

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

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

received MAY 7 1985

date entered JUN 6 1985

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

1. Name

historic Plainfield Town Hall

and/or common PLAINFIELD TOWN HALL

2. Location

street & number Route 12A (200' north of where Daniels Rd. inter- n/a not for publication
sects with NH Rte 12A)

city, town Painfield _____ vicinity of

state New Hampshire code 33 county Sullivan code 013

3. 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	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> n/a	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Town of Plainfield

street & number Main Street, Meriden

city, town Plainfield, n/a vicinity of state New Hampshire 03781

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number P.O. Box 448
28 Main Street

city, town Newport, state New Hampshire 03773

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title none has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date n/a federal state county local

depository for survey records n/a
n/a

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 type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date <u>N/A</u>

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Set back approximately twenty feet from Route 12A, the main thoroughfare in Plainfield, the Town Hall is a rectangular one story clapboard structure with a broad gable front facing westward. The Town Hall is comprised of three sections. The original structure with three bay wide side elevations was supplemented by a rear stage addition of the same height in 1916, approximately a third of the size of the original section and containing two additional bays. On the side elevations, interruptions in the siding and differing windows indicate the distinction between the original structure and addition. A shed addition spans the rear of the stage section. The original building is supported by a fieldstone foundation while the remainder is set upon a concrete foundation. The roof of the shed is sheathed in asphalt shingles, the gable roof is covered with 18" slate shingles of many different hues.

The facade of the Town Hall is dominated by a windowless projecting gable. The central entrance contains a six panel wooden door capped by a six light transom above which a wooden plaque reads: "Town Hall/Plainfield N.H./ Inc.1761". Three concrete steps with a cast iron pipe railing on the right, rise to meet the doorway. To the right of the entrance is a glass-enclosed notice board. To each side of the doorway is a twenty light fixed sash window, half the size of the windows on the side elevations. Although it may appear that the windows were originally larger and the upper portion was filled-in with clapboarding, the original construction agreement for the building specifies the half windows seen today. Blinds apparently originally flanked the windows. The only other window on the facade is a small 6/6 doublehung sash above and to the left of the main doorway. Six inch wide plain cornerboards and a wide clapboard baseboard frame the simple structure which features a projecting boxed cornice. In the front gable the eaves do not protrude from the front wall surface. Symmetrical plantings on either side of the concrete steps partially obscure the facade. This landscaping consists of lilac trees, fir trees and assorted shrubbery. In front of the greenery on either side of the stairs is a concrete flower box, presently unfilled.

On the south elevation, three tall 20/20 doublehung sash windows with simple surrounds mark the original section of the building. A single casement window is cut into the fieldstone foundation. In the original section but adjacent to the first addition, is a four panelled wooden door. Seven cast iron steps complete with a handrail lead to this side entranceway. The south elevation of the stage addition contains two 15/15 doublehung sash windows. There are only two other features on this section's south elevation: a single light casement window in the concrete foundation and a single panelled wooden door leading under the stage area. The south side of the shed addition which is only ten feet wide, contains a square panelled door leading into a storage area.

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EXTERIOR DESCRIPTION (cont.)

The rear or east elevation of the shed section contains two 15/15 doublehung windows, behind which are the dressing rooms for the stage area. A tall brick chimney projects from the shed roof north of the ridge.

Five windows light the north elevation. Like those on the other side elevation the two of the rear section are 15/15 while the three in the front are 20/20. A corbel-capped brick chimney protrudes from either side of the ridge near the front of the building.

A dirt driveway is located along the south side of the Town Hall with the remains of an outbuilding's concrete foundation located at the end of the driveway.

INTERIOR DESCRIPTION

The interior of the Town Hall is very simple, limited to a large hall with four main sections: the foyer containing the restrooms and the kitchen; the meeting hall itself; the stage and two dressing rooms in the rear. Today, as when the structure was first built eight feet is partitioned off the west end for two rooms, one at each end of the lobby. A single room was later made over those at the front of the building with stairs to it. The stage, with its elaborate light system and set design appears to be virtually unchanged since it was installed in 1917. Above the stage is an exposed rafter ceiling.

The original floor of the town hall was laid with floorboards salvaged from the old meeting house located in another part of town. The Town Meeting of 1846 describes the seating: "The seats are the same thickness stuff as those in the Lebanon (NH) town house and finished in the same manner with good merchantable pine stuff."¹

In 1908 the tiers of seats were removed and the floor relaid. The seats were replaced with benches and tables, and at the same time kerosene lighting was installed. In 1915, the kerosene lighting was replaced with electricity.

