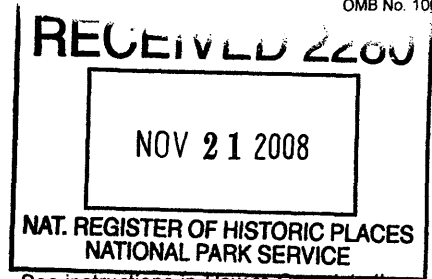


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

1256



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 Pythian Opera House
other names/site number Knights of Pythias Hall; Boothbay Harbor Opera House, The Opera House

2. Location

street & number 86 Townsend Avenue N/A not for publication
city or town Boothbay Harbor N/A vicinity
state Maine code ME county Lincoln code 015 zip code 04538

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.)

[Signature] 11/13/08
Signature of certifying official/Title SAPO Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State or 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 this 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

Date of Action

Patricia Andrews 12/30/2008

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PYTHIAN OPERA HOUSE

LINCOLN COUNTY, MAINE

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DESCRIPTION

The Pythian Opera House is an imposing three-and-one-half story wood frame building in the Lincoln County, town of Boothbay Harbor. The 1894 building was designed by the Portland, Maine architectural firm of Fassett and Fassett and is predominately Queen Anne in style, but contains minor elements of Shingle Style architecture as well. It is located on a just less than one-half acre urban lot and faces east to Townsend Avenue, one of two prominent north-south thoroughfares in the town. Smith Street runs along the north edge of the lot and a small parking area is located on the west side of the building. Another larger parking lot, the site of a former movie theater, is situated south of the Opera House, but is not within the boundary of this nomination. The neighborhood features a mixture of residential and commercial properties, many with nineteenth- or early twentieth-century dates of construction. Additional commercial properties and the harbor are located several blocks to the east and west.

The Pythian Opera House has an irregular footprint, with a prominent mass running east to west and a short, northward facing projection located near the western end of the north elevation. The building has a hip roof, with a gabled wall dormer on the east façade, wide gable dormers centered on the south and west elevations, and a pedimented gable roof over the north elevation projection. One brick chimney is located on the western flank of the latter's roof, and another, truncated chimney is on the south roof near the front corner of the building. The roof is covered with asbestos shingles and sits on a brick foundation over a full cellar under the front and rear thirds of its length.

The building is sided with light yellow clapboards and darker yellow decorative shingles. The pattern of the two materials is consistent on all the exterior walls. A wooden water table separates the brick foundation from clapboards at the first floor level. Dividing the first and second stories are two wooden belt courses, separated by about two feet the space between which is filled with rows of fish scale and saw tooth shingles. Both the second and third floors have clapboards, but they are interrupted at the top of the second floor by another belt course above which the clapboards flare outwards. A final belt course, located above the third story windows, provides the transition point for another band of fish scale shingles. These shingles assume the function of a decorative frieze. Above the shingles wooden modillions support the overhanging roof. All of the dormers have patterned shingles in the tympanum and modillions under the eaves. Corner boards are located only on the first two stories.

With the exception of the front façade the fenestration pattern is asymmetrically composed, yet most of the vertically aligned bays contain a regular hierarchy of windows. The first floor windows contain almost square two-over-two wooden sash. These windows share moulded side trim with the taller, two-over-two sash above the second floor. Between the pairs of windows are two recessed horizontal panels, painted dark yellow and separated by a piece of moulding. The third floor windows are even taller, but also have a two-over-two configuration. They are set in frames that match the windows below and are topped with a small hood which extends into the decorative frieze.

