

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

1489

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Post Mills Church
other names/site number Post Mills Meeting House

2. Location

street & number Vermont Route 244 N/A not for publication
city or town Thetford N/A vicinity
state Vermont code VT county Orange code 017 zip code 05058

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Eric Silberman Secretary SHPO 9/25/92
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Vermont State Historic Preservation Office
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Signature of the Keeper

William Dyer

Entered in the
National Register

Date of Action

10/29/92

Post Mills Church
Name of Property

Orange County, Vermont
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious structure

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION/religious structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls weatherboard

roof steel

other wood

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Post Mills Church
Thetford, Orange County, Vermont

The Post Mills Church, located in the village of Post Mills, Town of Thetford, in the pastoral Ompompanoosuc River plain, was built in 1818 and remodelled in 1855. It is a gable-front, clapboarded Greek Revival style building with twin entrances in a three-bay projecting pedimented pavilion. An outstanding feature is the three-stage bell tower that terminates in a pinnacle crowned by a rooster weathervane. The frieze, added during the 1855 renovation, was created from the original box pew doors. Inside, the sanctuary has a rare example of late nineteenth century ceiling stencilling. This tempera stencilling was completed in 1887 and restored in 1989-90. Wall stencilling, painted over in 1959, was reproduced in 1989-90. The Post Mills Church is well-preserved and retains its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The Post Mills Church, built in 1818, is located on Vermont Route 244, one half mile east of Route 113 in the village of Post Mills in the town of Thetford. The highest concentration of buildings in the village is on Route 113, near the original mill sites at the Ompompanoosuc River falls. In contrast, the Post Mills Church is relatively isolated in the pastoral

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Ompompanoosuc River plain east of the village center and river. The two-story, white, clapboard, Greek Revival building faces south and looks out onto a triangular common and village cemetery. Besides the church, the only other building on the common is a frame residence located at the east point of the green. Beyond the fields that stretch north and west of the church, a forested hillside, part of the Vermont Piedmont mountain range, borders the river plain and dramatizes the sense of serenity of the site.

The rectangular, three-by-three bay, timber-framed Post Mills Church measures forty feet frontally by fifty feet deep and is set back approximately forty feet from Route 244. A circular gravel drive leads from the road to the gable-front, where a slightly elevated stone stoop, surrounded by iron railings, was added to the entry when the building was raised onto a concrete block foundation in 1959. Three stairs lead from either corner up to the stoop. Before 1959 the church sat at ground level on a dry rubble foundation. Now the land grades away from the building leaving part of the sides and rear basement walls exposed.

The facade of the Post Mills Church features a three bay, pedimented projecting pavilion surmounted by a three stage, setback, bell tower. Paneled pilasters accent the corners of the main block and pavilion and support a unique full entablature that surrounds the sides and front of the building. The frieze of the entablature, added to the building in 1855 when it was "modernized" in the Greek Revival style, was formed from the doors of the original box pews, which were replaced at that renovation with the current style of open bench pews. Each panel of the frieze measures approximately thirty-six inches tall by eighteen inches wide and is separated by a

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Thetford, Orange County, VT

three inch wide rounded molding. There are thirty-two "doors" on each of the sides and thirty-two on the front (including the sides of the pavilion). The rear of the building is unadorned. The entablature of the main block continues on the sides and front of the pavilion to form the base of the pavilion's pediment.

The first story of the pavilion, which projects from the main block approximately four feet, contains a pair of deeply set four-paneled doors located in the outer bays. The doors are framed by single-story, plain square pilasters with Doric capitals supporting a full entablature that stretches across all three bays. Between the two doors, in the central bay, are 6/6 sash windows flanking a glass enclosed pedimented sign-board. The second story bays of the pavilion are defined by three 8/8 sash windows. A simple drip hood molding caps each window and a plain wood sill extends below. This facade used to look slightly different. Prior to 1959 there were only two second story windows in the outer bays of the pavilion, and in the central bay there was a large 15/15/15 double-hung sash window that spanned both stories. Rather than an entablature stretching across all three bays, as is the case now, the doors were framed by plain pilasters carrying a full entablature hood, that is, only above the doors.

