



1223

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 Mercer Union Meetinghouse
other names/site number Union Church

2. Location

street & number North side of Main Street 1/10 of a mile west of the junction with Route 2 N/A not for publication
city or town Mercer N/A vicinity
state Maine code ME county Somerset code 025 zip code 04957

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] 11/30/06
Signature of certifying official/Title 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] 1.9.07
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson H. Beall

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
_____ buildings
_____ sites
_____ structures
_____ objects
_____ 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
None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
RELIGION / Religious facility

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
RELIGION / Religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
EARLY REPUBLIC / Federal
MID-19TH CENTURY / Greek Revival
MID-19TH CENTURY / Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation GRANITE
walls WEATHERBOARD
roof METAL / TIN
other _____

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

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MERCER UNION MEETINGHOUSE

SOMERSET COUNTY, MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

DESCRIPTION

The Union Meetinghouse in Mercer, Maine is a greatly intact religious structure built in 1829 in the Federal style with Gothic Revival details. Owned to this day by the inhabitants of this small southern Somerset County village, the church is located on Main Street half a mile west of the center of town and just one-tenth mile east of the intersection of Main Street with State Route #2. The building faces south towards the road and is surrounded on all sides by a grassy lawn with sparse ornamental shrubs. To the east and north of the Meetinghouse lot is the Mercer Village Cemetery, the boundaries of which are demarcated by a wrought iron fence. A grass track along the west (meetinghouse) side of this fence leads to granite pillars hung with iron gates marking the formal entrance to the cemetery. To the southwest of the Meetinghouse is a large, freestanding boulder with a mounted plaque memorializing an old em tree that had been located in the village.

The overall form of the Union Meetinghouse is a rectangular gable-fronted mass with a projecting three-bay central pavilion and a square tower that rests equally on the roof of the main block and the pavilion. With the exception of flush-board siding on the tower at belfry level, the structure is clad with painted clapboards. Narrow corner boards mark the corners and a water table marks the transition from the timber frame building to the granite foundation stone and substructure. Both roofs are covered with galvanized steel. The central pavilion extends approximately eight feet from the facade of the main mass. The gable roof of the pavilion, although lower in elevation, matches the pitch of the main roof. The eave line of the pavilion joins to the full width cornice of the main mass. In contrast the center pavilion has only short, broken gable cornices which frame the tall, pointed arch window that dominates the building facade. This window contains two nine-light sash under a fixed sash covered by shutters and trimmed with an eared architrave. (The upper and middle sets of shutters are extant but the bottom set has been removed.) To either side of this window are wide, six-panel doors enframed by wooden pilasters with molded plinths and Doric-style capitals under a narrow entablature with a moulded projecting cornice. Each door is fronted by broad granite steps, over which a ramp has been lain to the westernmost door. Between the doors and under the window is a wooden, painted shield stating "Mercer Union Church Service 10 am to 11 1829". On each of the two narrow side walls of the central pavilion are a vertically aligned pair of nine-over-six windows.¹ The east and west sides of the Meetinghouse each contain three, evenly spaced window bays. These bays contain larger, nine-over-six wooden sash that are flanked by wooden shutters. Above each top sash is a blind, rounded arch set with a wooden louvered fan. The northern elevation contains only two windows, positioned in the far corners of the building. Neither window is ornamented with shutters, blind arch nor louvered fan. As opposed to the front facade, the rake trim on the rear elevation terminates with short cornice returns.

¹In contract to the auditorium windows, these are much smaller - domestic in scale - with glass panes measuring 7 ½ x 9 ½ inches compared to the 12 ½ x 15 ½ inch panes in the auditorium. These vestibule windows feature a classic, diminutive ovolo moulding of the early Federal period and may predate the erection of the church, as they are set in a later, transitional Federal to Greek Revival casing.

