Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

PH0685925

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Friends Meeting House at Portsmouth

AND/OR COMMON
Portsmouth Friends Meeting House (Cemetery and Parsonage)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Meeting house: 11 Middle Road
parsonage: 2232 East Main Rd.
__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
Portsmouth __ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
#1 Hon. Fernand J. St Germain

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
Rhode Island	44	Newport	005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
X STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	X PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	X RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Portsmouth Monthly Meeting of Friends

STREET & NUMBER
11 Middle Road

CITY, TOWN
Portsmouth __ VICINITY OF

STATE
Rhode Island 02871

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Portsmouth Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER
2200 East Main Road

CITY, TOWN
Portsmouth

STATE
Rhode Island 02871

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Interstate 895 Corridor Survey

DATE
1977 __FEDERAL X STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN
Providence

STATE
Rhode Island 02903

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	_UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE*
X GOOD	_RUINS	X ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Portsmouth Friends Meeting House, built between 1699 and 1702 and altered several times in subsequent years, is a large, plain, two-story shingled frame building with two end interior brick chimneys and a moderately tall hipped roof (Photo #1). It is sited, facing east, near the crest of Quaker Hill, from which there are impressive views westward and southward across the rolling fields of this still partially rural section of the town of Portsmouth.

The meeting house is separated from Middle Road on the east by a wood and iron railing on a 2-foot ledge-stone base and from Hedley Street on the south by a four-to-five foot fence of split ledge rock, which bounds the Friends Burying Ground, behind the church, on south, west, and north sides (see sketch plan). The Friends Cemetery (now designated Rhode Island Historical Cemetery, Portsmouth #10) has occupied this site since about 1706, although the earliest individual markers in it date back only to the 1830s. About fifty feet north of the meeting house, church historians and several written sources indicate that the church was moved back about thirty feet from the road sometime before 1887. A section of mortared split, ledge-stone wall about five feet tall is all that remains of the former horse sheds, which were taken down in the 1960s. North of this site stands the Friends Parsonage (Photo #2), built in 1891 when the meeting hired its first paid pastor. Walls, cemetery, and parsonage are included with the meeting house in this nomination.

The meeting house in its present form is two bays deep and five slightly irregular bays long. Windows are double-hung throughout, 15/15 on the main level and 10/15 at gallery level except where they have been foreshortened to 10/10 above the front vestibule. This enclosed vestibule, and the small, one-story hip-roofed office ell on the south (built originally as a partially open Victorian porch) are late nineteenth century additions. The small enclosed pedimented portico now on the north was originally one of two separate front entry vestibules; it was relocated here probably as part of an 1887 remodeling, for the staircase it contains leads through the arched brick base of the northern chimney to the cellar.

Two meeting rooms occupy the body of the meeting house; the men's meeting comprises the southern two-thirds or original portion of the building, and the women's meeting, the northern third, which includes later eighteenth- and perhaps one early nineteenth-century additions. (Photo #3). Two-run staircases in the northeast and southeast corners give access to the open galleries above the north, east, and south walls; the dais and lectern occupy the western wall (Photo #4). The meeting rooms are separated from each other by an almost full-height, almost

*Church historians and several written sources indicate that the church was moved back about thirty feet from the road sometime before 1887.

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full-width folding wooden door of diagonal match-boarding (see floor plan and Photo #4), installed as part of a general refurbishing in 1887.

This refurbishing gave the meeting house interior its present overlay of late Victorian woodwork and furnishings. Grooved door and window frames with cross-grooved corner blocks, doors with raised diagonal panels, solid gallery rails with recessed and chamfered panels, and match-boarded dais wainscoting and corner staircase enclosures were all installed at this time. The oak pews, portable lectern, and newel posts at the foot of the staircases, all of which are ornamented with simple incised Eastlake patterns (Photo #5), and the two pressed brick fireplaces with their sandstone mantel shelves and arched fireboxes also date from 1887.