A heavily carved raking and horizontal cornice with deep overhangs forms a pediment crowning the pavilion. Inset within the steel, standing-seam, gable roofs of the pavilion and main block is a prominent, three-stage bell tower. The original plans for the building provided for a simple square cupola, but the general public rejected the plan and raised an extra \$100 through subscription to construct the more elaborate tower that exists today. Corner

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Thetford, Orange County, VT

paneled pilasters, matching the corner pilasters of the main block and pavilion, accent the bell tower's square clapboard base and support a full entablature. The frieze of the bell tower entablature is more modest than the frieze on the main block, enhancing a sense of height through diminished scale. The front and sides of the base feature lighted, circular clock faces. The Seth-Thomas clock was added to the building in 1915. Symmetrically positioned on the rear wall of the base is a six-paned fixed sash window. The flat roof of the bell tower base is surrounded by a square-cut, wood balustrade that encloses an open, octagonal, arcaded belfry containing a cast iron bell. The bell was purchased in 1879 to replace the original that had cracked. The arcade is detailed with plain, flat archivolt with keystones in narrow relief carried on eight octagonal Doric columns. Surmounting the bell chamber is an octagonal, enclosed, louvered stage with an eight-sided, elliptical, metal bellcast roof that terminates in a pinnacle crowned with a rooster weathervane.

The east and west eaves sides of the building are identical. On each side the land is graded to expose concrete block basement walls allowing for steel casement windows in each of the three basement bays. The clapboard walls of the main block of the building are framed by corner paneled pilasters supporting a full entablature with the base of the clapboarding framed by a plain board watertable. The wall is punctuated by three, two-story 15/15/15 double-hung, sash windows flanked by wooden, horizontal-louvered shutters, so that each window has four shutters: two serving the upper half of the window and two serving the lower half. A simple drip hood molding caps each window and a plain wood sill extends below. Unobtrusive two-paned steel storm windows are inset into the exterior window frame. Originally there had been two rows of

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three windows on each side: the second story row to light the galleries and the lower story to light the main audience room, but when the building was remodeled in 1855, the side galleries were removed, and the windows were replaced with the large two-story 15/15/15 sash windows.

The rear, north side, of the building is nearly unadorned with a single 6/6 sash window located in the gable. The window has plain surrounds and is capped with a drip hood molding. The simplicity of this exterior wall suggests how the entire building must have looked prior to the 1855 renovation. In contrast to the other three sides, this wall has no corner boards, watertable or cornice returns. Rather than the deeply molded cornice found on the front and sides of the building, the raking cornice at the rear is a four inch flat board with minimal eaves. A brick chimney servicing a basement furnace runs up the west part of the wall. When the church sat on a stone foundation prior to 1959, there had been a crawl space under the building for a chunk furnace which was initially installed in 1887 to replace heating stoves that had been in the back of the audience room. A brick chimney, similar in appearance to the present chimney, ran up the center of the wall to the ridge. The concrete block basement wall is exposed in the back with a steel casement window at the eastern corner and a half-glass door at the western corner. Left of center are double half-glass doors. The doors are protected by eight-paned, three-quarter sash wooden storm doors.

The single basement door at the western corner of the rear leads to a kitchen area and the double doors lead to an open L-shaped, carpeted banquet/office facility. A furnace room and rest rooms

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are located in the back center of the basement between the kitchen and dining room, and a shallow storage room stretches across the front. U-shaped stairwells lead from the southeastern and southwestern corners of the basement up to a main level vestibule.

The single story, slate-floored vestibule is the interior space formed by the projecting pavilion. The south wall of the vestibule is pierced by wide, four paneled doors that provide the main access to the building. Opposite the front doors are two, four paneled doors with plain surrounds leading into the church sanctuary.