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The tower on the Union Meetinghouse is most accurately described as containing two stages, however, the overall dimensions of the structure remain essentially the same from base to cornice. The lower stage, which straddles the gable roofs of the pavilion and main mass, is unornamented save for narrow corner boards and clapboard sheathing. Progressing in elevation, the transition to the next stage is marked by a wooden belt course. At this point the corner boards assume the characteristics of simple pilasters and the siding changes to flush board sheathing. One third of the way up this stage is a secondary belt course that runs between the corner pilasters and acts as the sill for the louvered belfry openings.² The sides of each opening are formed by secondary pilasters, which, along with those on the corners, terminate with moulded capitals below a narrow frieze. The cornice of the belfry features the same moulded profile as on the roof eaves and door lintels, and it projects beyond the seemingly flat belfry roof. Each corner of the roof is marked with a tapered spirelet and linked by a simple, balustrade that has replaced an original low parapet. On the interior is a large bell manufactured by the Henry Hooper Casting Company of Boston, Massachusetts and installed in 1857.

Each of the front doors leads to a narrow vestibule which in turn opens via a four panel door to the interior of the auditorium. Within this room these doors are capped with slightly pediment-shaped lintels (*Greek peaks*), as are all of the windows. The center bay of the pavilion (between the vestibules) is open to the auditorium. The resultant apse-like area is raised on a platform gained from low side steps. Wrapping from stair to stair and crossing in front (north) of the platform is a ten feet wide enclosure with two decorative panels and a moulded, cornice-line railing. In each of the southwest and southeast corners of the apse are steep stairs leading to small rooms over the vestibule. Each set of these stairs are obscured by solid wood paneling under curved hand rails.

The remainder of the auditorium is filled with pews that face the front, or north, wall. The pews are divided into four sets of thirteen rows; one adjacent to each exterior wall and two sets sharing a common structural partition located between the two aisles. Stylistically the pews are a transitional form situated between 18th century box pews and later 19th century free-standing furniture.³ The seats are narrow, the backs high and only slightly inclined and cyma recta arm rails are positioned high above the paneled pew ends. There is no evidence, however, that these pews ever sported hinged doors. Each pew is numbered. Starting from the northwest corner, and proceeding front to back, the pews are labeled 33-44; 56-45; 1- 12 and 24-13. In addition, pews numbered 25-28 and 29-31 are attached to the east and west corners of the north wall respectively. Between these two sets of pews is a low, carpeted platform that forms the dais upon which an Eastlake-style pulpit and two velvet upholstered chairs are located. Behind this dais is a white curtain hung on the wall to provide a visual backdrop to the space. A small parlor organ and piano are arranged to either side

²Aluminum louvers have replaced the original wooden louvers that had worn out by the early 20th century.

³The pews are quite similar to those in the 1856 Second Freewill Baptist Church in North Montville, Maine.

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of the front platform and a large pipe organ is located in the southeast corner of the room.

The finishes on the interior of the Mercer Union Meetinghouse are quite noteworthy. The walls, above wide board wainscoting, are clad with embossed tin. The upper reaches of the walls arch into a cove which transitions along the flat of the ceiling into a broad field of tin ceiling panels with floral motifs edged with a moulded border. The ceiling panels are white, and the walls are painted coral-pink. The most striking aspect of the auditorium, however, is the unusual grain painted woodwork. This graining is present on the backs, fronts and paneled ends of the pews (not the seats), the paneled enclosure and the staircases in the apse, each of the interior doors, all the wainscoting, and, to a less decorative degree, the trim around the windows and doors. It is important to note that the graining is generally honey colored and does not seem to emulate a specific wood species or cut, i.e. birds-eye maple, quarter sawn oak or mahogany. Rather, many of the pieces, and especially the pews, feature almost abstract geometric figures. Often these are in concentric patterns that at times resemble ripples in water, sonic waves or musical notation on a staff more than the natural grain of wood. The beauty of the grain painting is further accentuated by a deep-purple stain applied to the chair rail, railings, armrests, panel edges and the moulded top caps of the Greek peaks.

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.)

- Criteria A, B, C, D with checkboxes and descriptions.

