

56-1769



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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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 certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

### 1. Name of Property

historic name First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
other names/site number N/A  
related multiple property listing N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 6660 State Route 26  N/A not for publication  
city or town Martinsburg  N/A vicinity  
state NY code 36 county Lewis code 049 zip code 13404

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,  
I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets     does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

    national     statewide X local

Michael J. Lynch Deputy APO 7/29/17  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property     meets     does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register  determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register  removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

[Signature] 10/27/2017  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

**Category of Property**

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**

NA

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

GOVERNMENT

COMMERCE/TRADE

**Current Functions**

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Museum

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

MID-19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY: Greek Revival

**Materials**

foundation: STONE

walls: BRICK

roof: ASPHALT

other: WOOD TRIM

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### **Narrative Description**

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The First Lewis County Clerk's Office is a small, one-story, rectangular brick building in the Town of Martinsburg, Lewis County, New York. Its gable end faces State Route 26, and the simple façade is dominated by a strong Greek Revival cornice return. The office is separated from the First Lewis County Courthouse (built c. 1812; NR Listed, 2001) by three buildings.<sup>1</sup> The First Lewis County Clerk's Office was built in 1847, used as the county clerk's office until 1864, and put into commercial use (law office, groceries, feed store, and harness repair) from 1864 until 1920, when it was converted into a garage and office for the Town of Martinsburg Water Commission and Fire Department. When the town built a new fire hall in 1964 that could accommodate larger trucks, the "brick building" was left vacant for twenty years. In 1983, the Martinsburg Historical Society leased the Lewis County Clerk's Office from the town and conducted a five-year restoration of the building. Back additions were removed, and the façade was partially rebuilt and restored; the current appearance of the building is the result of this campaign.

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### **Setting**

The Lewis County Clerk's Office is located in the town and hamlet of Martinsburg, NY, founded by Walter Martin in the early 1800s and the county seat of Lewis County from 1805 until 1864. The Town of Martinsburg remains a very rural, predominately agricultural community of less than 1,500 people, bordered on its western side by the Tug Hill Plateau and on the east by the Black River Valley.<sup>2</sup> The hamlet of only a few hundred people is located atop a 1250 foot hill, about 300 feet higher than Lowville, the relocated county seat four miles north. The crest of the hill along NY Route 26 is crowned by the 1805 General Walter Martin House (built 1805; NR listed, 2008), along with a small business district that once included county buildings, hotels, stores, and at least three churches of two different denominations (Presbyterian and Methodist Episcopal). Most of the old commercial district is gone. Surviving buildings include the first Lewis County Courthouse (built 1812; now Martinsburg Town Hall; NR listed, 2001), Martin Land Office (1822, much altered), Lewis County Bank (first in the county, founded and built 1833), Lewis County Clerk's Office (1847), second Methodist Episcopal Church (1857), and a variety of other buildings, all much changed. Route 26 has been widened repeatedly and the hamlet has lost its historic trees and sidewalks.

### **Exterior**

The Lewis County Clerk's Office was built in 1847 and is a one-story, one-room, brick Greek Revival building in Flemish bond on a limestone foundation. It sits on a 22-foot by 77-foot lot located south of the crest of the hill on the east side of NY Route 26 between Whitaker and Glendale Roads. The first Lewis County Courthouse, built and in use by 1812, is located four lots to the north on the same side of NY Route 26. A concrete sidewalk was added by the Martinsburg Historical Society in 2012 for easier entrance into the building. The front grassy area has an historic sign provided in 2014 by the Pomeroy Foundation of Syracuse, NY.

From the road, the appearance of the building is simple and highly symmetrical. The gable end of the façade faces west towards the highway; the cornice, frieze, and partial returns are wide and decorated with simple dentils in the Greek Revival style. This elevation has three bays. Two windows, with 6-over-6 wood sash and

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<sup>1</sup> The County Clerk's office is mentioned in the 2001 First Lewis County Courthouse nomination, but it is not clear why the office was not listed as part of the courthouse complex. Possibly the three intervening buildings discouraged its inclusion.

<sup>2</sup> The 2010 Census lists 1433 for the entire town; the population of the hamlet is much smaller.

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limestone lintels and sills, flank the main entry door, which has a similar lintel. Two limestone steps and a single railing of galvanized pipe provide access to the stone threshold.



Figures 1 through 3. West-facing façade, north elevation, and east elevation of First Lewis County Clerk's Office, 2017.

There are two original windows on the north side of the building, but no windows on the other two elevations. A back door on the eastern elevation was probably added in the late nineteenth century to access the rear additions (now gone) that were attached to the building by 1900. This opening lacks stone lintels and is set in concrete.

The roof is asphalt. The water and fire department added a cupola and siren in the 1920s or 30s, but these were removed in 1964 when the Town of Martinsburg built its new fire hall.

### **Interior**

The interior of the Lewis County Clerk's Office was gutted when it was occupied by the town water commission and fire department; they used the rear additions for offices and the front section housed a fire truck. The building is currently used for museum display. A lawyer's desk is supposed to have been in the building when it was used as the county clerk's office, and a cash register came from a later occupant – the D. H. Rima Store.