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The facade is three bays wide, with special emphasis placed on the center bay. The north and south bays have the same window details and relationships as the side elevations, however here each bay contains a joined pair of one-over-one sash rather than two-over-two sash. Between the first floor windows is a broad entry bay fronted by a set of granite-block steps. The steps are flanked by wood railings with paneled fields between sets of newel posts. Two wood and glass doors, hinged on the outside, are separated by a broad wood moulding. The doors are surrounded by a frame composed of two parallel sets of vertical wooden trim elements, the outside examples of which have minimal capitals. Short clapboard segments fill in the spaces between the boards. Over the doors is a horizontal band of trim topped with three sections of paneling above which is a projecting cornice. The vertical trim boards continue to the second floor level, where they flank a set of one-over-one windows before being capped by a wood entablature. On the third story is a one-over-one window set in a common frame between two very narrow one-over-one sash. This unit sits directly atop the entablature and is covered with a narrower frieze and cornice. A hemispherical plaque rests on the center of the cornice. The plaque contains a bas-relief motif featuring crossed broad axes, a shield and a knight, and a sculptural wooden torch protrudes above the plaque and stretches into the wall dormer. Four short and narrow one-over-one windows in a common frame are centered in the dormer, between cornice returns.

The south elevation of the Pythian Opera House is eight bays wide. The fourth and fifth bays, directly under the dormer, are situated closer together than the others, which are more or less equally spaced across the wall. On the first level the westernmost bay is blank, and a new side door, entablature and staircase has been positioned in the fourth bay from the west. A new glass and wood door is located on the second floor, positioned between the first and second bays from the west. There are two sets of iron fire escapes on this elevation. One fire escape runs from the aforementioned second floor west to ground level. The second fire escape starts at a platform in the gable, descends by ladder to another platform spanning three third floor window bays near the center of the building, then descends by ladder to a second floor platform positioned in the seventh bay from the west. From here another ladder stretches towards the ground. The gable dormer contains a Palladian window.

The north elevation is also eight bays wide, however the second and third bays from the west are located on the mass that projects northward from the regular wall plane. As with the opposite side of the building the fourth and fifth bays are clustered tightly together (closer than those on the south elevation), and the fifth bay contains a modern six panel door surrounded by simple wood trim. There are two bays in the projecting section of the wall; however their position suggests a tripartite wall division with the easternmost section having been left intentionally without a window. At the center of the first floor is a wood and glass door set in a wooden surround with pilasters, flanking side panels, and a bracketed hood. A Palladian window is positioned in the pedimented gable. Another door is located on the east side of the one-bay wide projection. The original two leaf doors have been replaced with a slightly smaller wood and glass door, and the remainder of the space occupied

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by the original doors has been filled with clapboards. Above this door is an oval, stained glass window, and on the third floor is a tall two-over-two sash window. The west side of the projection has a single window on the third floor. The westernmost bay of the main mass does not contain the same windows as found on the rest of the building. The third floor bay has a blocked window through which emerges a commercial kitchen ventilator. Below this a single, modern replacement window is positioned between the first and second floor levels, and below this is the electrical and utility service for the building.

The west elevation is also three bays wide. There are no windows or other openings on the first floor. Each of the upper stories features regularly spaced windows that match the windows present on the north and south elevation. The gable dormer contains a pair of narrow one-over-one sash, and an iron fire escape descends from this bay to the northernmost bay on the third floor, and from there the staircase leads towards the middle of the building (it is truncated above the first floor level).

The Pythian Opera House was designed to function as a public hall and as lodges for two fraternal organizations. The first two floors are occupied by a foyer, large auditorium with three sided balcony, a stage, and several back stage rooms. The third floor originally contained lodge rooms and associated ante-rooms for the Knights of Pythias and the Masons, and now also has a large commercial kitchen. The attic space contains three large finished rooms. Primary access to each of these functional areas is provided by a three story staircase located in the north side projection. A partially finished basement is located under the eastern and western thirds of the building; however, the center section is only partially excavated.

First Floor

The front doors lead to a square foyer. Opening to the southeast off this room is a rectangular office. A narrow hallway to the north of the front doors leads past a small new interior office to a bathroom in the northeast corner. On the partition wall at the west end of a foyer are a pair of French doors and a plate glass window looking into the auditorium. On the side walls of the foyer are a pair of doors that lead to staircases. The southern staircase leads to the balcony; the northern staircase originally also accessed the balcony but has been reoriented and now leads to the eastern section of the basement. The foyer, southeast office and bathroom have painted hardwood floors, bead board wainscot, chair rail and plasterboard walls. The plaster ceiling is inclined to support the balcony above.