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

- Criteria A-G with checkboxes and descriptions.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1829, 1857, 1884/5, 1917

Significant Dates

1829, 1857, 1884/5, 1917

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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):

- Documentation checkboxes: preliminary determination, previously listed, designated landmark, recorded by survey, recorded by engineering.

Primary location of additional data:

- Location checkboxes: State Historic Preservation Office, Other State agency, Federal agency, Local government, University, Other.

Name of repository:

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Erected in 1829 by an as yet unidentified builder, the Mercer Union Meetinghouse is a transitional Federal and Greek Revival style frame edifice that is detailed on the exterior with Gothic Revival style features and on the interior with Greek Revival mouldings and bold grain painting. It is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for its architectural and artistic significance. Criteria Consideration A also applies due to the building's religious use.

The Mercer Union Church was erected as a joint venture by the residents of the town and the members of the Congregational and Methodist societies. The effort was chronicled by Harold Owen Smith in The History of Mercer as follows:

The year 1829 was an important one in the lives of the Mercer Congregationalists, Methodists, and Universalists. These three societies united to build a new meetinghouse which would seat three hundred parishioners. There were fifty-five pews sold to help pay for the construction of the church. The dedication ceremonies took place on June 11, 1829. The Rev. J.B. Husted of the Bath Congregational Church preached the dedication services with the Rev. Josiah Peet assisting.... Two days after the Union Meetinghouse had been dedicated Joseph Campbell sold a half acre of land, on which the new Meetinghouse stood, to Luther Burr and William Paine, trustees of the Methodist and Congregational Societies of Mercer. The deed, which was dated June 13, 1829, stipulated "that the Methodists and Congregationalists shall or may occupy or use the pulpit for preaching 7/16 of the Sabbaths during the year, on the other 2/16 of the Sabbaths, the pulpit is to be at the disposal of the individuals not belonging to the above mentioned orders who assisted in building said house by purchasing pews." During the first thirty years the church enjoyed great harmony but then discord set in and a great deal of unrest existed for years. (Smith, p. 99-100.)

While Smith also notes that the Free Will Baptists had organized by 1802, the history and fate of the Universalists in Mercer is unknown. The Methodist presence in town dated to the first year of the 19th century. According to Allen and Pilsbury in History of Methodism in Maine. 1793-1886, "Methodism early took deep root in Mercer, a larger proportion of the people, including many active business men, uniting with the Methodists, than with any other religious denomination." In the back country towns Congregational churches were slower to form, and in Mercer it was not until 1822 that a congregation was formally organized. Prior to the erection of the Union Meetinghouse members of both groups met in various locales throughout town, the Methodists frequently using the carriage house of Luther Burr for their services. (Allen and Pilsbury, p. 306.) In the decades after the Meetinghouse was erected both denominations built separate vestry buildings in the village, (the Congregationalists by 1846 and the Methodists in 1860), in part because the large Meetinghouse

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was hard to heat in the winter.⁴

In 1857 the Ladies Sewing Circle raised the funds for a church bell, which was installed that year. At the same time Smith notes that the Union Meetinghouse was "repaired", after which "the church was rededicated under the care of the Congregationalists". (Smith, p. 103). Further, unspecified changes were undertaken in 1884. "In 1884, the church was again repaired, at the expense of several hundred dollars, contributed by natives of Mercer living abroad." (Allen and Pilsbury, p. 306). By the turn of the century the Congregational society had diminished and after the loss of their chapel the group apparently folded and the Methodists again started to utilize the Meetinghouse on a seasonal basis. However, by 1916 the structure had once again fallen into disrepair as described by the *Lewiston Journal* in 1936. "By 1916 it was in such a sorry state that something drastic had to be done - new ceilings were imperative, walls had to be repaired and painted, and there were other restorations that had to be done to repair the ravages of time." Smith notes the cost of the new ceiling was five hundred dollars and the steel roof cost one thousand. (Smith, p. 107).