The sanctuary is lighted on each of the side walls by three, large, 15/15/15 sash windows with plain eight inch surrounds and a deep six inch reveal. The windows are double hung with a fixed central sash. Thin, one-and-one-half inch deep muntins separate the panes. The sanctuary has a central pulpit and side choir that are elevated three steps on a platform against the western half of the front (north) wall. A curved, three-foot high, bead-board paneled wall separates the choir from the congregation and pulpit. The eastern third has five pews extending from the north wall, facing the pulpit, perpendicular to the pews in the main audience. The main audience is divided by side aisles so that there are ten long bench pews in the center of the room with ten four-person pews extending from the west wall and eleven extending from the east. This pew configuration dates from the 1855 renovation. U-shaped open stairs lead from the corners of the back of the room up to a gallery that stretches across the back (south) wall.

The gallery, lighted by three 8/8 sash windows on the south wall, has an enclosed stairwell against the west wall that leads to the

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belfry. What appears to be buttressing between the south windows are cavities: the right side to enclose suspended clock works, and the left side to visually balance the right. The balcony parapet is made up of a plain plinth with four dado panels capped with a series of scotia, cyma recta, and fillet moldings. The back of the gallery has an elevated platform allowing for increased visibility. Several bench pews dating from the 1855 renovation remain in the gallery.

Originally the sanctuary had side galleries as well as the rear gallery, but in 1855, West Fairlee builder and artisan, Hiram Powell, was contracted for \$1038.00 to renovate the building. Some of the changes made to the interior included raising the floor three feet, removing the side galleries, replacing the two rows of side-wall windows with the present 15/15/15 sash windows, installing new bench pews (using the old box pew doors to make the frieze as part of exterior renovations), the addition of new chandeliers and lamps, and constructing a pulpit stage that replaced the box pulpit that had been elevated nearly up to the galleries.

In 1922 the interior space was again modified. This renovation included extending the gallery "out to the windows" and moving the vestibule wall back five feet so that the stairs to the gallery were located in the back of the sanctuary rather than the vestibule. Two steel poles which support the gallery and bell tower were probably added at that time.

The paramount sanctuary feature is the ceiling and wall painting, most of which date from 1887 when the plaster was replaced and the walls and cove ceiling were "frescoed". Rather than true fresco, the hand-stenciled ceiling was painted with distemper paint bound

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in heated animal glue. Even though this technique was popular in the late nineteenth century, few examples remain due to the water-solubility of the paint. Once again, Hiram Powell was responsible for the work. The ceiling consists of concentric bands painted around the periphery of the ceiling. The outermost is a solid apple green band bordered with opposing terra-cotta colored stripes. Inside is a wider, approximately eighteen inch, band of stenciled, gold, snow-flake-motif designs. Adjacent, moving inward, is a wide, approximately twelve inch, solid, rose band flanked by narrower, approximately four inch, green bands. The corners of the rose band are accented with round, gold, snow-flakes. Again, each band is edged with a narrow stripe of its opposing color giving a sense of dimension to the scheme. Inward is a neutral field broken by a rose band and finally the innermost band is created by a terra-cotta stripe and three gold stripes against a neutral background. The stripes evolve out of corner green, gold and terra-cotta, flower and leaf stencils.

While most of the ceiling painting has survived to the present, the wall stencils were painted over in 1959. In the winter of 1989/1990, Vermont artisan, Leonard Spencer, restored the walls and ceiling. Spencer dry cleaned the ceiling and inpainted badly stained or missing areas. From an original sample that survives on the belfry wall, the cove band was reproduced. It is a terra-cotta and apple-green fan and scepter pattern edged with bright blue stripes and terra-cotta bands. At the base of the walls above wainscoting, the fan and scepter stencil was reproduced between the windows with a horizontal green band edged with gold stripes surrounding the room forming a stepped pattern behind the pulpit.