The auditorium occupies approximately three-quarters of the building's overall length, and is two stories in height. A balcony is positioned against the north, east, and west exterior walls and the stage extends across the western end of the room. Three doors in the north wall lead to the under-stair ticket room, the stair hall and the exterior, from west to east respectively. The auditorium has three-and-a-half inch painted hardwood floors. The side walls are clad with painted woodwork consisting of a lower section of vertical beaded boards capped by a torus and cove moulded chair

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rail, over which is an upper section of horizontally laid beaded boarding. The windows are surrounded by thick, compound painted wood molding.

Four sets of two story vertical posts are visible in the auditorium's side walls. (A fifth post is positioned in the first floor foyer wall and is visible at balcony level, while a sixth is obscured by the front walls of the stage.) Each post rises to the ceiling to meet massive transverse girts. Supporting the junction of each post and girt is a large 'ship's knee' brace. The girts intersect two longitudinal carrying beams: at each intersection a substantial cross-shaped steel foot is bolted to the girts and beams. The feet extend below the beams and provide counter pressure to massive transverse cables connected to turnbuckles, which in turn are anchored through the girts just in front of the knee bracing. Diagonally installed tie rods brace each set of iron feet under the girts. This assembly acts as a self supporting truss system and eliminates the need for interior supports. The ship's knees are covered with fir bead board and the ceiling girts and beams are cased with pine. In addition to the girts, cables and iron feet, the ceiling is awash in sprinkler piping and stage and house lighting on adjustable fixtures. Between the structural elements the ceiling is covered with beaded boards.

The slightly-inclined side balconies are supported by four sets of metal columns with "Y" shaped braces. Each column is positioned in line with the side-wall posts. The front of the balconies have temporary wood rail and style railings. (Segments of the original pipe railings are stored in the basement and may be reinstalled in the future.) On the side balconies two rows of seats are positioned on a flat platform fronted by a lower aisle. The eastern end of the balcony is much deeper, and supports several additional rows of seats. At the center of this section is a small projection room backed up against a staircase that leads to the third floor Pythian Hall room. Neither of these features were part of the original design, but they have been finished with painted bead board to match the rest of the auditorium.

The stage is not ornate. The proscenium arch is trimmed with eight-inch wide painted boards with applied bed mouldings and an applied capital at the base of the arch. The stage floor is slightly rounded and only minimally protrudes into the auditorium. The front of the apron is covered with painted bead boards. A second, trapezoidal, lower level stage is positioned on the auditorium floor. This is a fully removable feature. The floors of the upper stage are laid with five inch wide painted pine. Moveable side panels draped with curtains separate the performance space from the back stage areas. A short staircase in the northwest corner of the backstage area leads to a small dressing room ('green room') and out to the stair hall, while another staircase in the southern end of the stage wall leads to the auditorium.

Stair Hall

Affixed to the north side of the auditorium and stage is the stair hall. Painted bright yellow and white, all four levels of this appendix feature southern yellow pine or hardwood floors, vertical bead board wainscot and horizontal bead board walls and solid board railings under varnished handrails. The stair stringers feature a recessed panel decoration. Rows of coat hooks line the exterior first

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floor wall. The stairs ascend the south side of the hall between the first floor and balcony level, and climb the north side of the wall between the balcony, third floor and fourth floor. A wide landing runs along the south wall at the third floor level. The oval window above the eastern facing door contains twelve trapezoidal facets of purple, gold and cream glass surrounding a clear oval center. A large, Arts and Crafts-style lantern hangs from the underside of the stair in front of the oval window.

Third Floor

On the third floor the stair hall opens onto a foyer in the middle of the northern section of the building. A short hallway leads along the north wall to the Pythian Hall, while French doors lead south into the former Masonic Hall. The Pythian Hall occupies the first three bays of the eastern end of the building and the Masonic Hall occupies a similar, if narrower, volume of space between the fifth and seventh bay. Between the two halls is a narrow swath of rooms, linearly arranged, containing pantry spaces, small dressing room and walk-in refrigerator. At the west end of the building doors lead from the Masonic Hall to a pair of narrow anterooms. A commercial kitchen wraps around the northwest corner of the building and is accessible from the northern anteroom and the stair hall. A pair of modern bathrooms is situated between the west end of the foyer and the kitchen. The ceilings on this floor are approximately fourteen feet high.

