

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

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

For NPS use only

received FEB 7 1985

date entered MAR 7 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Westerly Meeting House

and/or common OLD WEBSTER MEETING HOUSE (preferred)

**2. Location**

street & number On the east side of Battle Street about 300' north of its intersection with Long Street. n/a not for publication

city, town Webster n/a vicinity of

state New Hampshire code 33 county Merrimack code 013

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House in Webster, New Hampshire

street & number Battle Street

city, town Webster, N/A vicinity of state New Hampshire 03303

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Merrimack County Registry of Deeds  
Merrimack County Courthouse (1942 Vol 592-p66)

street & number Box 248  
163 North Main Street

city, town Concord, state New Hampshire 03301

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Historic American Building Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1964  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Library of Congress, Division of Prints & Photographs

city, town Washington, state DC 20540

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## 7. Description

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<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>1942</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Webster meeting house is a rectangular framed building of two stories with clapboarded walls, a wood-shingled gable roof, and a foundation of original split granite slabs supported on modern (1979) concrete walls. The building retains its basic configuration, but has been remodelled several times to accommodate changing uses. Alterations include the removal of two end "porches" (stairway enclosures); the substitution of interior stairways for these projecting stairs; the flooring over of the auditorium at the gallery level to provide a full second floor; and the removal of pulpit and pews on the first floor. The building was also removed from its original location half a mile away in 1941-2 when the original site was cleared for a flood control project, and in 1979 was provided with a stable foundation of concrete below grade to ensure its permanent stability. Despite these alterations, the structure retains a sufficient number of original or early features to render it an important example of meeting house architecture in the upper Merrimack River Valley region of New Hampshire.

The facade of the meeting house faces west and is seven bays wide. Window sashes are 16-over-12, with muntin profiles typical of the Federal period. Exterior window casings are elaborated with flat fillets in place of backband mouldings. The front doorway, in the center of the facade, is a simple Greek Revival design which undoubtedly dates from 1844, when the structure was altered from its original use as a meeting house to a dual use as a town hall on the first floor and a chapel on the second. This doorway encloses two doors, each having five flat panels surrounded by applied Grecian ogee mouldings. Above the doors is a five-light transom sash with thin muntins characteristic of the Greek Revival period. The door casings are wide flat boards with flat strips applied to their inner and outer edges and with flat square corner blocks at the juncture of side and top casings. The water table and corner boards of the building are simple square-edged planks. The front cornice of the meeting house consists of an ovolo bed moulding and an ogee crown moulding.

The side (north and south) elevations are identical to one another. Both are five bays wide, with window sashes and casings matching those of the facade. The attic of the building is lighted by single 12-over-12 windows in each gable. The end doorways of the building each have five-panel doors with flat panels surrounded by Grecian ogee mouldings. The casings are identical to those of the front doorway. The side doorways have no transom sashes. The raking eaves of the roof are trimmed with tapered boards.

The rear (east) elevation is five bays wide, with window sashes and trim matching those features on the other elevations. At the center of this elevation is a window, elevated above the other four windows of the first floor but otherwise identical to them; this lights a moderator's desk in the center of the rear wall of the first floor. The cornice of the rear of the building is a box cornice with fascia and plancia boards but with no applied mouldings.

The interior of the building is divided into two stories. The first floor is a single large room, now used to display artifacts which illustrate the history of the town of Webster. The room is entered through a vestibule inside the front door, from which two flights of stairs rise to the second floor. Opposite the door is a raised desk of unpainted pine, with panelled ends which enclose a box pew that served as a moderator's podium for town meetings. Around the perimeter of the original gallery location, turned pine posts in the form of Tuscan columns

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with low pedestals and square architrave blocks rise to support the gallery flooring. The ceilings beneath the galleries reflect the pitched flooring of the latter, rising from the gallery columns to the outer walls of the building. These ceilings, like the walls of the first floor, are plastered; the heavy oak posts of the frame project forward beyond the planes of the walls. The central portion of the ceiling of the first floor is unplastered. This was originally an open area within the perimeter of the gallery, and is framed with heavy bridging joists which support a series of closely-spaced floor joists of square section. The first floor, originally the main floor of the meeting house auditorium and after 1844 the Wenster town hall, is today filled with museum displays.