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Post Mills Church
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Wood-grain painted wainscoting along the base of the walls probably pre-dates the painted plaster and may have been part of the 1855 restoration. Wide, horizontally-laid, tongue-and-grooved flush boards make-up the wainscoting so that the bottom board is approximately twenty inches wide and the top board is approximately twelve inches wide. A one-and-a-half inch rounded board protrudes as a chair-rail and continues to form the six-inch-deep window stool.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1818

1855

1887

Significant Dates

1818

1855

1887

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Dodge, Capt. E. S.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Post Mills Church
Name of Property

Orange County, Vermont
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property .3 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ann S. Cousins

organization _____ date September 19, 1991

street & number RD # 1, Box 437-K telephone (802) 434-5193

city or town Richmond state Vermont zip code 05477

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name _____

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Post Mills Church
Thetford, Orange County, Vermont

The Post Mills Church, built in 1818 and remodelled in 1855, is eligible for the National Register under criterion C. Its exterior appearance dates from 1855, and features Greek Revival style corner pilasters, a tall setback tower with open belfry, and an unusual frieze in the entablature made out of the doors of the original box pews. Inside the interior is noteworthy for its 1887 tempera paint ceiling stencilling and the reproduction of the wall stencilling that had been painted over in 1959. The church was built as a joint effort of the Congregational and Baptist societies, was funded through subscription, built on privately purchased land, and was supported through the sale of pews and donations. It served residents of Post Mills and nearby West Fairlee.

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Thetford, Orange County, Vermont

Religious worship was important to the earliest settlers of Thetford, Vermont. In July 1768, several months after the first town meeting, Thetford residents voted to "hire Preaching" the ensuing year. Five years later Rev. Clement Sumner, a Congregational minister, was installed as the town's first pastor. In 1781 a temporary log meeting house was built, and in 1785 to 1788 a stately clapboard meeting house was raised on the Common at Thetford Hill (Entered on the National Register of Historic Places September 23, 1988, as part of the Thetford Hill Historic District). Approximately ten years later, attracted by the availability of water-power and the growing number of mills, some residents moved in the 1790's and early 1800's to the northwestern corner of Thetford, to the newly established village of Post Mills. Post Mills was approximately five miles up the Ompompanoosuc River Valley from Thetford Hill and the town's only meeting house. Because transportation was limited to foot, or being drawn by horse or oxen, going to church became an all day affair for the residents of Post Mills. "As early as 1804, someone in the western part of town had inserted in the warrant an article to see if the town would build a meeting house. . . 'as far west of the center as the other is east'; the article was passed over."²

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About the same time, in the early 1800's, the diversification of religious denominations was challenging the close relationship between church and state. It must be noted that due to settlement patterns the Puritans had a very strong influence on Vermont government and religious practices. Under Puritan leadership, the church and state were inseparable. This influence is reflected in 1783 when the Vermont Assembly authorized legal voters to form a religious society and tax the inhabitants for the support of a church and its minister. In 1784 this Act was amended allowing an individual to be exempt from religious taxes by signing a declaration stating that they did not agree with the religious opinion of the majority of inhabitants, but by so declaring, they forfeited their right to vote in local affairs!³ Many of the early churches in Vermont were Congregational, and most received support through local taxation. "Free thinkers came with the nineteenth century and with them sprung up a variety of denominations and religious fanatics."⁴ By 1807 all laws uniting church and state were repealed, and the support of public worship in every form was made purely voluntary.⁵ Nevertheless, it was not until 1812 that the Thetford Hill Congregational Church ceased to be supported by town taxes.⁶ That year Rev. Asa Burton, pastor of the Thetford Hill church, wrote "that he was now pastor, not of the town, but of 'The First Congregational Society in said Thetford'."⁷ This separation seems to coincide with a shift of a number of Post Mills Congregationalists who joined the Post Mills Religious Society and began attending church services at the neighboring town of West Fairlee rather than making the longer journey to Thetford Hill.