### **1983 Restoration**

When the water commission and fire department occupied the building from 1920 to 1964, they removed a section of the brick wall from the façade below the lintels in the first two bays to insert a garage door. As a result, part of the façade between the north window and door has been reconstructed. The sash and sill in the window had been saved and were replaced; the brick matches the rear wall and appears to have been salvaged from the demolition of a late nineteenth-century rear addition (visible in Figure 7). The center door is an early nineteenth century door from the locality, with an added transom to fit the original opening.<sup>3</sup>

The interior is also the result of the restoration. The wide plank floor is a reproduction. New trim was made, using woodwork reproduced from the Lewis County Home in Lowville. The ceiling was partially paneled and holds two reproduction lamps – one cast from a fixture in the First Lewis County Courthouse and the other cast

<sup>3</sup> The restoration was organized by the Martinsburg Historical Society between 1983-1888. Clarence Good restored the masonry; Robert Denning donated the door; and Edward Ingersoll built the transom to fit the opening. The stone entry steps came from a local grist mill and the Alger Cheese Factory.

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from the first school in Lowville. Whenever possible, the society drew on local examples to appropriately restore the building to its appearance as the first county clerk's office in the Lewis County.

### **Integrity**

The First Lewis County Clerk's Office retains integrity of location, design, feeling, setting, and association. It remains on its original site in Martinsburg, close by the old courthouse, in the small hamlet that once served as the county seat of Lewis County. Its Greek Revival design complements the early nineteenth century styles of other major buildings in the hamlet, and the office fully expresses the aesthetic and feeling of the mid-nineteenth century when it was a county building. The hamlet of Martinsburg retains its sense of place, still rural when contrasted with its nearby rival, the village of Lowville. The office is associated with major events in the development of the county and township and retains its importance in the community, both for its association with the courthouse and, later, for its use as a store and town building.

The building was partially altered during and after the period of significance, and then restored. The exterior of the building has integrity of materials and workmanship; the interior of the building is a research-based reconstruction using local models.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

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

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

GOVERNMENT

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1847 - 1920

**Significant Dates**

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

NA

**Cultural Affiliation**

NA

**Architect/Builder**

NA

**Period of Significance:** Construction of building in 1847 when Martinsburg was the county seat of Lewis County to 1920 when it became the headquarters for the Town of Martinsburg Water Commission and Fire Department.

**Criteria Considerations:** N/A

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### Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The First Lewis County Clerk's Office is locally significant under **Criterion A: Government** for its association with the siting of the original county seat in Lewis County. Contention between the hamlet of Martinsburg and the village of Lowville over the appropriate location of county government began in 1805, when Lewis County first separated from Oneida County. The selection of Martinsburg and erection of the first courthouse (built c. 1812; now Martinsburg Town Hall; NR listed, 2001) were engineered by local landowner Walter Martin to improve the value of his property. Construction of the county clerk's office in 1847 was one move (of many) by which Martinsburg retained its hold on the county courthouse. The rivalry continued until – and after – the county seat was moved to Lowville almost twenty years later.

The First Lewis County Clerk's Office is also locally significant under **Criterion A: Social History** for its role in the economic and civic life of the hamlet after the community lost the county seat in 1864. The building was subsequently a law office, store, and harness repair shop until, in the 1920s, it was acquired by the Town of Martinsburg for its water commission and fire department. Finally, the building is locally significant under **Criterion C: Architecture**. The First Lewis County Clerk's Office replaced rented space in (then) Brigadier General Walter Martin's Land Office and shares a close resemblance to that earlier building. Both were "fire-proof" brick for document storage; both face gable end towards State Route 26. Since the restoration of the building by the Martinsburg Historical Society in 1983, the building has become a local museum and a focus of local pride.

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### Context

Lewis County did not open for settlement until the land was surveyed in 1796 and the Black River (former Boylston) Tract was divided into eleven towns. Martinsburg was settled in 1802 by Walter Martin, who was born in Sturbridge, MA, in 1766 and moved to Salem, NY, in 1787. Martin had scouted out the area the previous year. Impressed with the opportunity, he bought the entire east subdivision of Township Five – 8,000 acres of land in all – from James Constable for \$1.50 per acre, and built several log cabins to accommodate his family when he returned.<sup>4</sup> Others from Salem joined him, along with another group from Westfield, MA. As Martinsburg grew, there was an influx of French, Irish, and Polish immigrants who took up Martin's land at \$5.00 per acre and made him wealthy.

One of Martin's first concerns was to make Martinsburg the county seat. As early as 1803 – before Lewis County even existed separate from Oneida County – he "began to grub up the stumps for the site of a court house."<sup>5</sup> A rivalry with Lowville existed even at this early time; it had been settled in 1798 and felt it was owed precedence. A wooden building was erected there for a court, but Martin prevailed; he influenced the appointment of the three commissioners selecting the county seat for the new county, and Martinsburg was designated.<sup>6</sup>

The first session of the court of common pleas was held in the hamlet on December 8, 1805, at Chillus Doty's inn. Another eight sessions took place there, followed by eight at the house of Ehud Stephens (also in Martinsburg) and one at the Lowville Academy. The battle to relocate the county seat to Lowville had never

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<sup>4</sup> Martin also acquired other lands in the township.

<sup>5</sup> Franklin B. Hough, *History of Lewis County, New York, 1803-1883* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Co., 1883), 20.

<sup>6</sup> Most of the information on the construction of the early courthouse comes from Hough, 20-23.

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ended, and in 1809 a petition was sent to the State Legislature arguing against its designated location. More than 1,000 people signed, with 682 for Lowville and 474 for Martinsburg; in effect, the northern half of the county was pitted against the southern half. A bill was introduced in the State Legislature to make the change but failed to pass.

