished granite lintel, with the exception of the two windows in the north east corner, where the original lintel has been replaced with a rougher replacement.

In the peak of the western gable is a brick arch, now filled in with brick. Photographs from c. 1899 indicate that at one time the arch was filled with a wooden board. Its original ornamentation is not known at present.

The brick is laid in a Flemish bond on the west facade and north elevations, while the rear and south walls are of an American Common bond. However, the brick has been patched over the years, and where an ongoing, but sensitive, repointing has occurred it is difficult to establish if the east and south walls were originally laid in the American Common bond, or if they have been rebuilt.

An ancient tapered wooden flag pole is positioned at the northwest corner of the school. Three roughly faced granite posts are positioned along the rock wall about 10 feet south of the school; another post is located off the northwest corner of the building. These posts once supported an horizontal plank fence. Wooden shutters were added to protect the windows in 1976.

The interior of the Bell Hill School house contains a small, but full width, entry foyer at the west end of the building, through which is accessed the classroom that fills the remainder of the structure. In the south end of the entry is a towel rack, shelf and washbasin for the students. The east, north and south walls of the classroom and the entire entry are plaster above irregular and wide, horizontal wainscoting. To the left of the door to the entry foyer, the west wall of the classroom is covered with a black painted fiber-board, used as a chalk board. Under this board the wall is sheathed with horizontal bead board wainscot. Another blackboard is located on the south wall; the material of this blackboard is literally that of black painted wide boards. The full height ceiling gently arches above three cased girls. A Wehrle Log Wood #130 stove is located between the two rows of desks at the rear of the room. The floor of the classroom is of narrow hardwood.

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Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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In 1902 a woodshed and outhouse was attached to the north wall of the school. To do so, the rear section of the north wall, including one window, was removed and a door added between the woodshed and the school. This addition was removed shortly after the school was closed in 1940. The brick was then repaired and the window re-installed.

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 a 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.

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 # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION

Period of Significance

1939 - 1940

Significant Dates

1839

C. 1902

1940

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

Section number 8 Page 2

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The one room school house was a familiar object in the rural landscape of nineteenth and early twentieth century Maine. This was the result of a traditional educational system in which towns subdivided themselves into school districts, each of which contained a school house to serve its particular locale. Although the district school system became a target for nineteenth century school reformers, its affect was to produce a vast number and variety of buildings; a figure which at the turn-of-the-century totaled more than 4,000. Twentieth century school consolidation efforts have taken a dramatic toll on the number of these buildings which survive. In 1960, for example, it was reported that only 226 schools in Maine were being held in one-room buildings, a figure which has since dropped to a mere handful (*Report of the State Board of Education*). The Bell Hill School is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A as an excellent example of a brick, one-room schoolhouse, that educated a rural and changing population in Otisfield Maine for over 100 years.

Erected in 1839, the Bell Hill school was part of the second wave of public-building construction atop Bell Hill. Just a year earlier a new Congregational Church was started about 100 feet to the north, meant to later replace the earlier (secular and religious) meeting house. The earliest settlers in town had chosen to settle on Bell Hill in part due to the relatively longer growing season found at higher elevations. The first church was built on the hill in 1795. According to one description, "the town's first school consisted of a frame addition to early settler David Ray's 1783 log house northeast of Bell Hill in the Rayville section of town; the first town-supported schoolhouses were raised in five "district" location in 1798-99." (Bennett, p. 316-317). By 1800, the precursor to the current Bell Hill School had been built as the District Number 1 school to serve the population of this early settlement.

The current Bell Hill Schoolhouse was one of three brick school houses erected by the town in 1839. Historic photographs indicate that the three schools were very similar in exterior plan, sharing gable front entrances, low pitched roofs, rear chimneys and granite lintels and foundations. Neither the Gore School or the Spurrs Corner School exist currently; however some of the desks currently in the Bell Hill school may have original come from these schools, or one of the other school houses that were once located in the town. Neither the architect nor the mason are known.

The construction of the Bell Hill schoolhouse coincided with the highest population level in Otisfield's history to date. Between 1800 and 1840 the population of the town jumped from 541 to 1307 residents. As the population grew, the number of new settlements increased as well, and eventually fourteen one-room schoolhouses were erected. "Starting in the second part of the nineteenth century, Otisfield, like other southern Maine towns, suffered a steady decline in agricultural production and income. So many left for better opportunities in the Midwest that the population of Maine's cities and towns fell precipitously. Otisfield was no exception. From a peak of 1307 in 1840 the population declined over a hundred years to only 488 in 1940." (Hankins and Hankins, p. 4). Ironically, the Bell Hill schoolhouse, which opened in 1839, weathered this decline in its entirety, not closing its doors until 1840. The Bell Hill neighborhood was not

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BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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immune from the population loss during the 19th century, however, but in the second decade of the twentieth century Bell Hill became home to a numerous Finnish immigrants who purchased the area's abandoned farms. Indeed, historic photographs in the collection of the Otisfield Historical Society depict Bell Hill students posing out side of their school, and in 1916, 5 of the 15 students had Finnish surnames. While other town schools were closed, moved or consolidated in the early 20th century the Bell Hill School remained open until the Town voted "to close the Bell Hill School owing to the unsafe condition of the building". (Spurr, p. 71). In 1955 the town sold the school to the Bell Hill Meeting House Association, and the building has been restored and is open to the public at least once each summer. As the only remaining one-room schoolhouse that has not been turned into a private residence, this building is a touchstone to the history of the earliest settlement in Otisfield.

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BELL HILL SCHOOL

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

Annual Report of the Superintendent of Common Schools in the State of Maine. Augusta, Maine: Stevens & Sayward, various years.

Annual report of the Municipal Offices of the town of Otisfield. (Otisfield), 1976.

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

Clayton, W.W. History of Cumberland Co., Maine. With illustrations and biographical sketches of its prominent men and pioneers. (Philadelphia: Everts and Peck), 1880.

Hankins, Jean and David. A Short History of Otisfield, Maine. (Otisfield Historical Society), 1998.

BELL HILL SCHOOL
Name of Property

OXFORD CO., MAINE
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1/10 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 19 375141 4882562
Zone Easting Northing

3 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 19 _____
Zone Easting Northing

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 CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN

organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 16 APRIL 2003

street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132

city or town AUGUSTA state ME zip code 04333-0065

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 _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Bell Hill School property is fully described by the Town of Otisfield tax map R8, lot 25.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated boundaries represent all the property historically associated with the Bell Hill School.

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BELL HILL SCHOOL

OXFORD CO., MAINE

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 2
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
14 March 2003
West facade, facing east.

Photograph 2 of 2
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
14 March 2003
Interior classroom, facing southwest.