The second floor of the building as a single large room with a level central floor in the area within the original perimeter of the gallery. The floor slants upward on the front and sides of the room, where the original gallery construction is retained. The gallery floor is filled with a series of "slip" pews, which face the center of the rear of the building where the original pulpit was located in a position midway between the first floor level and the gallery level. An analogous position on the second floor is now occupied by a movable reading desk in the Empire style, undoubtedly installed when the second floor was finished as a chapel in 1844.

The second floor is reached by two enclosed flights of stairs which rise from each side of the vestibule at the front door of the building. The two stairwells are guarded by simple balustrades with square balusters on the second floor. The detailing at this level is simple: window casings are square-edged, and the uncased posts have chamfered edges to a point within a few inches of the ceiling. Walls and ceiling are plastered, and the juncture between the two is finished in a small plastered cove.

The frame of the building is composed largely of oak. The roof frame consists of six sets of rafters. The four interior trusses are composed of doubled rafters, rafter ties, and king posts. The king posts are braced longitudinally through the building by horizontal beams linking them at mid-height, and by diagonal braces which extend from points near the tops and bottoms of the king posts to the midpoints of the horizontal beams.

Original appearance: The basic structure has not been altered. As originally constructed, the meeting house had an open-centered gallery at the present second floor level, and a tall pulpit of typical eighteenth-century design on the east wall. Before alterations of 1844, the gallery was reached by flights of stairs enclosed in projecting "porches"--features which were shared by the majority of meeting houses in central New Hampshire. The main floor of the building originally held thirty-four pews, and the gallery had twenty-three.

Other structures: On the nominated parcel of land is also an open-sided reproduction of a typical horse shed of the type often associated with meeting houses. This was built in 1972 and extended in 1979.

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Standing behind (to the east of) the meeting house, the horse shed is one hundred feet in length. It is built of modern materials in a form that suggests the sheds that stood behind the meeting house in its original location. The building consists of ten ten-foot bays; the southern seven bays were constructed in 1972 and the northern three bays in 1979. The building has a braced frame of heavy sawn timbers, clad in wide vertical pine boards. The roof frame consists of rafters of two-inch stock, placed twenty-four inches on centers. The structure is sixteen feet in depth and has a wood-shingled gable roof. The three northernmost ten-foot bays are enclosed to accommodate a fire truck given for display purposes to the Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House. The middle five sections are unfloored and have open fronts (west elevations) to suggest traditional horse sheds. These bays presently house a display of various pieces of horse-drawn equipment. The two southernmost bays are enclosed to form a secure storage shed.

The lot upon which the meeting house stands is bordered on the west by Battle Street. The land slopes upward in a gentle ascending grade to the point, east of the meeting house, where the horse sheds stand. Here is a low but abrupt rise along which the sheds extend. The meeting house lot is generally clear of trees, and is separated from adjoining properties only by metes and bounds rather than by stone walls or other barriers. A gravel driveway extends from Battle Street to a point near the southerly door of the meeting house, and from there to the horse sheds behind.

The Westerly Meeting House is the only such structure remaining in the upper Merrimack Valley of New Hampshire which essentially retains its original exterior appearance as well as many of its original interior features. While the building was once one of a large group of comparable structures built in the region through the eighteenth century, all of its prototypes and contemporaries have been destroyed or so remodelled as to be no longer recognizable. The companion meeting house built in the eastern part of Boscawen in 1769, for example, was burned in 1798. The structure that replaced this eastern meeting house, constructed in 1799, was remodelled to the form of a typical Greek Revival church in 1839, with additional remodellings at later dates. Another meeting house in nearby Pembroke was converted to a barn and so remains today. That on Searles Hill in neighboring Salisbury, six miles distant, was built in 1768 and dismantled about 1790. Another at Canterbury, adjoining Boscawen on the east, was converted to a dwelling.