Meanwhile, Martin started a subscription fund to raise money for a courthouse; he contributed the site and "a liberal sum" to the building fund which soon reached almost \$2,000. On October 18, 1810, he committed \$1,500 of the fund to construction of a courthouse and jail. The following March, the State Legislature passed an act raising another \$1,200 by tax and \$300 by loan. The court house must have been completed before January 7, 1812, when the first session was held in the new building.

In 1811, the legislature also passed an act requiring each county to locate the county clerk's office within one mile of the courthouse. The first Lewis County clerk, Richard Coxe, lived near Collinsville and is thought to have initially kept the office in his house. Later, the records were kept by clerks (or deputy clerks) living in Martinsburg. Then, in 1822, General Martin – by this time a Brigadier General due to his service in the War of 1812 – built a brick land office and rented part of the space to the county. (This building, which still exists but is much altered, was next to his stone house at the top of Martinsburg hill.) Seven years later, the legislature passed a new law requiring each county to build its own county clerk's office, presumably to prevent collusion and the appearance of favoritism.<sup>7</sup> Lewis County delayed eighteen years, until the Martinsburg community built the current structure in 1847.

General Martin had died in 1834. The office lot was apparently bought by David Griffis in 1838 with a mortgage and conveyed by deed, dated September 26, 1846, by John W. Martin, one of Martin's sons.<sup>8</sup> Griffis was town supervisor in 1840 and 1844, and had been involved with young Martin in several investments and speculations. Money for construction was again raised by public subscription to forestall Lowville, which again was agitating for relocation.<sup>9</sup> Griffis and his wife Louisa sold the lot to the county in December 1847, for "as long as it shall be used as and for the purposes of a County Clerk's Office, and no longer."<sup>10</sup>

By this time, the hamlet of Martinsburg had built up so the First Lewis County Clerk's Office was located four buildings south of the courthouse itself. An early hand-drawn map from the Lewis County Historical Society (Figure 4) shows the location of the courthouse in the midst of a street full of houses and stores running straight into Lowville. (However, the actual siting of the buildings is questionable because the map was drawn on the back of a letter "sent to someone to show that they didn't live in the wilderness."<sup>11</sup>) Figure 5 is an 1857 map that shows the new county clerk's office in place, next to the new Methodist Church built the same year.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Hough, 23.

<sup>8</sup> Deed from John W. Martin to David Griffis, dated September 26, 1846, recorded in Book 2, 42-43, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY.

<sup>9</sup> J. H. French, *Gazetteer of the State of New York* [Fifth edition] (Syracuse, NY: R. Pearsall Smith, 1860), 375.

<sup>10</sup> Deed from David Griffis to Lewis County, dated December 8, 1847, recorded in Book 3, 191, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY.

<sup>11</sup> Description of the map from Jerry Perrin, Director of the Lewis County Historical Society.

<sup>12</sup> Hough, 469. Hough notes that the new church was built "adjacent to the old clerk's office in Martinsburgh village in the summer of 1857."



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Figure 4. Circa 1825 map of Martinsburg, on the back of a letter. (Lewis County Historical Society)

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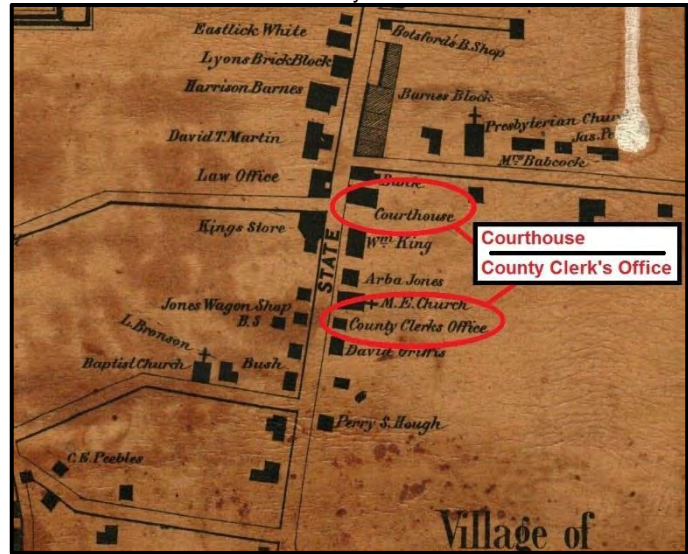


Figure 5. Inset, Village of Martinsburg(h). A. Ligowsky, *Topographical Map of Lewis Co., New York*, 1857. (Lewis County Historical Society)

However, Martinsburg remained a very small community. Brigadier General Martin had been the driving force in settling the community, building mills, factories, the hotel, a bank, the courthouse, jail, and clerk's office, as well as his grand stone house. Whenever Lowville challenged the choice of Martinsburg as county seat, he had responded. His heirs were not very successful in business and lacked the general's vision and drive. John W. Martin, though a member of the NYS Assembly in 1827, postmaster for Martinsburg from 1831-1845, and first county judge from 1833-1843, was heavily involved in the financial troubles of the Lewis County Bank in 1842, of which he was then president (1833-1843). He went bankrupt around 1846.<sup>13</sup> Martinsburg stopped growing.

In 1860, J.H. French's *Gazetteer of the State of New York* described the hamlet as follows:

*Martinsburgh (p.v.) is situated on Martins Creek, near the center of the town. It contains the co. buildings, churches, and a newspaper office. Pop. 210.*<sup>14</sup>

Lowville, by contrast, had more than four times the population (908), five churches, the well-respected Lowville Academy, two printing offices, a bank, and many more stores and hotels.<sup>15</sup> It built a structure to be used as a new courthouse in 1852, funding it by public subscription and tax. (While waiting for success in changing the location of the county seat, the building served as town hall but is labelled in Ligowsky's 1857 map as a second courthouse.)