The former Knights of Pythias Hall is the most ornate and intact of the third floor rooms. The short hall way between the foyer and the Hall retains a line of coat hooks along the wall and a retractable peep hole in the Hall door. In the Hall, the floors are of varnished maple and the painted plaster walls are ornamented with a narrow chair rail. Wooden interior shutters line the large windows. The ceiling is of ornamental tin and a paneled tin cornice, painted in blues, pinks yellows and greens and decorated with tri-glyphs, swags, fleur-de-lis, and urns, wraps down to create a frieze around the room in line with the tops of the windows. Running along the north and south walls (and continuing partially along the east wall) is a raised platform about five feet wide and one foot tall. In the center of each side wall this platform has a semicircular bulge, and historic photographs indicate that it is this section of the platform which has been removed in front of the center east windows. At the west end of the room is a modern three-sided oak and mahogany bar and glass and mahogany architectural bar back. Positioned in the middle of the room, near the east wall, are two large partition walls that enclose a broad staircase to the auditorium balcony. While neither the bar nor the staircase are original to the room, neither disrupts the volume of space of the essential character-defining features of the room.

Historic photographs also indicate that the original ceiling in the Knights of Pythias Hall was plaster with cased girls spanning the room's width, and that gas chandeliers were used to light the room. At some point after the building was outfitted with electricity the ceiling was entirely redone in ornamental tin accented with colored electric lights. Most of the ceiling tiles feature repetitive geometric patterns but these are interrupted by decorative triangular panels set at measured intervals. There are nine small, equilateral triangles arranged around the perimeter of the ceiling, each oriented with one of their vertices pointed toward the center of the room. The perimeter

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triangles are each painted blue, green, pink or yellow, and five of them contain a letter (P, C, F, K, or B) executed in raised tin. Each of these triangles are also outfitted with three white glass globes. At the center of the room is a much larger triangular figure with vertices pointing northeast, south and northwest. The triangular pattern is repeated in three fields of decreasing size, painted pink, yellow and blue, from the largest to the smallest figure. Colored globes (red, yellow and blue) mark the vertices of the figure, and are connected by lines of clear and white glass globes down each side of the largest triangle.

As originally designed the former Masonic Hall was accessed via the ante rooms at the western end of the building, not from the foyer. Currently the Hall has a carpeted floor and plaster walls with molded chair rail and picture rail. The windows retain their interior shutters, but the perimeter platforms, originally situated against the north, south, and east walls have been removed. In contrast to the Pythian Hall, historic photographs show that the ceiling of the Masonic Hall was either clad with painted tin or featured plaster painted with geometric designs. Today the ceiling is of painted plaster broken by the cased girts.

The two anterooms behind the Masonic Hall are reached via two five panel doors in the west wall of the latter room. The partition wall between the two anterooms has been removed and narrow counters and shelves line the exterior walls. The commercial kitchen retains some plaster walls and ceilings, but has two new interior partition walls and linoleum floors.

Fourth floor/attic.

Three large, connected rooms fill the attic and attic dormer spaces. These rooms are nominally finished with plywood floors and plaster walls and ceilings. Iron tie rods descend from the low ceilings to the transverse girts that support the floor. A small pantry at the top of the stair landing is the only space on this level with any discernable function. Numerous short doors open into knee wall storage spaces under the roof.

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 a 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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

SOCIAL HISTORY

POLITICS / GOVERNMENT

ARCHITECTURE

ENTERTAINMENT / RECREATION

Period of Significance

1894 -1958

Significant Dates

1894

C. 1934

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Fassett, Francis H. (1823-1908), and

Fassett, Edward F. (1848 -1922), architects

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:

Boothbay Region Historical Society, Boothbay Harbor, Maine

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Pythian Opera House in the Lincoln County, town of Boothbay Harbor is a substantial, architecturally impressive three-and-a half story structure designed by the Portland Maine architects of Francis H. Fassett and his son Edward F. Fassett. Erected by the Pythian Hall Company in 1894 the handsome Queen Anne style building with Shingle Style details house Boothbay Harbor's governmental functions until the 1930s and served as the meeting halls for two fraternal organization into the 1960s. It was also an important public hall utilized by the community as a site for entertainment and recreation until the late 1980s. The Pythian Opera House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance under Criterion A, for its long term association with the social and governmental history of the town, and under Criterion C for its architectural significance.

