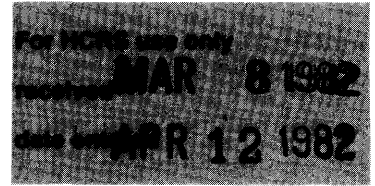


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 McElwain House

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 2 Main Street, Presque Isle Road _____ not for publication

city, town Caribou, _____ vicinity of _____ congressional district #2

state Maine code 023 county Aroostook code 003

3. Classification

A.C.
9/1/84

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	_____ agriculture _____ museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	_____ private	_____ unoccupied	_____ commercial _____ park
_____ structure	_____ both	_____ work in progress	_____ educational _____ private residence
_____ site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	_____ entertainment _____ religious
_____ object	_____ in process	_____ yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government _____ scientific
	_____ being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	_____ industrial _____ transportation
		_____ no	_____ military _____ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Northern Maine Regional Planning Commission

street & number 2 Main Street; Box 779

city, town Caribou, _____ vicinity of _____ state Maine 04736

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number _____

city, town Houlton, _____ state Maine

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title None 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

Caribou's McElwain House of 1916-1917 is an interesting example of the Colonial Revival style in a rural context.

The 2½ story building is of frame construction with a steep, truncated hipped roof with a "widow's walk," one internal and two external chimneys, and clapboard siding. Window treatment varies throughout, but most are diamond paned. All cornices are bracketed and denticulated. A large, 2½ story ell with a hipped gable roof and a gambrel roofed carriage house are connected to the rear (west side) of the house.

The facade, which faces east, is three bays wide, the central bay on the ground floor being the front door. The flanking windows are made up of a double sash and a stained glass transom. The second story has three bays, from left to right respectively: a set of French doors; a three section, diamond paned window made up of a central casement and two sidelights; and a diamond paned casement window. Piercing the roof is a large hooded dormer with a three part window, each part containing eight lights. A flat roofed porch with square, paired posts extends across the facade and beyond, creating a port cochere on its south end. Wide stone steps beneath a triangular pedimented portico lead to the front door.

The north side of the house is four bays wide on the second floor, each bay being a diamond paned casement window. The half-story possesses a dormer identical to that of the east side. The first story, however, is divided between the base of an exterior chimney and three single sash windows of varying sizes.

The south side of the building is similar to the facade as to fenestration. The hooded dormer and pairs of diamond paned windows are present and the latter appear randomly on the first two stories. The other exterior chimney is located on this side near the porch.

Continuing west on the south side of the McElwain House is a large hipped gable roofed ell. Over a projecting bay is a gable dormer with an arched window. Other windows in the ell are similar to those of the main house. Perpendicular to the 2½ ell is a 2½ story gambrel roofed carriage house.

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" 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 1916-1917 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The beautiful McElwain House of 1916-1917 was, for 30 years, the home of one of Aroostook County's most prominent farmers. John McElwain, combining an industrious nature with a taste for elegance, created in this rural area of the state an agricultural empire in the early twentieth century. The Colonial Revival style home of this "country squire" is an imposing reminder of the era that produced it and, for all its remote location, was as elegant and refined as many of the "cottages" then being built along the coast.

When John McElwain came to Caribou from Woodstock, New Brunswick, in 1902, he brought with him his young wife, Frances, and the capital necessary to purchase 200 acres of land along the western side of the Aroostook River. On this land McElwain began a farm which consisted of livestock (hogs, cattle, and chickens) and cultivated crops (potatoes, buckwheat, and oats). By 1911, McElwain was capturing the attention of area residents and was referred to as a "hustling farmer." His reputation as a country squire was brought on by his tendency to wear a white shirt and tie to perform even the most menial of tasks.

The small house which had been home to the McElwains and their daughter, Geneva, was outdated by 1916 and construction of the present structure began in June of that year. Although the architect is unknown, it is certain that Mrs. McElwain had a great deal of input into its design. The blueprints had taken three years to complete; it seems that the wait was worthwhile for the "showplace" that resulted in July of 1917 was "beautifully appointed...faultlessly complete in every detail." Handcrafted stone fireplaces, stained glass on each side of the entrance door in the upper panels of the sliding doors between sitting and dining rooms, Tiffany glass in the dining room cabinets, a bell system to summon servants, a bird's-eye maple room, were a few of the many embellishments planned by Mrs. McElwain. On the practical side there were many others: insulation made of buckwheat hulls in the walls, a wood furnace, a cistern for rain water, "set" tubs made of cement used for laundry, a laundry chute to the basement, a root cellar, a men's shower used by the hired hands, and an interior passage from the house to the carriage house; seemingly no detail was forgotten. The same careful planning that was followed for the house was also used in landscaping the surrounding grounds. A new road past the house and a sunken garden were the two major projects undertaken.

The social events that took place in the McElwain House during the 1920's were well described in the local newspapers. Geneva's T-Garden, a sort of old fashioned and elegant concession stand, was located in the sunken garden and was a success from the time of its opening in 1925. From all accounts the McElwain's organization of social events was impeccable, the atmosphere festive, the decor flawless, and the food a delight. Such were the "Roaring 20's" even in remote Caribou, Maine, thanks to the wealth and spirit of the three McElwains.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Manuscript information on file at Maine Historic Preservation Commission.

10. Geographical Data

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property 1/2
Quadrangle name Caribou

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:62,500

UMT References

A

1	9	5	7	5	4	2	0	5	1	8	1	6	8	1	0	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing											

B

Zone		Easting				Northing											

C

Zone		Easting				Northing											

D

Zone		Easting				Northing											

E

Zone		Easting				Northing											

F

Zone		Easting				Northing											

G

Zone		Easting				Northing											

H

Zone		Easting				Northing											

Verbal boundary description and justification

Assessor's Map 7, Lot 4

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

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Frank A. Beard, Historian/Bette A. Smith, Assistant

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date January, 1982

street & number 55 Capitol Street telephone 207/289-2133

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Earle S. Speltz

title J.H.P.O.

date 2/18/82

For HCERS use only

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

Frank A. Beard
Keeper of the National Register

date 4/12/82

Attest:

date

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	APR 12 1982

McELWAIN HOUSE

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

The 1930's, however, brought the Great Depression. Economic difficulty, and the marriage and departure of young Geneva McElwain, notably subdued the atmosphere at "Happy Corner." The house became a tourist home, the McElwains continued to entertain guests, but the ballroom's transformation into guest rooms symbolized the end of an era for the family.

Frances McElwain died in 1940 leaving her husband to carry on the tradition of the McElwains alone. With the help of his employee and companion, James McConnell, McElwain continued to operate the farm until his death at age 78 in 1946. From 1947 until 1973 the house continued to be used as a residence and few changes were made in the building. In 1973 the Northern Maine Regional Planning Commission purchased the property and has carefully converted the interior for office use. The changes have been made gradually and will allow the house to revert to a residence if that need arises.

The McElwain House still stands in its original location, an imposing reminder of an era more grandiose (or at least more romantic) than the present. The strength of the McElwain character, as reflected in the sturdiness of their home, was the focal point of many aspiring citizens of the day. The McElwains were the epitome of the industrious, the clever, the good; their house was mirror of all that was grand. The sight of it still inspires those who are unfamiliar with its history to imagine what bygone era produced it. Many of those who know and participated in its history continue to recount tales of the days when they were part of the McElwain House.