Lowville's advantage over Martinsburg further increased when the hamlet's only hotel, four stores, and many outbuildings burned on February 5, 1859, during the court session. The hamlet again raised money by public subscription to help Edwin Pitcher rebuild the hotel and a "fine block of stores" "to save the county seat from

<sup>13</sup> Hough, *passim*. This is when the clerk's office lot was conveyed to Griffis, and identifies Martin as "late of Martinsburgh."

<sup>14</sup> French, 378.

<sup>15</sup> French, 378.

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removal in consequence of this loss of accommodation," but to no avail.<sup>16</sup> In 1863, the county supervisors held a meeting in Lowville and passed resolutions asking the State Legislature to move the county seat to Lowville, noting that:

*...The citizens of the town of Lowville, have tendered to the county a good and suitable Court House, a site for a county jail and a clerk's office, when the county seat should be located in said town...*<sup>17</sup>

No public vote was pursued, citing three excuses: first, that an election would "involve much contention and strife in said county, to the damage of its interests"; second, that it was the board of supervisors' responsibility alone (based on a decision of the Court of Appeals in another case); and, third, that it would be time-consuming and costly.<sup>18</sup> However, expressions of public support were taken at various town meetings, and the State Legislature passed a bill on March 10, 1864 relocating the county seat to Lowville. The bill took effect May 2, 1864.

The move was only a few miles north, but the loss of the county seat made all the difference to the future of Martinsburg. The courthouse and county clerk's office had made the community a hub of activity within the county. Not only did court sessions bring petitioners and lawyers to the hamlet, but the county clerk's office brought a constant stream of people searching land records, recording deeds and property transfers, and filing pensions based on the service records of veterans of the Revolutionary War, War of 1812, and Civil War. After 1864, much animosity remained among Martinsburg people towards "Lowvillians" – the people of Martinsburg felt their county seat had been stolen from them.

Hough, looking back from 1883, provides a more balanced perspective:

*The scenery which the surrounding country affords from every point, north, east and west from Martinsburgh village, is very fine; and in natural beauty of location there is nothing in the county that surpasses it. In the days of early settlement it had a considerable amount of business, and the stream that flows adjacent along the west and south sides was improved to the full extent of its water power. But like other villages upon hills, through this and adjoining counties, it was not found convenient for business; but the great cause of the decline was the failure of the Lewis County Bank [1842, 1854], and the bankruptcy of John W. Martin [1846], by which many were injured, and some were ruined.*<sup>19</sup>

## **1864-1920**

In subsequent years, the former clerk's office became a law office, blacksmith shop, store, and home to the Town of Martinsburg Water Commission and Martinsburg Fire Department. In 1856, Abram Isaac Mereness (1804-1875) bought almost eleven acres of land from the administrators of David Griffis' will; in 1863 – probably when it became clear that the county seat was going to leave the hamlet – he registered the deed, enabling him to claim the county clerk's building.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Hough, 21.

<sup>17</sup> Hough, 22.

<sup>18</sup> Hough, 23.

<sup>19</sup> Hough, 460.

<sup>20</sup> Deed from the Executors [Earl P. Salisbury and Laura Griffis] of the Will of David Griffis to Abram I. Mereness, dated September 26, 1846, recorded in Book 24, 185-186, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY. The 1865 NY Census notes that Mereness was born in Schoharie and half of his children were born in Montgomery County; he apparently bought the land about ten years after he came to Martinsburg.

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Mereness was a member of the Lewis County bar who came to the law late in life around 1859, after many years of farming; he appears as the sole remaining lawyer in Martinsburg in Kimball's 1867 *Lowville Directory*.<sup>21</sup> He had served as deputy county clerk under Sidney Sylvester and run unsuccessfully for county clerk in 1858. In 1867, the *Lewis County Democrat* listed him as clerk of the board of excise, and he litigated a variety of cases (mortgages, disputed wills, a murder, and a "disorderly house") that were reported in the local papers.<sup>22</sup> Beer's map of Martinsburg(h) in the 1875 *Atlas of Lewis County* shows his office in the old county clerk's office and his home nearby.<sup>23</sup> Sometime that year, Mereness moved into Lowville to practice with his son, Charles. When he died of "bilious colic" in November 1875, the entire county bar attended his funeral as a token of respect.

The first week of January, 1876, a safe that still belonged to the county was removed from Mereness' office in the "brick building" and, a couple of weeks later, Laura Mereness received title to the building after her husband's surviving children signed off on their interests in the property.<sup>24</sup>