The most important aspect of the interior is the stage set designed by local resident, Maxfield Parrish in 1916. The backdrop portraying nearby Mt. Ascutney adds color and life to the entire auditorium. Painted in tones of blue and purple, the backdrop was designed to portray varying skies, from daybreak to dusk depending on the stage lighting used. Parrish also designed the six side props which flank the woodland scene, consisting of birch and oak trees with large boulders. The set and props were painted by unidentified professional scenepainting technicians, following Parrish's design, using gouache or tempera paints.

¹Plainfield Town Report, 1846.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" 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 1846-Arch. 1917-Arts **Builder/Architect** Bradbury Dyer & Charles Eggleston

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) & Theatre

The Plainfield Town Hall has both local and national significance. At the local level, the building is significant because of its importance in the areas of architecture and theatre. At the national level, the Town Hall is significant because it contains a stage backdrop and wings designed by famous painter Maxfield Parrish.

Architecture

The Plainfield Town Hall is a good example of a rural interpretation of the Greek Revival style, as is suggested by its stark, low pedimented facade. Indicative of the thriftiness of small town New England, the Town Hall was largely constructed from materials used in Plainfield's first Meeting House built in 1804, elsewhere in town. An index to the tastes and skills of a rural New Hampshire town, its simple utilitarian interior and exterior also represents the financial condition of the Town at the time of construction and the strife between the two major villages of Plainfield: Plainfield and Meriden. Apparently the people of Meriden wanted the town hall to be built in their village, and therefore were somewhat stingy when allotting funds for the construction of the town hall in Plainfield. Eventually Meriden also built a town hall and the town meetings alternated between the two. At one time in the early 1800's the townspeople had begun to construct a centrally located town hall between the two, but it was never completed.

The builders of the Town Hall were Bradbury Dyer and Col. Charles Eggleston. Eggleston (1787-1858), a master builder in the Plainfield-Cornish area also is thought to have been responsible for the Baptist Church (1840) and Blow-Me-Sown Grange in Plainfield and the United Church of Cornish Center (1841-2) among other designs. Much of his work resembles that of Ammi Burnham Young (1798-1874), a Lebanon architect who later gained national prominence.

A detailed account of the erection of the Plainfield Town Hall was recorded at town meeting in March of 1846. The Town of Plainfield paid the builders eight hundred dollars to complete the job. The contract included the dismantling of the first Plainfield Meeting House built in 1804, and reusing its materials on the new structure. The specifications given at the 1846 town meeting recreate a structure very similar to the one now standing minus its two rear later additions. Constructed in 1916 to accommodate a stage these additions continue the lines of the original structure without diminishing its simple effect.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Briggs, Frederick A. "Rambles in Plainfield". Claremont, NH: The National Eagle,
September through October 1886.
Colby, Virginia. "Stephen and Maxfield Parrish in New Hampshire".
Antiques Magazine, June 1979 continued.....

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .36 acre

Quadrangle name No. Hartfield, Vt.-NH

Quadrangle scale 1:24 00

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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Verbal boundary description and justification

The property being nominated is lot number 7100 from Map 2A in the Plainfield Assessors Office. The property is 125' x 125' with acreage totalling .36 acres. It is bounded on the north and east by lot number 7200 and on the continued.....

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

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
N/A			

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Loreen P. Collin, & Lisa B. Mausolf, Preservation Planners

organization Upper Valley - Lake Sunapee Council date August, 1984

street & number 314 National Bank Building telephone (603) 448-1680

city or town Lebanon, state New Hampshire 03766

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 

title New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer date APR 26 1985

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

 date 6-6-85
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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SIGNIFICANCE cont.

Art

According to a catalog of the work of Maxfield Parrish by Coy Ludwig¹, during a lengthy career spanning from 1894 to 1962, Parrish painted only three designs for theatrical scenery including that of the Plainfield Town Hall. The woodland scene painted for the town hall portraying nearby Mt. Ascutney reflected in a crystalline lake is consistent with many of Parrish's works though it lacks the romantic figures which dominate much of his work completed during the same period. Parrish painted landscapes throughout his career, although it was not until the 1930's that he began to paint them exclusively. The design for the Plainfield Town Hall scenery, prepared in 1916 while typical of many of Parrish's work in terms of subject matter (Mt. Ascutney) and hues (iridescent blues and purples) survives as an early exercise of his in pure landscape and a unique example of his work of a theatrical nature.