Despite the darkly varnished Victorian veneer of most of its interior finish, the meeting house still clearly shows its early c. 1699-1702 origin. Heavy now encased posts rise in the four corners of the original part of the building; intermediary framing posts, also encased, rise against the plastered walls on the east and west flanks. The galleries here, unlike those in the women's section, stand free of visible support and are joined directly into the exterior frame. On each flank, above the gallery on the east and the dais on the west, four arched trusses, hand hewn and chamfered with lamb's-tongue stops, spring upward from the vertical posts, free of the casings, for a distance of five to six feet and then are swallowed up in the plastered ceiling, above which they rise to support the roof framing. These trusses were certainly exposed originally and may have remained so well into the nineteenth century. (Accounts of the Friends Meeting House in Newport, whose physical history closely parallels that of the Portsmouth church, indicate that its chamfered framing remained exposed as late of 1859.) The heavy support beams for the staircase in the southeast corner are also quiet witnesses to the earliest period of the building.

Although no in-depth study of structural changes has yet been undertaken, the building's basic development can be surmised from the visible building fabric and from study of the monthly meeting records. The earliest part of the meeting house appears to have been three bays long and two deep, two stories in height with a free-standing gallery on the north, east, and south sides, served by stairs in the southeast corner. It was complete enough to meet in by February, 1702, when the

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first record of a service in the new meeting house is recorded. As early as 1703, however, the women's meeting requested a more convenient space and a committee was appointed to make some kind of adjustment. In April, 1705, the meeting granted permission to build an addition for the women's meeting; that this section is subsequently referred to as "the Little Meeting House," suggests it was a small appendage, probably of only a story or a story-and-a-half in height. In November, 1719/20, the Friends approved an account for labor (apparently completed) "altering the Little Meeting House at Portsmouth ... being an enlargement out of the great meeting house." This alteration was either removed entirely or incorporated in the major addition of 1731, authorized in October, 1730. (The committee appointed to build this addition was given the added responsibility of disposing of the "little meeting house.") In June, 1731, the Friends were authorized to borrow the money needed to carry on the work.

No written record or description of the extent of this addition has been found in the monthly minutes, but it seems likely that the northern portion of the meeting house assumed its present two-story configuration in this construction phase. What is visible of the framing here is quite different from that of the original section and fairly typical for simple building in the 1730's: two heavy cased joists inset in the plaster ceiling run north and south, connecting and, apparently, framing into the plate of the original north wall and that of the new 1731 north wall.

Major work on the meeting house is recorded for the remainder of the eighteenth century; the only items noted are such maintenance projects as priming at both Portsmouth and Newport, in 1732 (presumably of doors and windows in the new additions), window glazing, and building and repair of fences and gates. In July, 1808, however, a committee appointed to determine what additions or alterations ought to be made to accommodate the needs of the monthly and other meetings at Portsmouth reported that an addition of ten feet on the north would be appropriate and that the chimney and "seating in the chamber" should be rebuilt. At least some of this work seems to have been carried out; the few old pews remaining in the meeting house, now used in the gallery and in the basement Sunday School room, appear to date from this remodeling (Photo #6). Whether the ten-foot addition was actually built, and, whether, if so, it forms the fifth bay of the present building (which appears unlikely) or was

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external to the present space and subsequently removed, is a matter for further study. If this addition is part of the present building, the 1808 alteration must have involved a major re-working of the 1731 addition. Only a complete physical exploration of the building fabric, in conjunction with an exhaustive search of all possible records, can begin to answer faithfully such questions.

The last and most obvious of the alterations the meeting house experienced, that of 1887, has already been described. The parsonage of 1891--a small, story-and-a-half, frame cottage with cross-gable roof and open front porch--was a slightly later accomplishment of the same building campaign, a visible indication of the renewed strength of the meeting at the end of the nineteenth century. Only slightly remodeled on the interior for modern convenience and reshingled on the exterior, the parsonage completes the group of structures on the crest of Quaker Hill which embody the three-hundred-and-twenty-year history of the Society of Friends in Portsmouth.