The Mercer Union Meetinghouse is one of a relatively small number of surviving Federal style religious buildings in Maine that are characterized by a central pavilion which projects from the main block, and a tower that either rises thorough or straddles both sections. Among the most notable examples of the group are the First Church of Belfast (1818, NR: 76000115), the First Parish Church in Kennebunk (1770s, with pavilion and tower added c. 1800, NR: 74000324) and the First Parish Church in Portland (1825-26, NR: 76000115). Late examples of the form, including the Old Union Meeting House in Farmington Falls (1826-27, NR: 73000106), the Union Church in Buckfield (1832, NR: 80000245), the Union Church in Durham (1835, NR: 01000810), and the subject building in Mercer, utilize a consistent design with pedimented pavilions or gable ends, as well as towers astride both sections. Of further note in the latter two examples is the appearance of Gothic and Greek Revival style motifs that herald new architectural influences. In Mercer the location of the Gothic Revival inspired central window precluded the construction of a full pediment across the projecting pavilion, however the continuation of the cornice returns on the main body of the church to the side walls of the pavilion strongly suggest the pedimented form.

The appearance of Gothic Revival features, both the large pointed arch window and the spirelets, as early as 1829 in rural Maine is unusual and worth reconsidering. As noted in the following discussion of the Gothic Revival style in Maine from Maine Forms of American Architecture, the earliest application of Gothic detailing in the state was undertaken in 1837.

In America early interest in Gothic Revival was evidenced by Benjamin Latrobe, who had been trained abroad and brought professional knowledge of all the styles of 18th-century

⁴The Congregational chapel burned in about 1878. They then donated a lot to the Baptist Society of Mercer on which a new, shared chapel was constructed. This building burned in 1895. The Methodist vestry burned in 1901 but was rebuilt the same year and is still in use today.

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England. However, his alternative, Gothic, plan for the Baltimore Cathedral (1805) was rejected in favor of a classical one. Nearer at hand in Boston, Bulfinch's Federal Street Church (1809, no longer extant), has been described as a provincial reflection of 18th-century English "Gothick." This church became an influential model because "the meeting house arrangement was retained without significant change." Bulfinch, of course, rarely worked in the Gothic idiom. His compromise, of "basically classical churches with pointed windows for the sake of a 'churchly' appearance," can still be spotted in many churches in Maine built and rebuilt in the first half of the 19th century. These churches are rectangular, symmetrical, structures with a single tower and spire at the front, built of wood, sheathed with clapboard, and almost universally painted white. The pointed arches above the main windows and doors are usually "blind." Inside, the pointed arch is found as a decorative motif in the paneling and church furniture.

Examples of this rebuilding in Gothic style can be seen in the Phippsburg Congregational Church of 1802, with Gothic touches dating from 1847; the Oxford Congregational Church of 1826 and 1840; and the Baptist Meetinghouse in Yarmouth built in 1796, remodeled in 1825 by Samuel Melcher III, with Gothic additions made in 1837 by Anthony C. Raymond. (Miller, p. 152.)

Indeed, in Mercer the use of the pointed arch and the spirelets does give the Union Meetinghouse a 'churchly appearance' rather than alter the overall style of the building. While it is known that the bell was installed in 1857, and that the church was 'repaired' at this time the extent of the changes is unknown. However, close scrutiny of current and historic pictures of the Meetinghouse indicate that the clapboards on the central pavilion and the clapboards on the facade of the main mass do not line up. It is possible that in 1857 not only was the bell installed, but that the entire front pavilion was added or considerably altered. There are also inconsistencies that support a major re-organization of space on the interior. Along the edge of each aisle the floor is regularly marked with rectangular, 1 " x 2" patches (dutchmen) spaced 11 ½ inches on center. The width of the base of the pews are 17 inches and the space between pews is 15 ½ inches. These dutchmen suggest that the Meetinghouse was initially outfitted with a different set of pews or benches. In addition, the grained 'wainscot' directly behind the dais is not of wood, but consists of a painted plaster. Furthermore, the paint scar left behind when one pew was removed from the front of the auditorium shows that the underlying wainscoting was not finished prior to the grain painting, but water stains and weathering on this wood also indicates either a previous leak or the reinstallation of the wainscoting using a weathered board. This also suggests that the arrangement at the front of the church has changed. Sometime during the mid to late 19th century the church was outfitted with extremely ornate Victorian oil-filled brass chandeliers, which have since been placed in storage for safe keeping.

