

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED JAN 30 1976  
DATE ENTERED JUN 3 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC  Bingham Free Meeting House  
AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER West side, Route 201  
South Main Street  
CITY, TOWN Bingham VICINITY OF Second  
STATE Maine CODE 23 COUNTY Somerset CODE 025

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" 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	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Historic Landmark

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Town of Bingham  
STREET & NUMBER Selectmen's Office  
CITY, TOWN Bingham VICINITY OF STATE Maine

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Somerset County Registry of Deeds, Skowhegan  
STREET & NUMBER  
CITY, TOWN Skowhegan STATE Maine

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
DATE  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
CITY, TOWN STATE

# 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      DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

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## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Bingham Free Meeting House of 1835-36 prominently displays a Federal style design with tastefully blended Gothic Revival elements.

The construction of the church consists of a wood frame upon a granite foundation. The exterior of the building is sheathed with clapboards and detailed with wood trim. The church itself is a simple rectangle with a gable roof running the entire length. At the front of the roof a square tower base rises, with only a slightly projecting moulding separating its front face from the facade.

The entrance facade on the Meeting House is noticeably free of any interrupting mouldings which leaves the face of the church delicately textured with its even clapboards. The only sculptural relief is provided by the Federal style doorways, which are evenly spaced along with a third unit, a window, across the facade at the ground level. Above each element at the balcony level is a window like the one at the ground level. Each door is flanked by wide pilasters and capped by a wide architrave and dramatically projecting cornice moulding, a feature noticeably absent from the rest of the church. The side elevation shows a row of four equally spaced windows of exactly the same type as those on the front. The rear elevation is composed of three of the same windows, equally spaced at ground level, with the center unit raised above the others. All of these windows are crowned by louvred panels in the pointed arch motif of the Gothic Revival. The entire window unit is surrounded by a narrow moulding which is almost flush with the clapboards.

The square tower base displays a louvred circular "sunburst" panel on the front and both sides. This panel is encircled by the same moulding used on the windows. The square section is crowned by a railing with balustrades and corner posts topped by small Gothic Revival pinnacles. Within the railing eight columns support the steeple. Each pair of columns supports a wide architrave with a basket arch cut between the columns. A graceful bell-shaped steeple rises from the projecting cornice above the architrave, providing a restrained culmination to a disciplined progression. The summit of the steeple is made complete by a pinnacle which bears a wrought iron weathervane.

The simplicity of the exterior is continued on the interior. The large auditorium was designed with a raised pulpit at the front, pews on the main floor and a second floor gallery at the rear. All of these features were executed in restrained Federal Style woodwork. While the pew doors and the gallery were removed in a 1902 remodelling, the meeting room retains its original light and spacious atmosphere as well as its pulpit, pews and woodwork.

The Bingham Free Meeting House represents a frontier Maine church in which the strong influence of traditional Federal period design is enhanced by the presence of the incoming romantic Gothic Revival.

# 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 checked="" 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/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      1835-36

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Bingham Free Meeting House is significant as the earliest church building used by the first religious organization north of Caratunk Falls on the Kennebec River in the Maine wilderness. It is also noteworthy as an early ecumenical experiment at a time when denominational lines were ordinarily very strictly drawn.

The Town of Bingham takes its name from William Bingham of Philadelphia, land speculator and entrepreneur, who had served the Revolutionary cause as agent for obtaining supplies and munitions from France through a base which he established on the island of Martinique. Following the war he became one of the wealthiest men in America and acquired vast land holdings not the least of which was an immense area in central Maine granted to him and Gen. Henry Knox by the Massachusetts Legislature.

Although the earliest known settler in the area came there in 1764, the first legal property titles were not granted by Bingham and Knox until 1800

In 1805, a "Society Meeting" was formed by Mrs. Elizabeth Goodrich which met every Sabbath for religious observances. Shortly thereafter, a Congregational Church was organized. For a number of years there was no specific place for public worship and meetings were held in homes of the members. After 1815 the local schoolhouse was employed for this purpose.

By 1835 the town had increased in size and prosperity. In response to Mrs. Goodrich's often repeated words, "You are building better homes for yourselves, but none for God," the Union Free Meeting House Society was formed. This organization erected the church on a hill south of the village between 1835 and 1836.

The construction of the meeting house was entirely a local effort. The timber was cut from the banks of the local Austin Stream. The builders came from Bingham and the nearby towns of Concord and North Anson. Surviving records are unclear as to who designed the church and who oversaw its construction. The result was a restrained but handsome structure of traditional form. The influence of the passing Federal style was exhibited in the doorways and both interior and exterior woodwork, while the emerging Gothic Revival was displayed in the pointed arch windows as well as the pinnacles at each corner of the tower. The total cost of the church came to just under \$2,000. It was dedicated on October 29, 1836.

(See continuation sheet)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bingham Sesquicentennial History, Skowhegan, 1962

Records of the Society for Building a Meeting-House in Bingham, Maine, typescript copy in the Maine State Library, Augusta, Maine.

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	9	4	3	0	4	7	15	4	9	8	8	9	2	15
ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING						

B 

ZONE				EASTING				NORTHING					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

no person own land  
 no one else own

9.11.76

10/29/76

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
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# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Frank A. Beard, Historic Preservationist  
Mark Wilcox, Student Assistant

ORGANIZATION Maine Historic Preservation Commission DATE December, 1975

STREET & NUMBER 31 Western Avenue TELEPHONE 207-289-2133

CITY OR TOWN Augusta STATE Maine

# 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 *Harwin Gullett* DATE 1/26/76

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<u><i>John T. ...</i></u> DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE <u>6/3/96</u>
ATTEST: <u><i>Charles ...</i></u>	DATE <u>6-2-76</u>
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
<u>RBR for WJM 6-2-76</u>	

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

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Because of the variety of religious persuasions then existing in the community, the church building was so arranged that any one of the various denominations might have the use of it at some time. There were fifty-two pews, one for each Sunday in the year, and any pew owner might, on the Sunday corresponding to his pew number, choose and provide such preaching and service as he wished. The Congregational Church, however, being the only organized body, soon took over the building and installed the first minister.

From this time the church prospered for many years, but by 1902, a new Congregational Church building having been erected in the center of town, attendance fell off. The building was remodelled inside, removing the gallery, four rows of pews and the pew doors. Electric lights were also installed.

Eventually services ceased to be held in the building but final razing of the structure was prevented when the Kennebec Chapter of the D.A.R. raised funds and acquired title to it in 1916. Finding maintenance of the building too great a burden, the D.A.R. later transferred ownership to the Town of Bingham as a local landmark.

The Bingham Free Meeting House is a tangible and direct tie with earliest religious strivings in the Kennebec wilderness and stands as a reminder of a noble, if short lived, effort toward denominational cooperation and toleration.