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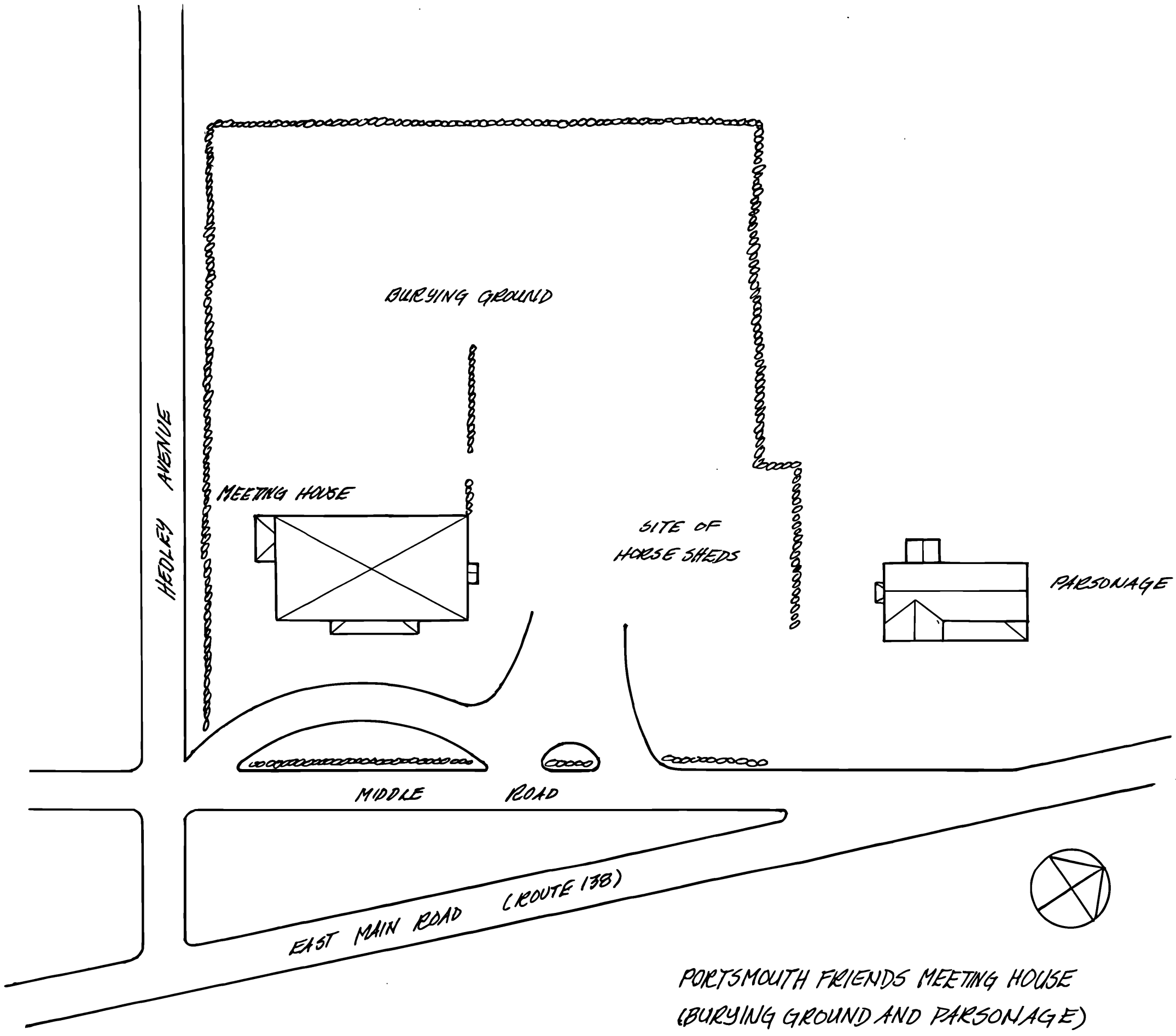
CONTINUATION SHEET 4 ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 5



PORTSMOUTH FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
(BURYING GROUND AND PARSONAGE)
PORTSMOUTH, RHODE ISLAND
SITE PLAN - NOT TO SCALE