The establishment of the Pythian Opera House is historically associated with the birth of the town of Boothbay Harbor. Through most of the first nine decades of the nineteenth-century the town of Boothbay occupied the southern half of the peninsula that stretched between the Sheepscot and Damariscotta Rivers. However, in the waning years of the century the village of Boothbay Harbor, at the southern end of the land mass, started to create a personality distinct from that of the northern, more agricultural sections of the town. Throughout the state coastal villages and towns had become attractive to summer vacationers, many from out of state, who built seaside cottages and immersed themselves in the mild sea air and imported a robust social and cultural milieu to otherwise "quaint" and "backwater" maritime villages. Boothbay Harbor was a favorite destination. By the early 1880s the Harbor village had embraced the summer colonies, while the remainder of the town, which saw less economic development, grew wary. In 1886 a serious fire burned several business blocks in the Harbor and led residents of this village to advocate for a comprehensive water system; the remainder of the town balked at the expense and the seeds of municipal division were sown. After much debate and acrimony, the town of Boothbay Harbor was formed by an act of the State Legislature in 1889.

Although the financial panic of 1893 had generally depressed the economy, as Boothbay region historian Barbara Rumsey summarizes, this did not quell the ambitions of the nascent town.

The opera house was build (sic) in 1894, the same year the United States became the greatest industrial producer in the world. Despite the panic of 1893, it was a time of optimism in Boothbay Harbor, and the opera house was an indicator of both the town's prosperity and the great expectations for its future. Boothbay Harbor was feeling its oats, its leading businessmen confident they had jumped on the train of prosperity in time to lead the town to economic and cultural glory.

There were many reasons for the confidence: the town of Boothbay Harbor, created in 1889, had cut itself free of the part of town it perceived as backward and against development; the industrial revolution was transforming the country; progress was bringing centralized utilities,

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such as gas and water to even small towns; and the 1880s summer resident and tourist boom was continuing unabated. Land that had been in the same family for 200 years was moving fast and at a good price to non-residents. The expected "advent of people of wealth, culture, and refinement" (April 28, 1888, Boothbay Register) was being realized. (Rumsey, 1999.)

The Pythian Opera House was conceived of as a multi-purpose building to serve governmental functions for the nascent town, offer a venue for cultural activities and host local Fraternal organizations. It was also a symbol of the emerging town's prosperity and rising status - in size, massing and ornamentation it was the grandest of all the public buildings in either Boothbay or Boothbay Harbor at that time. Stylistically it reflected the popular Queen Anne aesthetic found among the village's cottage communities, but at the Opera House the stylistic vocabulary was utilized on a grander scale. While a few of the outlying summer hotels were equally impressive in terms of scale and design, as a public building the Pythian Opera House was noteworthy within the immediate village which until then had been populated with one and two story frame houses, modest commercial blocks and working wharves, piers and canneries.

The Pythian Hall Company was formed in 1894, with encouragement and some financial support from the town, specifically to erect the needed building. Local resident and developer Luther Maddox spearheaded the effort, as he related in his memoir Looking Backwards.

Feeling that it was necessary to have better accommodations for our lodges and town meetings, ten of us undertook the building which is known as the Pythian Opera House. None of us had any spare money, and it was hard work to start it as we had the same old opposition and it was predicted that we would get it part way along and then we would have to board up the windows and there it would remain, but we were full of courage and perseverance and we started with \$1500; we sold stock which brought our capital up to about \$3500. We organized our Company; bought the lot for \$500. We bought the frame part and shingles at Gardiner and then we started to raise a sufficient amount on a mortgage to complete it. This we did. The building cost with all its equipments, steam heat and lighting, about \$14,000. This left about \$11,000 to be raised on the mortgage. We soon completed the building and were ready for business. Our Mason's Lodge occupied one end of the second story and the Knights of Pythias the other. The town leased the opera house auditorium for town business and the corner room for a town office. (Maddox, p. 58)

Work on the building began in April of 1894 and was finished just 70 days later. Although the design was by a Portland architectural firm the work was accomplished by Boothbay or Boothbay Harbor tradespeople: the foundation and drains were undertaken by Bryon Giles, granite walls were installed by Charles Dodge and Nathaniel C. Reed was the lead carpenter.