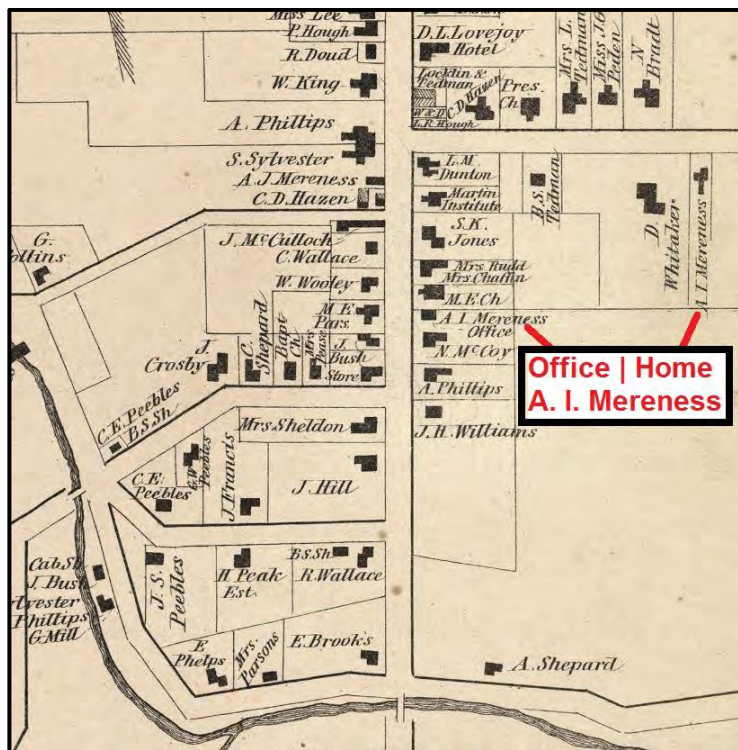


Figure 6. Detail of inset map of Martinsburg(h) in D. G. Beers' *Atlas of Lewis Co., New York, 1875*. (Library of Congress)

NOTE: By 1875 the courthouse had been converted to an academy, the Martin Institute. A description of the school by A.I. Mereness in Kimball's *Directory* (127) suggests that the rivalry with Lowville (and the Lowville Academy) continued with Martinsburg described as "free from the prominent vices with which most villages and larger towns are afflicted."

NOTE: For several years, Mereness' sons Amos and Charles occupied the old Martin Land Office and were job printers and publishers of *The Boys' Journal*. Charles must have already moved to Lowville to practice law when the Beers' map was produced.

Perry Hough (1825-1898) seems to have been the person who converted Mereness's law office into a store after buying the building from Laura Mereness on January 29, 1877.<sup>25</sup> Hough was listed as a farmer in the 1850 US

<sup>21</sup> "Death of Abram I. Mereness," *Lowville Journal and Republican* (December 1, 1875), 2; J. C. Kimball, *Kimball's Directory of Lowville for 1867-9* (Watertown, NY: Lytle, Hanford & Company, 1867), 10.

<sup>22</sup> "County and Town Accounts, for the Year 1867," *Lewis County Democrat* (December 25, 1867), 1.

<sup>23</sup> D. G. Beers, "Martinsburgh," *Atlas of Lewis Co., New York* (Philadelphia: Pomeroy, Whitman & Co., 1875).

<sup>24</sup> "Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Lewis County," *Lowville Journal & Republican* (January 5, 1876), 4; Deed from the [Children of Abram I. Mereness] to Laura Mereness, dated December 13, 1876, recorded March 15, 1879 in Book 55, 475-476, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY. The deed seems to have made it possible for Laura to almost immediately sell the property.

<sup>25</sup> Deed from Laura Mereness to Perry Hough, dated January 29, 1877, recorded January 4, 1888 in Book 76, 165, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY. Note the gap between the sale and registration of the deed.

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Census, joiner in the 1860 and 1870 US Censuses, mechanic in the 1865 NY Census, and carpenter in the 1875 NY Census. He was not a wealthy man. In 1850, his 82-acre farm supported five people and was worth less than \$2,000; his two horses, twelve cows, and six pigs were valued at only \$350; in 1860, he owned real estate and personal assets worth \$1,000. Throughout his life, extended family often boarded with him, his wife Electra Crosby, and their children. In 1880, Hough's occupation was listed as "merchandise (sic)," with Electra working as a draper and an aunt as a dress maker; his purchase of the old county clerk's office and change in profession may be explained by a census note that Perry had suffered an "injury of the head." By 1892, at age 67, he was back working as a carpenter and died six years later.<sup>26</sup>

The same 1892 NY Census identifies John Smithling, aged 49, as a merchant in Martinsburg. He seems to have continued use of the "brick building" as a store after buying it from Perry Hough in 1888 but left Martinsburg to run a cheese factory in Harrisburg in May 1894, two months after his young son Giles died in an accident while playing on a farm.<sup>27</sup> The father died a few years later, being mentioned as the "late John Smithling" in an obituary of another son, Leon, in February 1898.<sup>28</sup>

A newspaper story reveals that sometime before 1899, Robert Forbs (also known as Forbes) acquired the building. Forbs, a cattle dealer and "speculator," is described as owning the old county clerk's office in which Dealton H. Rima (1850-1920) opened a feed store in October, 1899.<sup>29</sup>



Figure 7. D. H. Rima Store, 1900-1904. Note addition and shed behind. (Lewis County Historical Society)

Rima was born in Orwell, Otsego County, in 1850, but by 1880 he lived in Lewis County with his wife and small son, farming in Pinckney, west of Lowville. In 1892, he was farming in Martinsburg. When he opened the store, he appears to have first focused on farm sales; besides selling feed, Rima was listed as a "harness repairer" in the 1900 US Census. Within a few years, he had converted his business over to groceries.

The 1900 US Census reveals that Rima did not own the "brick building," even after operating his store in it for at least a year. Perhaps as a result, he moved to a new building across the street (and next to the old Martin Land Office) in 1904.

<sup>26</sup> US Census, 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880; NY Census, 1865, 1875, 1892. At various times, Hough also shared his home with his parents, sister-in-law (a teacher), aunt, and other boarders.

<sup>27</sup> Deed from Perry S. and Electra Hough to John F. Smithling, dated January 2, 1888, recorded January 4, 1888, Book 74, 282, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY; "Martinsburg," *Lowville Journal and Republican* (May 17, 1894), 2; "Killed," *Lewis County Democrat* (March 21, 1894), 3.

