

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received OCT 11 1985
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Starksboro Village Meeting House

and/or common Starksboro Village Meeting House

2. Location

street & number Vermont Route 116

N/A not for publication

city, town Starksboro Village N/A vicinity of

state Vermont code 50 county Addison code 001

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object | N/A 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: community |

4. Owner of Property

name Starksboro Village Meeting House Society

street & number c/o Bertha Hanson, Recording Secretary RD 2, Box 283

city, town Bristol N/A vicinity of state Vermont 05443

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Starksboro Town Clerk's Office

street & number N/A

city, town Starksboro state Vermont 05487

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Vermont Historic Sites and Structures Survey has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date June 19, 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

city, town Montpelier state Vermont

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 | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Starksboro Village Meeting House is a rectangular three by three bay one story tall structure on a high fieldstone basement with its main entrance in the center of the gable front. Located in the heart of Starksboro Village on the west side of Vermont Route 116, it is distinguished on the exterior by pointed arch windows and a two stage belfry crowned with simple cresting, and inside by its original furnishings, grained woodwork, and a large kerosene lamp chandelier. It stands as a good example of the Gothic Revival style.

The Meeting House is located in the middle of its 82 1/2 foot wide and 132 foot deep lot on the west side of Vermont Route 116 in Starksboro Village. It is the only building on the lot. It is a one story high rectangular clapboard sided wood frame structure on a tall fieldstone basement wall, and is three bays wide and three deep with the main entrance in the center of the front (east) gable end. The moderately pitched roof has returned eaves and is covered with asphalt shingles. Rising from the front roof peak near the northwest corner of the building is a two stage belfry, also sided with clapboards. A brick chimney emerges from close to the rear (west) roof peak near the northwest corner of the building. The tall pointed arch Gothic Revival style windows of the first floor are made up of two narrow vertical sashes (the top sash has twelve panes, the bottom has nine regular panes with six smaller panes in a geometrical pattern at the bottom) topped by a fixed pointed arch sash with curved intersecting muntins. The wide basement windows have twelve (two rows of six panes) over twelve sash. All corner boards on the building are plain. A simple Greek Revival style molding enriches the cornice line of the gable ends and the eave sides, wrapping around the building corners under the returned eaves to give the effect of a capital.

In the center of the main facade (the east gable end) of the Meeting House is its formal entrance. Double doors, each with four panels edged by simple Greek Revival style molding, are framed by a surround derived from the Federal style with entry pilasters and an entablature. Above the door is a fixed pointed arch sash, and a similar sash is found in the gable peak. Centered on the roof peak above the door is a two stage belfry, each side containing a fixed pointed arch louvered shutter. The top stage of the belfry is crowned by a simple cresting with pinnacles at the corners.

On the south eaveside wall, the three basement windows are placed directly under the sanctuary windows. The rear (west) gable end has two evenly spaced basement windows, but no openings on the first floor. Emerging from the right of the basement wall is a modern exhaust pipe. The north eaveside basement wall has five regularly spaced openings--three windows separated by two deeply recessed doors. Both doors have four beveled edged panels, and the one to the left retains its original hardware.

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In 1868, louvered shutters were made for the eight large first floor windows and two small pointed arch sashes on the front facade. They were screwed fast over the windows instead of being hung by hinges to "obviate the danger of blowing open and breaking the blinds & glass."¹ Installing them required removing "beadwork," probably thin strips of molding edging the window surrounds in imitation of columns in Gothic style vaulting. These shutters were removed sometime between 1911 and 1919 (they remain in storage today) when the clear glass in the windows was replaced by opalescent stained glass. Much of the original glass in the basement windows remains intact however. The wood shingle roof was replaced probably around 1957 by the present dark asphalt shingle roof. About that time the top stage of the belfry and cresting were removed because of their deteriorated condition. They were recreated and installed in 1976. The old wooden steps leading up to the front door were replaced by cement steps, and in 1972 a fieldstone retaining wall was erected around these steps and across the front width of the building.

The first floor of the interior is divided into two spaces--an entry hall across the width of the building and the sanctuary with a balcony above the hall. The walls are lined by a wainscot made of two very wide horizontal boards topped with a thin simple molding, and above the wainscot the plastered walls are papered. All interior doors have beveled edged panels. The inside of the main double doors, two doors from the hallway to sanctuary, pew doors, and pew ends have their original graining, while almost all other woodwork is painted in a solid color. All floors, wide pine boards, are original.