The choice of the architectural firm of Frances H. Fassett and his son Edward F. Fassett is not hard to understand. By 1894 the elder Fassett was one of the state's most respected and prolific

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architects. With a career that spanned more than five decades and resulted in hundreds of commissions, the cumulative effect of Frances H. Fassett's legacy has yet to be thoroughly evaluated. However, there is no doubt that his talents and contributions were widely acknowledged during his lifetime. The following biography of Fassett was prepared by Richard Herndon in 1897:

His early education was acquired in the common schools of his native city. He left school, however, at the age of fourteen, and for the next four years was a clerk in the store of a general trader in Bath. He then was apprenticed to the carpenter's trade, and subsequently studied architecture in the offices of architects in Boston and New York. In 1850 he began the practice of his profession in Bath; his operations gradually extending up the Kennebec River to Augusta, where, after the great fire of 1862, he practically rebuilt the city. In 1864 he removed to Portland, where he has continued in the active business of his profession to the present time. During his career Mr. Fassett has designed many of the public and business buildings and dwellings erected in Maine and neighboring states. Among the more noteworthy monuments to his taste and skill throughout the state are the Maine General Hospital, the new Congress Square Hotel, the Baxter Building (the largest business block in Maine), the Portland Public Library, the Payson Memorial Church, also the Jackson, McLellan, Butler and High school buildings, all in Portland; several of the buildings of the Maine Insane Asylum, Augusta; the Hancock County Court House, Ellsworth; and St. Mary's School in Biddeford. He also rebuilt the City Building of Portland after the great fire of 1866, and is engaged in building the new Church of the Sacred Heart in that city. (Herndon, p. 342).

After the Great Fire of 1866, Fassett was largely responsible for the rebuilding of Portland's public landscape, and he earned the moniker "Maine's undisputed architect for all seasons." (Shettleworth, p. 186). However, while his post-fire oeuvre concentrated on a 'personal version of High Victorian Gothic architecture', he was proficient at designing buildings in styles that incorporated all the post Civil War architectural trends. (Shettleworth, p. 187). Not until after Fassett entered into a partnership with John Calvin Stevens in 1880 did his designs start to incorporate Queen Anne and Shingle Style elements, a trend that continued to be developed in conjunction with later partners, including his son Edward. The younger Fassett first studied in Syracuse, New York to be a machinist, and then returned to Maine where he took up architecture. After several years in Wisconsin, Denver and Kansas City he returned to Maine and joined his father's practice. As related in his obituary, the name Fassett "was closely identified with that profession [architecture] father and son, more than 60 years." (*Portland Evening Express and Advertiser*. January 6, 1922.)

While many of the elder Fassett's commissions were executed in urban areas, he designed buildings throughout the state, and included several other town halls or assembly spaces. Each reflected current architectural trends but also responded to the budgetary and programmatic needs of their communities. Among the more notable buildings include the Queen Anne style Fifth Maine Regiment building (1888) and the Shingle Style Eighth Maine Regiment Memorial building (1891),

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both assembly halls on Peaks Island in Portland.¹ Town houses or town halls designed by Fassett included a highly detailed High Victorian Gothic style brick and stone example in Cape Elizabeth (1874); a simple one-story Italianate town house in Waterville that was almost residential in scale (1875); elaborate Queen Anne style brick town halls in Pittsfield (1882) and Brunswick (1883-84), (both with his partner John Calvin Stevens), followed by a more modest brick town house in Winthrop (1889), also in the Queen Anne style. Sensitive to local conditions, in Boothbay Harbor the building the firm designed was both monumental and reserved, and as compared to the examples from a decade earlier, was tempered by a restraint that reflected the Fassetts' familiarity with the less flashy Shingle Style and Colonial Revival styles that were also enjoying popularity at this time.