<sup>28</sup> "Leon J. Smithling" [Obituary], *Lowville Journal and Republican* (February 24, 1898), 5.

<sup>29</sup> "Martinsburg," *Lowville Journal & Republican* (October 5, 1899), 8. The NY Census for 1892 lists Forbs as a "speculator" – but, whether in livestock or property (or both) is not clear.

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
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This building was much larger and also served as the post office after 1911. Rima continued to run his business until at least 1915, when his son, Fred, took charge. For a few years the elder Rima and his wife lived with his widowed sister in Oswego, where he died in 1920.

Meanwhile, the brick building appears to have remained vacant. It was sold in a tax deed in 1909 back to Forbes (previously, Forbs), suggesting that at some point the old clerk's office might have been sold to another and seized for taxes or that Forbes defaulted and redeemed the building.<sup>30</sup> Eleven years later, Forbes and his wife sold the First Lewis County Clerk's Office to the Town of Martinsburg for its Water Commission and Fire Departments.<sup>31</sup>

### After 1920

The building was eventually converted into a garage. During the 1930s, electricity was added, possibly as part of the same WPA project that upgraded the old courthouse and town offices. Shortly thereafter, the department placed a siren on the roof to call volunteer firefighters.

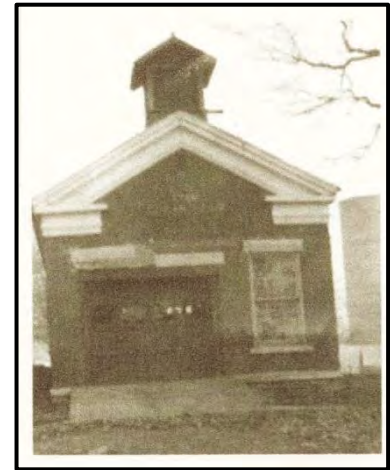


Figure 8 and 9. First Lewis County Clerk's Office as Town of Martinsburg Fire Department garage, 1950s.<sup>32</sup>

Edward Ingersoll, fire chief for the Martinsburg Volunteer Fire Department during the 1940s and 1950s, was instrumental in acquiring the department's vehicles.<sup>33</sup> Figure 8 shows five vehicles owned by the department in 1959. The 1929 Packard on the left was their parade car, and the other four vehicles were the engines. The first fire engine on the left was "home-made" by Ingersoll, who mounted a 60-gallon tank with Hale portable pump on the back of a 1922 Childs truck. The second fire engine was a tanker. The third was an open Ford truck that Ingersoll purchased from a factory on his way home from an out-of-town job. Finally, the 500-gallon pumper with 900 feet of hose – "Little Mo" – was purchased in the late 1950s from a fire department in Tupper Lake or

<sup>30</sup> Deed from the County of Lewis to Robert R. Forbes, dated November 16, 1909, recorded December 21, 1909, in Book 116, 341, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY.

<sup>31</sup> Deed from Robert R. and Ida D. Forbes to the Water Commissioners and Fire Department of the Town of Martinsburg, dated August 28, 1920, recorded February 8, 1921, in Book 137, 525-526, Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY.

<sup>32</sup> "Martinsburg Fire Fighting Fleet," *Lowville Journal and Republican* (June 25, 1959), 1. Also, Sue Adsit, *Martinsburg The Way We Were* (Martinsburg, NY: Courtney Publishing, 2015).

<sup>33</sup> Edward Ingersoll [Interview] (Martinsburg, NY: January 14, 2017). Ed Ingersoll was in his late 90s when he talked about the Martinsburg Volunteer Fire Department, and his description of the vehicles is combined with that in the story in the 1959 *Journal and Republican*.

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Old Forge, NY. The newspaper article featuring the vehicles noted that the "firemen need housing badly, as the department headquarters in the rear shows."<sup>34</sup>

While essential for fighting fires, the Martinsburg Volunteer Fire Department was also instrumental in sponsoring social events and maintaining a sense of community. Throughout its time in "the brick building," the department participated in parades in and around the area and raised funds through an annual "Fireman Field Days" held on the Glendale Road. Then (as now), the department had a very active auxiliary. In the 1940s and 1950s, a dance was held each Saturday night in the town hall throughout the winter, with a variety of bands providing variety to the dances. The fire department officially incorporated as a volunteer organization in 1955.

The increasing size of fire trucks required a new fire hall in 1964; the converted trucks that fit into the old county clerk's office were replaced by more modern and better equipped fire trucks that could not. The brick building was again vacant until 1983. At that time the Martinsburg Historical Society leased the building from the town for \$1 and began a five-year restoration campaign. In 2011, the society was able to buy the First Lewis County Clerk's Office from the volunteer fire department and the town to run as its museum.

### **Architecture**

When erected in 1847, the "brick building" blended well with the architecture of other early Federal and Greek Revival buildings in the hamlet of Martinsburg, among them the General Walter Martin House, First Lewis County Courthouse, Martin Land Office (constructed beside the Martin House), and Lewis County Bank (on the north side of the courthouse). Walter Martin had provided the land and often at least part of the money for all of these buildings to encourage development of the area.

Except for the courthouse, these buildings were stone or brick. In particular, the 1822 Martin Land Office seems to have been the model for the 1847 First Lewis County Clerk's Office. Both buildings, in their original condition, were examples of a style used throughout New York State in the early nineteenth century for small law offices, schools, and government buildings. Both are small, brick buildings built gable end to State Route 6; both are "fire-proof" to protect documents; both have stone lintels and sills. However, the older one has simple Federal cornice returns, while the newer has stronger Greek Revival cornice returns. In addition, the Martin Land Office sits on the west side of the street, while the clerk's office sits on the east side.