Shortly after the repeal of the church tax there was a renewed interest by the Post Mills Religious Society to build a meeting house

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at Post Mills. An 1816 document states that subscribers agreed to pay cash for the "purpose of creating a House for Publik Worship near the burying Ground north of Eliphalet Dodge's in Thetford. And that Eliphalet Dodge, [Clenen ___] land owner, [omer Lass] & [Nil___] shall be a committee to erect said building at this direction and the [___] officer to [___] name shall be paid in meat stock at the Merchanstable."⁸ This document goes on to suggest appointing a minister by advertising in the Vermont Watchmen, a Montpelier based newspaper. After at least two years of planning, on April 17, 1818, the two denominations: Baptist and Congregationalist, jointly began construction of the Post Mills meeting house on land that had been purchased by Capt. E. S. Dodge and Capt. Phineas Kimball from Oramel Hinckley. The building committee is recorded to have been Capt. E. S. Dodge, Capt. William Heaton, Capt. Phineas Kimball, Samuel Daniels and David Wheeler.⁹ It is generally believed that Dodge was the organizing force responsible for the actual building, as most of the records are in his hand writing and disclose that he was paid \$1.25 a day as compared to the common laborer who received 75 cents (later raised to \$1.00) per day.¹⁰ "Capt. Dodge was known to have been a ship-carpenter by trade before coming to Vermont and was considered an expert workman with the broad-axe and adze."¹¹ Also significant was Capt. F. Churchill whose name appears as purchasing agent on many of the invoices, and who, in the payment ledger, is listed alongside Capt. Dodge. Records indicate that there were at least fourteen laborers who worked on the building, and the estimated cost was about \$1200.

The Post Mills Church may have been designed after plates appearing in Asher Benjamin's The Architect's Companion and The American Builder's Companion. Even though the church is on a smaller scale

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than Benjamin's (Benjamin's plan is for a church to seat 400; the Post Mills Church was planned to seat 250), the general design with central pedimented pavilion and inset bell tower is similar to Benjamin's "Plate 38: Plan and Elevation for a Meeting house" that appears in The American Builder's Companion. The three part bell tower, with square base and two octagonal upper stages with the bell located in the middle stage especially suggests Benjamin's design. New England meeting house scholar, Edmund W. Sinnott has noted the influence of Benjamin's designs throughout Vermont and a survey of area churches reinforces the similarity of classical, gable-front designs.^{1 2}

The bell tower has expressed the community's on-going pride in the meeting house. The original plans in 1818 were for a simple square bell tower, but apparently the early inhabitants wanted a more elaborate "cupola and weather vane" and raised subscription of \$100 to pay for the three stage structure. Nothing is known about the original bell, except that it became cracked, and a new bell was purchased in 1879 through subscription "and entertainment" at a cost of \$400.00. The Seth Thomas clock that currently adorns the tower was the gift of The Girls' Dramatic Club, installed in October 1915, after seven years of fund raising, at a total cost of \$450.00.

The considerable amount of rum that was bought by the building committee is noteworthy. Invoices that remain from 1818 show that approximately 34 gallons of rum were purchased along with hemlock, boards, nails and hardware. It is assumed that the rum was payment for labor. In light of what seems to have been a rather large consumption of alcohol, it is interesting that in 1839, the Post

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Post Mills Church
Thetford, Orange County, VT

Mills Congregational Society charter states "That we will not receive any person as a member of this Church who makes use of Addent Spiret as a common beverage."¹³

Even though bills "for finishing" the church date from 1828 and 1829, the meeting house was apparently complete enough to house services by 1821, as that year the Post Mills Religious Society and the West Fairlee church alternated weekly services between West Fairlee Center and Post Mills with one minister from each denomination, Baptist and Congregationalist, holding services on alternate Sundays in each town. In 1839 the Congregational Church Society of Post Mills was organized, and presumably the Baptist Society was formed at the same time, because land records show that on January 7, 1839, Capt. Dodge and Capt. Kimball deeded the land and meeting house to the Baptist and Congregational Societies for twenty dollars. A one rod wide strip of land on the east side of the church was reserved from the land transaction and sold to School District No. 14 as a site for Plains School. From 1839 to 1857 the two denominations continued to hold services on alternate Sundays at the church. From 1857-1865 arrangements were made whereby each Society was to hold services for two years at a time alternating between West Fairlee Center and Post Mills. Finally, in 1865, the Baptist Society was unable to "support preaching" due to a loss of members, and a year later a united brotherhood was developed so that the Baptist Society sold their title to the property to the Congregational Society for \$200.¹⁴

In 1855 the Post Mills Church was remodeled by West Fairlee craftsman, Hiram Powell, who was paid \$1038.00 for his services. The floor was raised, the side galleries removed, the box pews were