In 1885, the famous American sculptor Augustus Saint Gaudens arrived in Cornish, the town south of Plainfield, where he set up a studio. His presence in the area attracted other artists and eventually this group of artists was referred to as the Cornish Colony. The Cornish Colony was composed of both summer and year-round residents who were writers, poets, artists and actors. Among the more famous residents of the Cornish Colony were: Winston Churchill (1871-1947) a novelist; Ethel Barrymore (1879-1959), actress; Peter Finley Dunne (1867-1944), humorist; Charles Dana Gibson (1867-1944), an artist and illustrator; and William Vaughn Moody (1869-1910), a poet and playwright. Another famous frequenter of the Cornish Colony was etcher and painter Stephen Parrish. In the summers when Stephen Parrish would set up studio in Cornish, he would bring his son Maxfield with him.

Maxfield Parrish (1870-1966) was born in Philadelphia in 1870, graduated from Haverford College in 1888, and the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1892. After gaining fame as a magazine cover designer for Harpers, Scribners, Colliers, Life and the Ladies Home Journal, Maxfield decided to settle in Plainfield to be able to work in peace and quiet. His original home, The Oaks, burned in 1979, but the studio, begun in 1905, still survives about a half mile south of the Plainfield Town Hall.

Besides designing magazine covers, Parrish also designed posters, advertisements, calendars, greeting cards, murals and theatre scenery. So when William Howard Hart, a landscape artist of the Cornish Colony asked Parrish to design the set for the Plainfield Town Hall Stage in 1916, Parrish gladly obliged. Parrish's 16 x 22" rendition of Mt. Ascutney was then gridded and enlarged by a professional painting firm on the backdrop canvas, painting each square separately from the corresponding grid on Parrish's original.

¹Coy Ludwig, Maxfield Parrish. New York:Watson-Guption, 1973.

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SIGNIFICANCE cont

Theatre

At the March 1916 Town Meeting William Howard Hart (1863-1937), a Plainfield resident and landscape artist of the Cornish Colony proposed that the town appropriate \$300 to add to the Plainfield Town Hall a stage for amateur talent plays with the condition that Hart would finance the cost of constructing a stage addition, excluding foundation work but including staging and equipment. Hart also paid for professional scene painters to reproduce a Maxfield Parrish design onto a backdrop and stage wings. Upon completion in 1917 it was said to be the best stage north of Boston. The stage is also included on a National List of Historic Theatre Buildings compiled by the Dramatic Arts Dept. of the University of California at Davis.

After the stage was built, the Town Hall was the scene of many plays by groups such as the Ladies Aid of the Baptist Church and the Mother's and Daughter's Club. Perhaps its most famous group of actors and actresses was the Howard Hart Players. Albert Boyd, a writer, artist and Plainfield summer resident, created the Howard Hart Players Group in honor of the benefactor of the Plainfield Town Hall stage, William Howard Hart. Many of the Cornish colony artists who spent their summers in Plainfield and Cornish participated in the Howard Hart Players.

Conclusion

Significant in the areas of art, architecture and theater, the Plainfield Town Hall is slowly deteriorating. It is used infrequently for plays, but still is utilized for fund raising events, town suppers and other community get-togethers. Water seepage has caused some interior damage and the Maxfield Parrish scenery is slowly disintegrating. Many of the town's people worry that without proper assistance and interest the scenery will eventually deteriorate beyond repair.

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Hood, Vernon. A History of Plainfield: a collection of papers. (No specific date)

(Town Library)

Ludwig, Coy. Maxfield Parrish. New York, NY.: Watson-Guption Publications, 1973.

Quimby, William C. "A Brief History of Plainfield, NH." Wesleyan University Thesis, 1952. (Town Library.)

Miscellaneous

Assorted playbills for Plainfield Town Hall Theatre productions over the years. (Cornish Historical Society)

Parris, Maxfield, Jr. Letter to Stephen H. Taylor, former Plainfield selectman, regarding the Plainfield Town Hall set and props designed by his father. June 18, 1977. (Plainfield Historical Society)

Sketch for backdrop by Maxfield Parris. Owned by Harold Knox, West Lebanon, New Hampshire.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION AND DESCRIPTION cont.

south by lot number 7000. The west boundary is formed by Route 12A.