Although the Westerly Meeting House lost some original features in its remodelling in 1844, it is the only such structure in central New Hampshire that retains the essential form of the typical eighteenth-century meeting house of the region. The only comparable examples of early meeting house architecture in New Hampshire are a group of three steepleless structures that survive in the southeastern towns of Danville, Fremont, and Sandown, some 45 miles from Webster. Together, these four structures preserve the only remaining record of typical eighteenth-century meeting house architecture in New Hampshire.

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Effects of the moving of the building: The Westerly Meeting House was moved from its original site (about half a mile southwest of its present location) in the fall of 1941. Its original site fell within the limits of a flood control project being developed by the United States Army Corps of Engineers.<sup>5</sup> The building was condemned, the town of Webster was reimbursed \$10,000 for its loss, and the structure was slated to be demolished. In October, 1941, an association was formed for the purpose of purchasing the building as surplus property, relocating it to a site above the limits of the flood control project, and preserving the structure for the future. This organization was incorporated as The Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House in Webster, New Hampshire; it remains the owner of the structure.

The Society employed the Walter Hill Company of Tilton, N.H.--long regarded as the most skillful building movers in New Hampshire--to move the building to its present site. This was accomplished in the spring of 1942 with no damage to the structure.<sup>6</sup> The effect of the move on the old site was great but inevitable inasmuch as all structures within the flood control district were required to be removed or demolished. The effect of the move on the new site was to add a building of a public nature to a neighborhood which already combined domestic structures, a store, a relocated burying ground, and a church. The addition of the meeting house to this group reinforced an already strong sense of the neighborhood as the town center, and added an attractively maintained structure to a group that already typified the New Hampshire village. The effect of the move on the building was minimal due to the care of the movers. The principal impact of the move upon the structure was to alter its compass orientation, placing the front door to the west instead of to the south as formerly. In subsequent years, the effect upon the building of ownership by the Society has been to enhance the care of the structure to a level beyond that traditionally maintained by the former owner, the Town of Webster.

<sup>5</sup>Webster History Committee, Webster, New Hampshire, 1933-1983 History, pp. 252-257.

<sup>6</sup>Webster History Committee, Webster, New Hampshire, 1933-1983 History, pp. 157-159.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** Built 1791 **Builder/Architect** Samuel Jackman (1749-1845)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Westerly Meeting House in Webster, New Hampshire, is one of a small group of eighteenth-century meeting houses in northern New England that essentially retain their original form. Despite some alterations, the building remains the only well-preserved example of its type in the upper Merrimack Valley of New Hampshire. Built by local craftsmen according to a regional architectural tradition, the building was altered in the nineteenth century in keeping with new local traditions. Today it is a museum which preserves a record of the evolution of meeting house architecture in central New Hampshire.

Architecture: The Westerly Meeting House was constructed in 1791 after the inhabitants of the westerly part of the town of Boscawen, N.H., complaining that many of them had to travel five miles or more to the town's only meeting house, petitioned to be set off as a separate township. Although this division did not take place until many years later (creating the present town of Webster), the inhabitants of Boscawen voted in 1791 to erect a second meeting house for the convenience of the inhabitants in the westerly part of the township.

