

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

For HCRS use only

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

received MA 1 15 1982
date entered

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

1. Name

historic OLD GRAFTON COUNTY COURTHOUSE

and/or common PLYMOUTH PUBLIC LIBRARY

2. Location

street & number 1 Court Street not for publication

city, town Plymouth vicinity of congressional district Second

state New Hampshire code 33 county Grafton code 009

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: <u>Public Library</u>

4. Owner of Property

name Young Ladies Library Association

street & number c/o Plymouth Public Library, 1 Court Street

city, town Plymouth vicinity of state New Hampshire

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Grafton County Courthouse
Grafton County Registry of Deeds

street & number Route #10

city, town North Haverhill state New Hampshire

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		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>1876</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Old Grafton County Courthouse is a one-story, hip-roofed frame structure of square floor plan, measuring 34 feet in width and depth. It stands on a late nineteenth-century brick and stone foundation, having been moved to its present site in 1876. A doorway at the northeast corner of the foundation gives access to the basement. The building has simple exterior detailing which includes wide corner boards with simple square capitals under the cornice with bed mouldings, a deeply-projecting soffit, and a cyma crown moulding. The walls are clapboarded.

The building has three-bay fenestration on the front (north) and east elevations, the central bay on the north being the principal doorway. Window trim consists of simple square-edged side casings; wide, flat top casings; and a small drip moulding as a cap. Windows have 12/12 panes. The doorway has flat side casings with square backband mouldings, a flat upper casing or architrave, and a gable-roofed porch roof supported by diagonal braces. The latter was added sometime after 1906.

The roof is covered with asphalt shingles and is crowned by a square open cupola with a low-pitched hipped roof supported by four square corner columns. A chimney with fireplace rises inside the west wall; it is flanked by two windows.

A wood-frame addition measuring 8 by 12 feet was constructed against the south (rear) wall in 1963. Access to this addition, which has a low-pitched roof and two windows, is gained through the original rear door of the courthouse.

The interior of the building is a single room with a brick fireplace centered on the west wall. The walls and ceiling are sheathed in stained hardwood panelling; the flooring is also hardwood. All interior detailing, including perimeter shelving for library use, was installed in 1876 when the building was moved to its present site and renovated.

Original Appearance: This structure was built in 1774 as one of two buildings (the other was in Haverhill, N.H.) for the use of the courts of newly-formed Grafton County. The building was described in its original state as square, with "a stately cupola out of proportion to the diminutive size of the structure."¹ A new and larger brick courthouse was built in 1823, and the old building was sold and moved to the outskirts of Plymouth village, where it was used for a time as a wheelwright's shop. Photographs of the structure taken during that period show that the front doorway was altered from what must have been its original form and that a large double doorway for wagons had been cut into the side of the structure where the present exterior detailing, including corner boards and window casings and caps, must have been installed during the remodelling of 1876. In that renovation, the structure was given its present form (except for the cupola, which was rebuilt later) and presented to the Young Ladies' Library Association for use as a library, which continues to the present day.² The cupola was added sometime before 1906,³ as a replica of the original, lost during the years when the structure served as a shop.

¹ Ezra Scollay Stearns, History of Plymouth, New Hampshire. 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1906), Vol. 1, pp. 188-191, 194-195.

² Ibid., 1, p. 190; Grafton County Convention Records, June 10, 1824; Grafton County Deeds: Vol. 352, fol. 156 (lease agreement, May 3, 1877); Vol. 360, fol. 285 (deed, August 2, 1878); Vol. 1163, fol. 542 and Plan Book 1140, page 18 (boundary line agreement, May 15, 1972); Vo. 1183, fol. 496 (quitclaim deed, December 11, 1972).

³ Stearns, History of Plymouth, 1, photographs facing pages 188 and 328.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input checked="" 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 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 1774

Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Old Grafton County Courthouse is one of the earliest surviving public structures in New Hampshire. Though remodelled several times, the building retains the form of an eighteenth-century structure and in addition contains much detailing added in the late nineteenth century under the influence of the colonial revival. The building is further significant for its judicial history and for its use since 1876 as the first public library structure in its town.

Architecture: The Grafton County Courthouse is one of few eighteenth-century public structures, other than meeting houses, to survive in New Hampshire. It is significant in revealing the architectural form that was chosen for a rural courthouse built only eleven years after the town in which it stands was chartered. The square plan and hipped roof have an ancient lineage in New England, being the form chosen for most meeting houses from the mid-seventeenth century until about 1700. The same plan and roof form were also seen on eighteenth-century New England schoolhouses. Thus, the building's form denoted its public nature, and the structure is a rare survivor of this form.

The Courthouse is further significant as an early instance of architectural preservation. Probably spurred both by the nation's centennial and by a respect for the memory of Daniel Webster (who pleaded one of his first court cases in the structure in 1806), U.S. Senator Henry W. Blair (1834-1920) acted to preserve the building. In 1876 Blair purchased the dilapidated courthouse and arranged to have it moved to a lot adjacent to the modern courthouse in the center of Plymouth. At his own expense, he renovated the exterior and fitted the interior for use as a library. Although his work cannot be termed a restoration, it was an early act of adaptive use. The architectural elements that Blair added to the building thus have an importance of their own as early examples of colonial revival taste and as part of a pioneering effort at architectural preservation.

Social/Humanitarian: When Blair moved the old courthouse to a site adjacent to the newer one, he secured a lease of the property from Grafton County "for so long as the Courthouse shall be occupied for the use of a public library or other benevolent and useful purpose of public nature." Shortly after renovating the structure with library fixtures, Blair presented it as a gift to the Young Ladies' Library Association of Plymouth, which was formed in 1873 and incorporated in 1878 as an agency to promote and support a circulating library. With the encouragement of Blair's gift of the building and other donations, the library grew to a point where the Town of Plymouth commenced to vote appropriations for its benefit in 1885 and to co-direct it as a free public library in 1896. The building continues as the Plymouth Public Library to the present day.

¹ Ezra Scollay Stearns, History of Plymouth, New Hampshire, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1906), vol. 1, pp. 327-331.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Young Ladies Library Assoc., Record Books held by members 1908 - 1981
Stearns, E.S. History of Plymouth, N.H. Vol. 1 Univ. Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1906
Speare, Eva A. Twenty Decades In Plymouth, New Hampshire, Courier Printing Company, Inc.
Littleton, N.H. 1963

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property Less than one-fourth of an acre

Quadrangle name Plymouth, N.H.

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

UMT References

A

1	9	2	8	3	5	1	8	4	8	4	8	3	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

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D

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Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated property is a rectangular lot which is approximately 94 x 75 feet, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a parcel of land owned by the Town of Plymouth. It is bounded on the north by Court Street; the west, by Plymouth Savings Bank; the south, the Congregational Church, and east the Plymouth Town Hall. (Recent New Courthouse)

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 Juliet B. Rand, President

organization Young Ladies Library Association date May 12, 1981

street & number 67 Main Street telephone 603-536-2833

city or town Plymouth state New Hampshire

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 

Commissioner, NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Development

title NH State Historic Preservation Officer

date February 23, 1982

For HCRS use only

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

date 4/29/82

of Keeper of the National Register

date 4/20/82

Attest: 
Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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date entered APR 29 1982

Continuation sheet

SKETCH MAP

Item number

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