In the hall, the short north and south walls each have two doors--narrow with two panels closest to the east wall and wider with four panels near the west wall. The left door on the north wall has its original latch and leads to the balcony stairs. The right door is for a closet. On the south wall, the left door opens onto the basement stairway, which was installed in 1911 when the Town of Starksboro moved from its basement meeting room to the new Town Hall. The right door is fastened shut, the balcony stairs on this side having been removed after 1911. In the middle of the west hall wall is a small lidded storage cupboard made out of twelve of the original sanctuary pew doors. A horizontal panel (another pew door) in the back wall of the box opens into the sanctuary. This box was used to store firewood for the stove that once heated the church. On each side of the box is a door with six panels and original hardware which leads into the sanctuary.

The rectangular sanctuary retains many of its original features. The north and south walls are lined with twelve rows of pews facing

¹ Letter, W.S. Howdin to George W. Ferguson, July 28, 1868.

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west, with nine rows of double width pews up the middle of the church. In the southwest corner are four short pews facing north and the side of the altar area. Each pew seat is made of one wide board, while the back has two beveled edged panels and is topped by a simple rounded molding. The pew doors (some of which were removed earlier in this century) and the pew ends have two beveled edged panels. The pew door numbers are painted in gold on a small square black painted field in the middle of the top panel of each pew end.

The altar or pulpit area, across the west wall, is raised about nine inches from the main floor and is set off by a simple altar rail with thin square balusters. The smaller altar and pulpit platform, raised about one and a half feet higher, has a Greek Revival style baseboard molding and cornice under the floor lip. It is reached by inset steps on its north and south sides. Two piers, about one and a half feet wide, project from the west wall on each side of the altar area. The one to the right contains the present chimney stack.

The pointed arch windows of the north and south walls are filled with panes of opalescent stained glass that were given in the 1910s in memory of deceased members of the congregation, many of whom were descendants of Starksboro's earliest settlers. Their names are painted in black on the bottom glass pane in each of the lower sashes. The boards that form each window reveal extend out about one inch beyond the wall surface and have rounded edges. They are framed by two small half-round strips of molding with a small rounded wooden impost block at the spring of the arch--this simple surround a carpenter's version of Gothic vaulting.

Hanging from the center of the ceiling is a large kerosene lamp chandelier installed in 1884, perhaps also when the ceiling was covered with the present narrow beaded edged boards. The chandelier is made up of a circle of fourteen glass kerosene lamps, suspended by a cord (inside a thin tube) under a fourteen sided mirrored reflector. The lamp circle, which can be lowered for lighting, is held in place by a bucket of stones hanging in the attic at the other end of the cord.

Just in front of the back (east) wall between the sanctuary and hallway are two evenly spaced tapered eight sided posts that reach to the ceiling. On top of this wall is the solid paneled three bay wide balcony railing. The balcony floor, rough wide pine boards, has two levels with a built-in pew on the upper level. A trap-door in the ceiling to the rear leads to the attic where the massive post and beam trusses that support the roof and belfry can be seen. The belfry, where the church bell that was cast in Troy, New York hangs, is reached through another trap-door.

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The basement, originally one large room finished by the Town of Starksboro for use as the "Town Room" and reached only through the doors on the north side, was divided into two rooms sometime after 1911 when the present Town Hall was ready for occupancy. All the basement walls are plastered. The original pine floors still remain. Each side of the deep angled window reveals are paneled with one wide pine board.

The front (east) basement room, now used for the town library, has a straight run of stairs (installed in 1911) with simple square balusters and a square newel post along its wouth wall. In the middle of the room are two evenly spaced eight-sided posts, located directly under the posts in the sanctuary. The main (rear, west) room is reached through a four paneled door. Along the outer north and west walls are simple wooden built-in benches, original to the Town Room. The southwest corner of the room was later partitioned off for a small kitchen, and in the 1960s or 1970s a small restroom was added. A small room centered in the middle of the east wall houses the furnace.

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 1838-1840 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Starksboro Village Meeting House, which was built between 1838 and 1840 as a Union Church for three denominations with a meeting room for the Town of Starksboro in the basement, is a very good and well preserved example of the traditional meeting house form popular in small rural Vermont towns through much of the 1800s. It is distinguished from its more common Greek Revival style contemporaries by its Gothic Revival style pointed arched windows and pinnacled cresting (reconstructed) atop the belfry. Its interior is also well preserved with most of the original furnishings remaining intact. The Meeting House is also an excellent example of a Union Church, a co-operative building effort by several congregations in a town, and common in Vermont in the first half of the 19th century. Located in the heart of the small village of Starksboro, it was built during the town's peak period of growth and is the most architecturally distinguished building in the village.