In so doing, the people of Boscawen followed local architectural tradition, making the new building a virtual twin of the earlier Boscawen meeting house, built in the easterly part of the township in 1769.<sup>1</sup> The building was also part of a larger regional tradition. It was one of some seventy known examples of meeting houses built between 1772 and 1804 that had end "porches" or stairtowers providing access to the galleries. By far the greater number of these twin-porch meeting houses were in southern New Hampshire, where they constituted a dominant architectural tradition.<sup>2</sup> The Westerly Meeting House was built by native joiner and carpenter Samuel Jackman (1749-1845), who would have been familiar with both the regional tradition and the specific prototype in the eastern part of Boscawen.<sup>3</sup>

In 1823 a dispute over the proprietorship and use of the meeting house arose between the Congregational Church, which had been its sole religious occupant since its construction, and the relatively new Christian Union Society. The eventual outcome was the withdrawal of the Congregationalists, who built the nearby Webster Congregational Church for their own exclusive use. Eventually, in 1844, the Christian Union Society and the town voted to cooperate in remodelling the building, removing the projecting stair enclosures, flooring over the gallery, and adapting the interior for a chapel on the second floor and a town hall on the first.<sup>4</sup> This was in keeping with a movement at the period for towns to abandon or remodel the uncomfortable and drafty old meeting houses and to provide smaller but more convenient halls for the use of town meetings. Thus, the Westerly Meeting House evolved to meet changing religious and civil needs in the area it served.

<sup>1</sup>Charles Carleton Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster, pp. 101-102, 139-143.

<sup>2</sup>Peter Benes, "Twin-Porch versus Single-Porch Stairwells: Two Examples of Cluster Diffusion in Rural Meetinghouse Architecture," Old-Time New England 69 (Winter-Spring 1979), pp.44-68

<sup>3</sup>Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster, pp. 139, 559.

<sup>4</sup>Coffin, History of Boscawen and Webster, pp. 190-191, 207, 236-238, 240-242.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

(see continuation sheet)

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Penacook, NH

Quadrangle scale 1:62500

### UTM References

A	1 9	2 7 9 6 7 5	4 8 0 0 8 1 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

### Verbal boundary description and justification

(see continuation sheet)

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

state	code	county	code
N/A			

state	code	county	code
N/A			

# 11. Form Prepared By

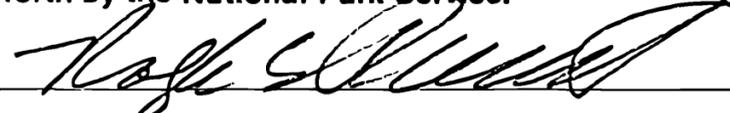
name/title	Dorothy R.W. Sanborn *James Garvin
organization	Society for the Preservation of the Old Meeting House *New Hampshire Historical Society
street & number	Box 7 *30 Park Street
city or town	Boscawen, *Concord,
date	August 1984 *August 1984
telephone	(603) 796-2211 *(603) 225-3381
state	NH 03301 *NH 03301

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature  date 1/24/86

title New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer date

### For NPS use only

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

 date 3-7-85  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

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- Burbank, William W. Historical Sketch and Roll of Membership of the First Congregational Church, Webster, New Hampshire. Penacook, NH: W. B. Ranney, 1908.
- Buxton, Willis G. History of Boscawen-Webster, 1883-1933. Penacook, NH: W. B. Ranney, n.d.
- Coffin, Charles Carleton. The History of Boscawen and Webster, from 1733 to 1878. Concord, NH: Republican Press Association, 1878.
- Webster History Committee. Webster, New Hampshire, 1933-1983 History. Warner, NH: Webster History Committee, 1984.

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Beginning on Battle Street at the southern boundary of June Smith Austin, thence easterly along the property of June Smith Austin 178 feet to a point, thence southerly 144 feet to a point, thence westerly 174 feet to Battle Street, thence northerly 152 feet on Battle Street to the point begun at.

Boundary Justification: The boundaries described above are those of a lot which was purchased in 1942 as a relocation site for the meeting house which if not moved, would have been demolished during the clearance for a flood control project.