As mentioned above, one of the reasons the Pythian Opera House was constructed was to provide the town with a fitting structure in which to locate their governmental functions, although it is interesting to note that among Fassett's town hall commissions, this building was designed with the most emphasis placed on the performance and gathering spaces; the dedicated governmental space was secondary to the dedicated Fraternal and entertainment spaces. Throughout Maine, well into the twentieth century, towns erected central facilities that were capable of sheltering a large percentage of the town's residents for purposes of conducting their annual town meeting, the once yearly event during which budgets were set, local leaders elected and policy formulated for the town. The buildings were used throughout the year for voting, selectmen's and assessors' meetings and special town meetings as needed. Outside of the urban areas there was little need for town 'offices' as there were few if any professional staff that worked on a regular basis. (Note, these buildings were usually referred to as town houses or town halls in the 19th and early 20th centuries.) Until 1931 the southeast first floor room served as the selectmen's office, however after several years of debate a dedicated town office was built closer to the harbor.² Town meetings continued to be held in the building until the mid-1970s.

Many of halls that served municipal functions also functioned as a public hall, and in this capacity the building was used for many town groups for everything from recreation to performances. The following overview of the Pythian Opera House was prepared by Boothbay Harbor historian Barbara Rumsey:

The opera house became the center of almost all local public events: town meetings, elections, plays, traveling shows (minstrels, choruses, magic, vaudeville, plays), dances,

¹The Fifth Maine Regiment was listed in the National Register on January 5, 1978 and the Eighth Maine Regiment was listed on October 4, 2006.

² Interestingly, the establishment of the new office was connected to an effort by Dr. James M. Todd to restructure the center of Boothbay Harbor in order to provide more of a town center. This project included moving several houses from the corner of Oak and Mckown Street, re-routing a road and creating a 'common' area near the Library, all of which helped cultivate an image of the town thought to be more in line with what the summer visitors expected. According to Asa Tupper, Sr., in Boothbay Harbor Historical Sketches V. II "In the new town office Dr. Todd was very proud of the tourist lounge for which he bought the furnishings...these facilities were popular with tourists and it has been said that they had no equal on the coast." (Page 225.)

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concerts, sporting events, graduations, and movies when they were invented. Mildred Webster's sister, Ina Delano (Mrs. Richard) Murray, played the piano during the silent movies. Virginia Gamage and Hilda May recalled other repeated opera house events: baccalaureate, graduation ball and grand march, and Saturday night dances with local bands, including fellows such as Lawrence Lewis and Albert McKown. Their minstrel show memories include players Dr. Sprague, George Gregory, Freddy Curtis, Lawrence Bennett, and John Arsenault, the top local tapdancer. The biggest sporting event Virginia remembers was the Harlem Globetrotters' appearance about 1930.

Virginia had an opera house responsibility when she worked in Porter's drug store in the late 1920s and 1930s. She took reservations for events, such as minstrel shows or the senior play, and those reservations were indicated on a hardwood board which always sat on the counter. The board was laid out with numbered and lettered holes for the seating arrangement. When the seat was chosen, a peg was placed in the hole. Virginia's biggest problem with keeping reservations straight were the "loafers" who sat the counter and played with the pegs...

A typical week was that of March 3, 1930, a time when "talkies" were coming in: on Tuesday "Untamed" with Joan Crawford and James Montgomery played with Paramount News, Fox Movietone News, and Universal News; March 5 was a basketball game between the Boothbay Bears and the Oakhurst Athletic Club; and Friday and Saturday was an all-talking drama, "Madam X" with Ruth Chatterton and Lewis Stone, talking news, and two vaudeville shows.

After local non-profits came into being, such as the library, hospital auxiliary and humane society, they too used the building for fund raising events. In the 1950s I saw my mother act in Little Theater Group plays there. In 1960 the YMCA started using the building for activities, and I remember rollerskating and playing basketball there. (Rumsey, 1999.)