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<sup>34</sup> "Martinsburg Fire Fighting Fleet."

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Figure 10. 1822 Martin Land Office, after 1911. Note that it stands between the General Walter Martin House and the relocated D. H. Rima Store. (Lewis County Historic Society)

Figure 11. First Lewis County Clerk's Office, 2017.

## Summary

The First Lewis County Clerk's Office is significant as an early county building built as a pawn in the contest between the hamlet of Martinsburg and the village of Lowville for location of the county seat. It continued to be important after the courthouse moved to Lowville, serving a variety of functions and helping to maintain the identity of the community as the center of the township. Finally, the architecture of the building is significant as a Greek Revival example of a mid-nineteenth century county clerk's office.

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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- Beers, D. G. "Martinsburgh." *Atlas of Lewis Co., New York*. Philadelphia: Pomeroy, Whitman & Co., 1875.
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- "Martinsburg." *Lowville Journal and Republican* (May 17, 1894), 2.
- "Martinsburg." *Lowville Journal & Republican* (October 5, 1899), 8.
- "Martinsburg Fire Fighting Fleet." *Lowville Journal and Republican* (June 25, 1959), 1.
- "Proceedings of the Board of Supervisors of Lewis County," *Lowville Journal & Republican* (January 5, 1876), 4.

### Archival and Information Sources

- Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lowville, NY (Deeds)
- Lewis County Historical Society, Lowville, NY (Jerry Perrin)
- Martinsburg Volunteer Fire Department, Martinsburg, NY (Edward Ingersoll)
- NY Census: 1855, 1865, 1875, 1892.
- US Census: 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, 1910, 1920, 2010.



First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_  
 recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office  
 Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other  
Name of repository: Lewis County Historical Society

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** .04 Acres

**UTM References**

1	18N	462240E	4842724N	3		
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4		
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary encompasses the lot historically and currently associated with the nominated building.

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
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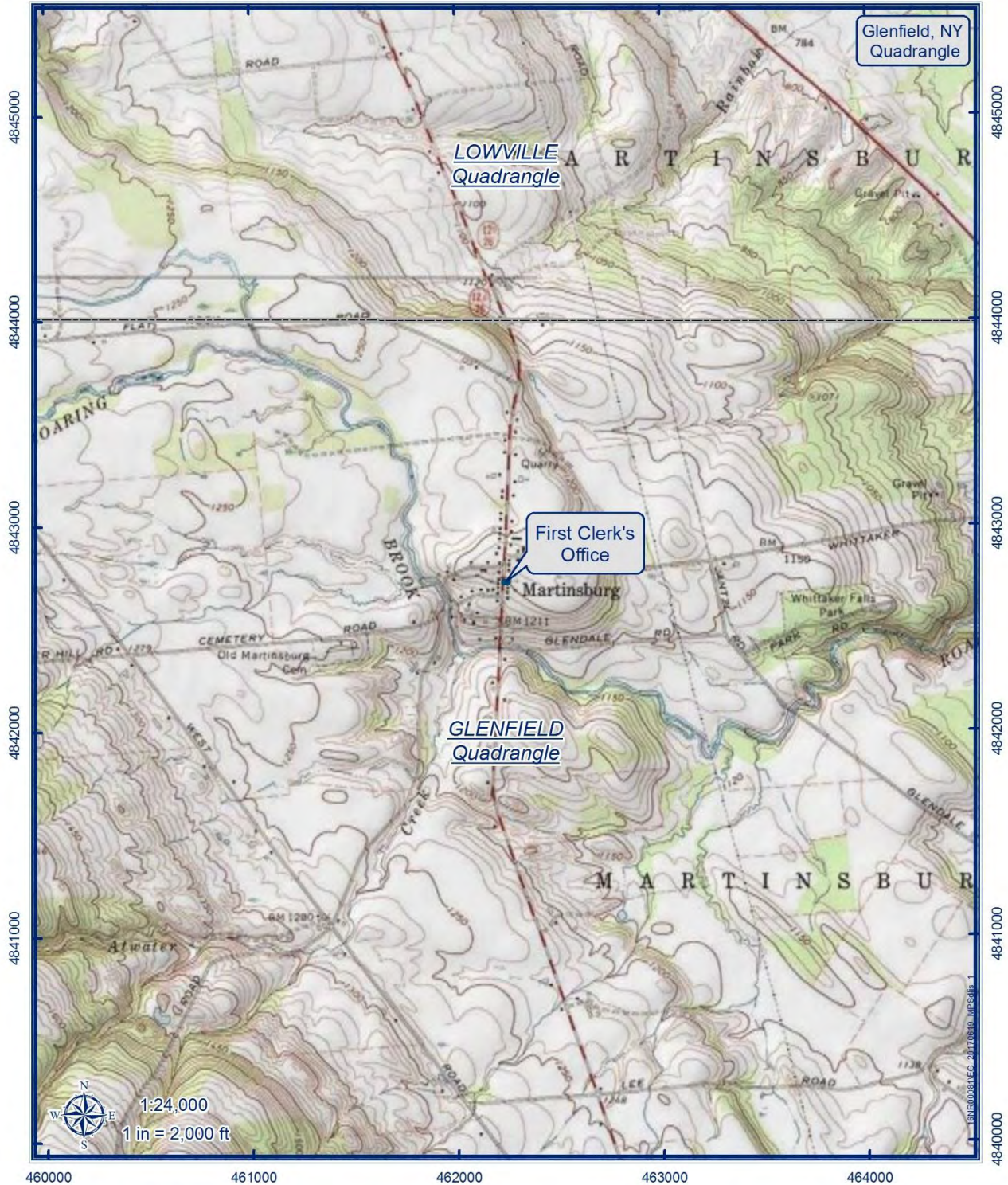