The boundary of the nominated property is drawn from the original parcel upon which the town hall was built and which is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Boundaries are sufficient to convey the original context and also sufficient to protect it.

Boundaries of the nominated property have been highlighted in yellow on the enclosed sketch map.

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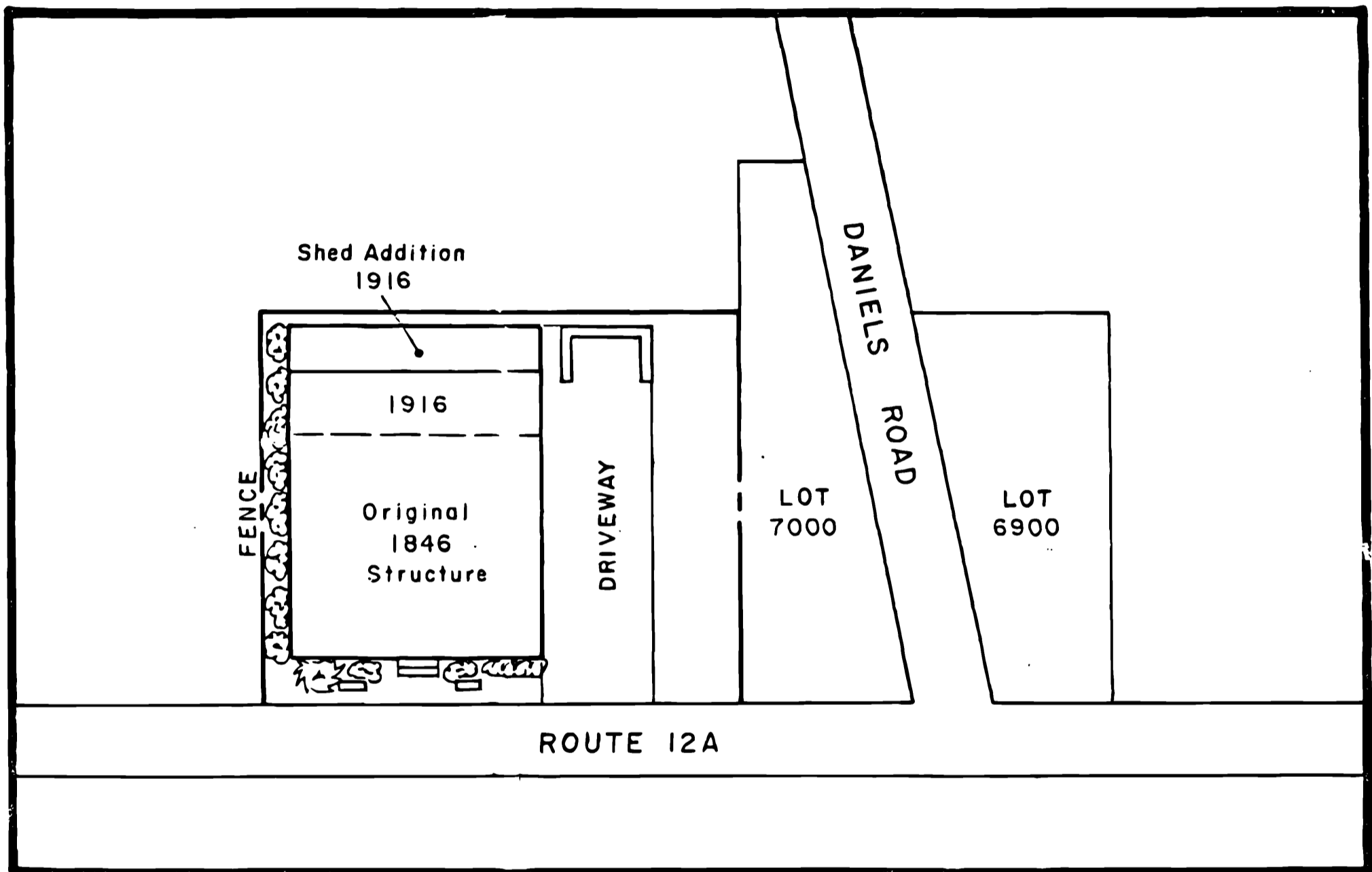
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This certifies that the appearance of the photographs has not changed.