Although the building was erected to serve both civil and municipal functions, the primary sponsors of the effort were the town's fraternal organization, especially the Knights of Pythias. Membership was strong in the local chapters of both the Knights of Pythias and the Masons, and in 1906 the Boothbay Harbor Knights of Pythias lodge inducted its 500th member, the largest in the state. Both the Pythian room, and the Masonic Hall were designed to specifically address the rites and rituals of their organizations – specific orders were seated on raised platforms, and peep holes in doors and anterooms allowed for member's preparation and facilitated ritualized entrance procedures. While it is unknown precisely when the ceiling of the Pythian meeting room was refinished in tin, the triangular motifs and color scheme reflect mystic symbols of the fraternal order.

The Pythian Opera House, which ironically has never hosted an operatic performance, continued in service to the Boothbay Harbor community into the second half of the twentieth century. By the 1920s, however, the building's size and expense had become more of a liability than a resource for

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many residents. Rumsey relates its apparent demise:

The 1970s was a crisis time for the opera house, with the YMCA leaving for its new building on the Meadow, and the town no longer willing to rent the auditorium for town purposes. Those who were responsible for the building foresaw that without rent from the towns, the lodges could not carry the building. In the February 25, 1971, *Register*, Gordon Harrington, president of the Boothbay Lodge Corporation, wrote, "Are the residents of this town ready to let this building which for 75 years served the townspeople not only as its town hall, but has always been available for thousands of civic services, shows, dances, basketball games, and numerous benefits for charitable organizations, be closed down and sold?" The answer was eventually yes, though the town stayed on a few more years. Another letter went in the paper the following year, signed by all lodge officers, including Dick McDougall. Again they laid out for the townspeople the good the building provided and how the rent money paid by the town was returned in, among other ways, taxes and water and sewer bills. In 1978 the elementary school was built and available, and the town finally abandoned the opera house for the new building.

Over the decades and years, all the organizations that used the opera house built their own buildings, including Saul Hayes's 1928 movie theater and the 1956 Meadow high school with its gym/auditoriums, large meeting rooms, a Masonic hall, a K.P. hall, a playhouse, and a post-1970s movie theater. If the whole town had conspired together to make the opera house obsolete, it could not have done a better job. (Rumsey, 1999.)

In 1977 the Pythian Opera House was finally abandoned by the town and the Pythian Lodge, and sold.³ Over the next 24 years the building was remodeled into commercial spaces (with a series of false-front 'stores' erected in the auditorium), served as an inn and hosted a restaurant. In 2001 an unsuccessful effort was made to restore the auditorium to a performance center, and under different management this goal was achieved in 2005. While the Masonic Hall lost some of its character-defining features, and a new staircase and bar were built in the Pythian Hall and a couple of new exit doors were installed to meet code overall the auditorium emerged unscathed, and the Pythian Hall retains its distinctive fraternal-era finishes. The Pythian Opera House has re-emerged as the center of local, year round performances and events, and its future prospects for serving as central element in the life of the Boothbay Harbor community looks promising.

³ In 1931 the Pythian Hall Company mortgaged the property to the Boothbay Lodge, Knights of Pythias, and the mortgage was foreclosed upon in 1938. However, the title was not fully cleared until 1977. (Book 909, pages 266 through 269, Lincoln County Registry of Deeds.)

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is depicted on the Town of Boothbay Harbor tax map 20, lot 97.
.45 acre

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the nominated property represent the limits of the urban lot upon which the building is located. South of the nominated parcel are two adjacent parking lots, formerly the site of a movie theater, which are also owned by the proprietors of the Opera House, but which are not included within the boundaries of this nomination.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_001
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
7 September 2007
East facade; facing southwest.

Photograph 2 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_002
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
7 September 2007
South elevation; facing northwest.

Photograph 3 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_003
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
12 March 2008
Interior, auditorium balcony; facing northwest.

Photograph 4 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_004
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
12 March 2008
Interior, auditorium; facing west.

Photograph 5 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_005
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
12 March 2008
Interior, Pythian Room, facing southeast.

Photograph 6 of 6
ME_Lincoln County_Pythian Opera House_006
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
7 September 2007
Interior, stairwell; facing east.