On May 8, 1838, the Starksboro Village Meeting House Society was deeded two adjacent parcels of land in the center of Starksboro Village upon which they had already begun building their meeting house. The Society was a union of three of the five religious denominations in the town: the Methodist Episcopal congregation, formed in 1798, two years after the Town of Starksboro was organized; the Free Will Baptists, organized in 1821; and a group called the Christian Church. Although the Society of Friends had built a meeting house in the northern part of Starksboro in 1812 and one in South Starksboro in 1826, these three congregations did not have permanent churches and met instead in the homes of their members. During the 1830s, the need to build a Union Church became clear. The town's population had been increasing, and in 1840 would reach 1263. Starksboro Village was also developing as a milling center with a forge, fulling mill, saw mill, two trip hammer shops, and still standing a tavern, store, and a number of houses.

At the annual Starksboro Town Meeting held March 6, 1838, voters voted to "raise a tax of Four Hundred dollars for the purpose of furnishing a town room in the basement story of a meeting-house contemplated to be built in the village in said Town of Starksboro."¹

¹First Book of Minutes, Starksboro Annual Meeting, p. 164.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx 1/4 acre

Quadrangle name Bristol

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UTM References

A

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Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated property is a rectangular lot 82 1/2 feet wide at the front and rear and 132 feet in depth, and is the original lot associated with the building. Volume 5 of Deeds, pp. 419,420 (May 8, 1838), Town of Starksboro Land Records.

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

state N/A code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Elsa Gilbertson, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization N/A date May 17, 1985

street & number RD # 2, Box 300 telephone (802) 453-2079

city or town Bristol state Vermont 05443

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.

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature Elsa Gilbertson

title Director, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation date September 30, 1985

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

Janice Lorest Byer Entered in the National Register date 11/7/85
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____
Chief of Registration

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Up until that time, town meetings were generally held in the village schoolhouse. Construction began sometime between March 6 and May 8, 1838 when the deed was received, and enough work had been done on the Meeting House for a town meeting on April 4, 1839 to be held in the basement town room. Construction was completed in 1840 at a total cost of \$2400.

The meeting house, although similar to other Gothic Revival style churches in Vermont of the same period, examples including those designed or influenced by the work of master builder John Cain of Rutland, it is the only one of its type to be found in the region of Starksboro and its surrounding neighbor towns. This indicates the building committee's awareness of architectural trends and the newly emerging Gothic Revival style in Vermont. Although the interior has less Gothic Revival style details than the exterior, it is also distinguished for the high quality craftsmanship of its furnishings and the grained woodwork. It is not known who designed or built the church. The interior pews were built by George W. Ferguson, who had a casket and carriage making shop across the street, and Mark G. Hanson. For many years these pews were bought and sold like real estate.

Until the 1860s, the Methodist Episcopalians used the church one half the time, the Free Will Baptists one quarter of the time, and the Christian Church one quarter of the time. In 1868, the Baptists built their own church, a large two story Greek Revival style building across the street. The Christian Church eventually lost its membership, thus leaving the Methodists the sole occupants of the sanctuary. Their membership fell steadily from its high of 228 in 1842 to 8 by 1914. In 1909, the Town of Starksboro appointed a committee to look into buying the Meeting House as more space was needed for town and community affairs, but the next year decided to appropriate \$4000 to buy a lot and build a Town Hall. Despite the low membership, the Methodist congregation made a few changes in the building after the Town left. Stairs were installed for access to the basement from the first floor, and the original clear glass window panes were replaced with opalescent glass given in memory of deceased members. One is dedicated to Rev. Elijah Hedding, the seventh bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, who as a young man came to Starksboro and was an early member of this congregation in town. The membership slowly rose again, reaching 32 by 1919. In that year, they voted to join in federation with the Baptists and form a United Church. They met in the larger Baptist Church, leaving the Meeting House empty. Since that time it has been used for occasional services and for other community activities. The

(see Continuation Sheet)

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Meeting House Society was revitalized in 1957 and began much needed maintenance and restoration work, much of it completed in 1976 in honor of the nation's bicentennial celebration. Today the Meeting House continues to serve the community and remains as the most architecturally distinguished building in this small village.

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- First Book of Minutes, Starksboro Annual Meeting, on file at Starksboro Town Clerk's Office.
- Hanson, Bertha. "Elijah Hedding, D.D." Town of Starksboro, Vermont Annual Report 1977, 1978.
- Hanson, Bertha. "Village Meeting House Opened for Services." The Valley Voice. 16 July, 1975: 3.
- Hemenway, Abby M., ed. Vermont Historical Gazetteer, vol. 1. Burlington, Vermont: 1867.
- Letter, W.S. Howdin to George W. Ferguson, July 28, 1869, in Papers of the Starksboro Village Meeting House Society, Starksboro, Vermont.
- Smith, H.P., ed. History of Addison County, Vermont. Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1886.