First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Martinsburgh, Lewis Co., NY

6660 State Route 26  
Martinsburgh, NY 13367



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Clerk's Office



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Martinsburgh, Lewis Co., NY

6660 State Route 26  
Martinsburgh, NY 13367



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Clerk's Office



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Martinsburgh, Lewis Co., NY

6660 State Route 26  
Martinsburgh, NY 13367



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Clerk's Office



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Martinsburgh, Lewis Co., NY

6660 State Route 26  
Martinsburgh, NY 13367



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Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



First Clerk's Office



Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation

First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title Bette S. Lathan, Member (with edits by Emilie W. Gould, Historic Preservation  
Program Analyst, NY State Historic Preservation Office)

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organization Martinsburg Historical Society date May 1, 2017

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street & number P.O. Box 17 telephone

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city or town Martinsburg state NY zip code 13404

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e-mail armitta@bellsouth.net

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First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

**Additional Documentation**

None

**Photographs:**

Name of Property: Lewis County Clerk's Office

City or Vicinity: Martinsburg, NY

County: Lewis County

State: New York

Photographer: Emilie W. Gould

Date Photographed: May 2017

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

0001: Façade and south elevation, from the west.

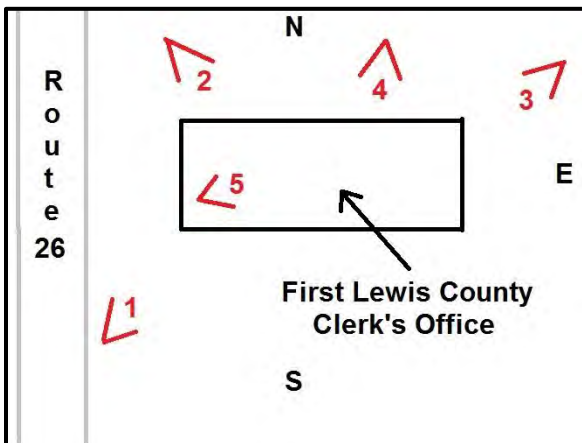
0002: North elevation – from the northwest.

0003: East (rear) elevation.

0004: Window detail, north elevation.

0005: Interior, with early desk attributed to First Lewis County Clerk's Office

Photokey:





First Lewis County Clerk's Office  
Name of Property

Lewis County, NY  
County and State

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**Property Owner:**

---

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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.











TOWN CLERK'S  
OFFICE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 9/12/2017      Date of Pending List: 10/11/2017      Date of 16th Day: 10/26/2017      Date of 45th Day: 10/27/2017      Date of Weekly List: 11/3/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- |                                       |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal       | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL            | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape       | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver       | <input type="checkbox"/> National        | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other        | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP             | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years         |
|                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG             |   |

Accept       Return       Reject      10/27/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

# Lewis County Historical Society

7552 South State Street

P.O. Box 446

Lowville, New York 13367

(315) 376-8957

lewiscountyhistoricalsociety@gmail.com

Michael F. Lynch  
Director, Division for Historic Preservation  
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation  
PO Box 189  
Waterford, NY 12188-0189

May 25, 2017

Re: First Lewis County Clerk's Office

Dear Mr. Lynch:

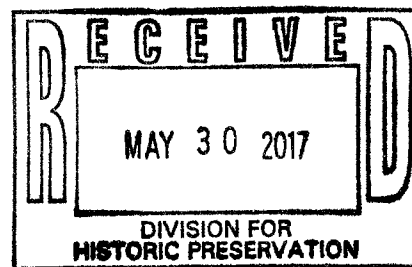
As Curator of the Lewis County Historical Society I support the nomination of the first Lewis County Clerk's Office to the National and State Registers of Historic Places. Martinsburg, where the Clerk's Office is located, was originally the County Seat until it was removed to Lowville in 1865. Martinsburg has several historic buildings already on the National Register including the 1805 General Walter Martin limestone mansion which we own and the original Lewis County Courthouse, all within a few hundred feet of the Clerk's Office. The building has seen many uses such as a store and fire house which temporarily disguised its original look. Fortunately the building has undergone restoration to return it to its pleasant facade.

The Lewis County historical Society's Preservation Committee is actively working with all townships to identify historic buildings and sites in their towns. We applaud the Martinsburg Historical Society's efforts to place their building on the registers.

Sincerely,



Dr. Jerry Perrin  
Office Manager/Curator  
Lewis County Historical Society







**Parks, Recreation  
and Historic Preservation**

ANDREW M. CUOMO  
Governor

ROSE HARVEY  
Commissioner

6 September 2017



Alexis Abernathy  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places

Mail Stop 7228

1849 C Street NW  
Washington DC 20240

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to submit the following three nominations, all on disc, to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register:

Coeymans Landing Historic District, Albany County  
390 Ocean Avenue, Nassau County  
First Lewis County Clerk's Office, Lewis County

Please feel free to call me at 518.268.2165 if you any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank  
National Register Coordinator  
New York State Historic Preservation Office