Map and Parcel Number: Map 3; Lot #63

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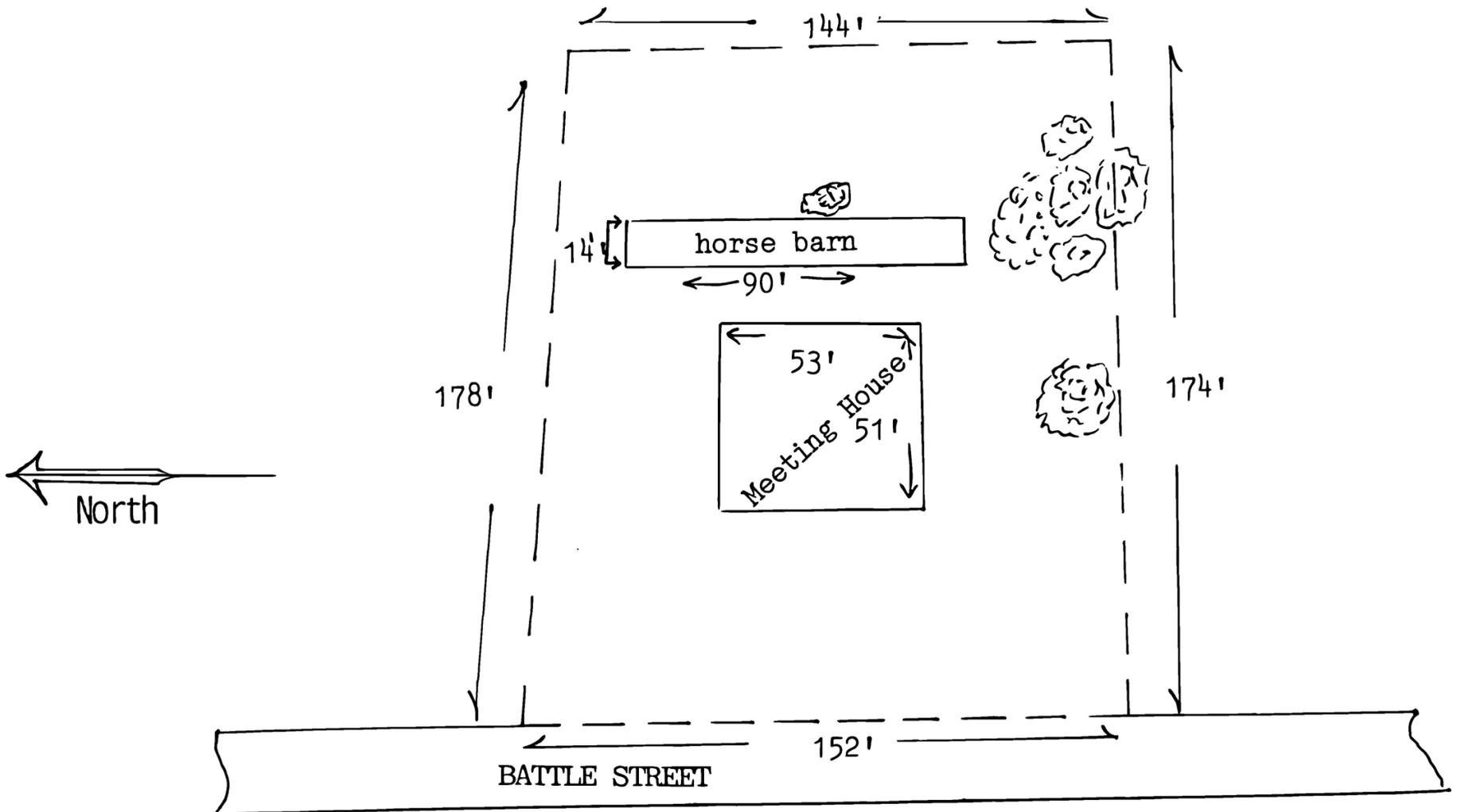
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WEBSTER MEETING HOUSE

Webster, N.H.

(not to scale)

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This is to certify that the appearance of the photographs taken  
in support of the Old Webster Meeting House have not changed.