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replaced with open bench-like pews, and a stage platform was built to replace the original pulpit that had been ten or twelve feet high, reaching nearly up to the galleries. Originally there had been two rows of windows on each side: the upper row to give light to the galleries and the lower to light the main audience room. These windows were replaced with a single row of 15/15/15 sashes. Invoices reveal that a six light chandelier, a two light chandelier for the gallery and a pair of "pulpit" lamps were also installed. The center aisle was taken out so that side aisles flanked the center pews with rows of pews against each of the side walls. Wool carpeting was installed in the pulpit and oil cloth was laid down in the main audience room aisles. The exterior of the building was renovated with "work done on the capitals," and the doors that had been removed from the original box pews were used to make a cornice frieze. In 1920 when a new floor and new pews were installed, some of the 1855 pews were moved to the gallery.

In 1867 repairs were again made to the building. This time the interior was relathed and re-plastered. "Twenty years later there was further need for repairs, and some \$1200.00 was spent in making them. . . . A chunk furnace was installed in a crawl space under the church in 1887, replacing the small wood stoves that had heated the building. The plaster was renewed, the walls and ceiling frescoed. . . . Mr. Hiram Powell had charge of the work."¹⁵ The "fresco", not true fresco, refers to a painting technique that was popular in the 1880's. In this technique tempera pigment was suspended in a hot animal glue medium and painted onto the plaster. A report prepared by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in October 1988, states that the Post Mills church ceiling is one of the few remaining examples of early

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stenciling with distemper paint. "These were once extremely common, and may be thought of as pigmented equivalents of the calcimine ceiling paint. They are essentially pigments bound in differing amount of animal glue. They always remain soluble."¹⁶ The ceiling and wall painting at the Post Mills Church was recently restored. Vermont artisan, Leonard Spencer, dry cleaned the ceiling in 1989/1990 and inpainted badly stained or missing areas. The bands of wall stencils that were painted over in 1959 were reproduced by Spencer from an original sample that survived on the belfry wall. The work was funded in part by a grant from the Division for Historic Preservation.

At one time there had been a long, open-faced horse shed at the rear of the church that housed horse and carriages, and also held the privy. These sheds were probably built in 1840 as committee records dated November 12, 1839 provides for "horse sheds to be built on meeting house land."¹⁷ Stalls in the shed were sold much the same way that pews were sold to the congregation, with the name of owners painted above the stable openings. While one historic account states that the shed was demolished by a tornado in 1926,¹⁸ several residents dispute this claim, and recall that the shed was torn down c. 1946.¹⁹ The Congregational Church located across the Connecticut River in Lyme, New Hampshire has retained and preserved its horse sheds which are similar to the ones that had been behind the Post Mills Church.

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10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The rectangular boundary of the nominated property begins at a point on the northern boundary of Vermont Route 244, twenty-two feet southwest of the southwestern corner of the Post Mills Church, thence running northerly 100 feet on a line parallel with the west side of the building; thence easterly 165 feet on a line parallel with the north side of the building; thence southerly 100 feet on a line parallel with the east side of the building to the north edge of Route 244; thence westerly on the line of the highway to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

This boundary is the same as the original lot deeded by Oramel S. Hinckley to Capt. Eliphalet S. Dodge and Capt. Phineas Kimball in 1818 for the purpose of building a meeting house, and transferred from Dodge and Kimball to the Congregational and Baptist Societies at Post Mills, received and recorded by the Thetford Town Clerk February 28, 1939. Thetford Town Deeds, Libro 13 D, Folios 578 and 579.

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Post Mills Church
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Photographs

This information is the same for photographs 1 through 4:

The Post Mills Church

Thetford, Vermont

Credit: Ann Cousins

Date: June, 1991.

Negative filed at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Photograph 1: Front facade and east side, looking northwest.

Photograph 2: West side and rear, looking southeast.

Photograph 3: Detail of the frieze, dating from 1855, made from the doors of the original box pews, looking northwest.

Photograph 4: Interior, looking south.