It is not unreasonable to postulate that as constructed in 1829 the Union Meetinghouse was a transitional Federal and Greek Revival structure with a pedimented facade with two Federal style doorways, a higher platform in the front of the auditorium, and unpainted benches or pews. In this scenario, the central pavilion, pointed arch window, and the bell tower would have all been added c.

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1857, and the original doors repositioned onto the new facade the church. Either at this time, or when 'repairs' were again made in 1884/5, the present pews and platform were installed, and all of the trim grain painted. The *Map of Somerset Co.*, published by J. Chase Jr. In 1860 clearly shows that the projecting pavilion was completed when the map was compiled.⁵ Unfortunately, none of the records consulted to date have been able to verify this hypothesis, and it is possible that the 'repairs' made in 1884/5 and 1917 might also have resulted in alterations to the interior organization or finishes. It is known for certain that the current appearance of the interior is due in part to the installation of tin sheathing and a tin ceiling in 1917; whether this was an aesthetic installation/upgrade, or a convenient way to hide decaying walls is not known.

In preparing The History of Mercer, author James Owen Smith references published records of the statewide Methodist and Congregational conferences, as well as local records kept by both congregations. Unfortunately, since his history was published some of the local material has become unavailable, including a ledger that includes accounts for the purchase and installation of the bell. The available volumes of the "Records of the Congregational Society of Mercer" end in 1855 (with the exception of one entry in 1877) and the Methodist "Church Records Mercer Circuit" commences in 1879. Both of these sources deal almost exclusively with the business of the congregations and do not provide information on the use, maintenance or repair of the Meetinghouse. Smith notes two small details that may be linked to the changes suggested above: in 1857 the 'repaired' church was rededicated under the care of the Congregationalists, and the following year they had a 'revival' that increased the body's membership. (Smith, p. 103). While the details await further investigation the architectural significance of the Mercer Union Meetinghouse may reflect not just trends in church architecture in Maine, but a particular congregations attempt to redefine its worship space to uniquely reflect the denomination after rededicating the previously shared meetinghouse.

⁵This map also shows the presence of two out buildings to the northeast and north west of the back corners of the building. One of these is just barely visible in a postcard (stamped 1910) and appears to be an open bay wagon shed.

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Miller, William B. "Revival styles of Maine Architecture: from about 1840 to 1880," in Maine Forms of American Architecture. Thompson, Deborah, ed. (Camden, Maine: Downeast Magazine), 1976.

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"Records of the Congregational Society of Mercer [1822-1833]." Volume A-73; Mercer Historical Society Room, Mercer Town Library, Mercer, Maine.

"Records of the Congregational Society of Mercer [1833-1855]." Volume B-73; Mercer Historical Society Room, Mercer Town Library, Mercer, Maine.

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Soutar, Arch. "Union Church, Mercer, Typical of Little Maine Town Churches" in *Lewiston Journal Magazine Section*". December 26, 1964. (Lewiston, Maine), pages 1a-2a.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .51 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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

3 1 9
Zone Easting Northing

2 1 9
Zone Easting Northing

4 1 9
Zone Easting Northing

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 CHRISTI A. MITCHELL, ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIAN
organization MAINE HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION date 20 July 2006
street & number 55 CAPITOL STREET, STATION 65 telephone (207) 287-2132
city or town AUGUSTA state ME zip code 04333 -0065

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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundaries of the nominated property are described by the Town of Mercer tax map number 11, lot 25.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The above described boundaries represent all of the land that has historically been associated with the Mercer Union Meetinghouse.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
6 June 2006
South facade, facing north.

Photograph 2 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
6 June 2006
South facade and east elevation; facing northwest.

Photograph 3 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
6 June 2006
Apse-are in south end of building; facing southeast.

Photograph 4 of 4
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
6 June 2006
Interior, looking facing south.