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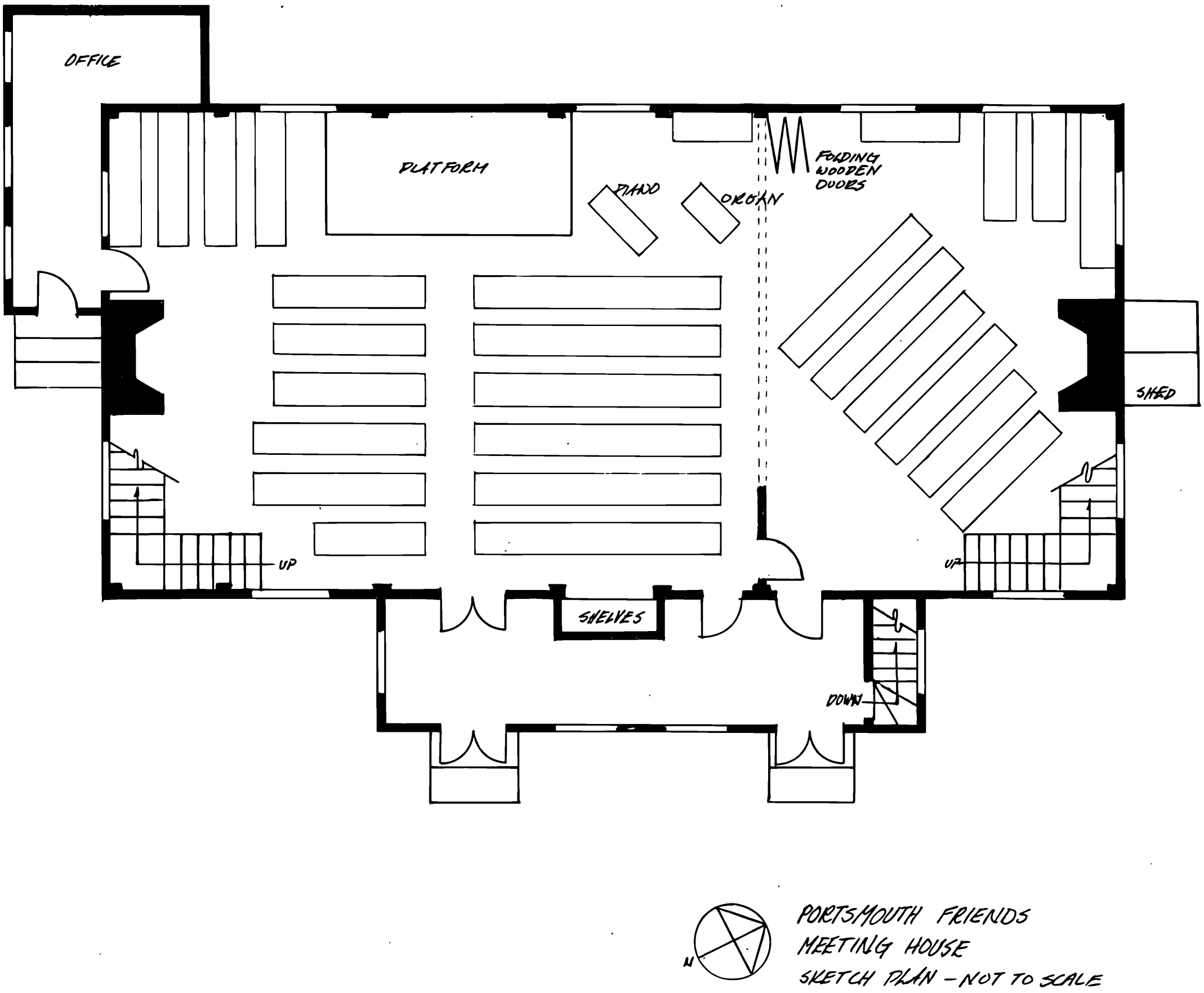
CONTINUATION SHEET 5 ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 6



PORTSMOUTH FRIENDS MEETING HOUSE
SKETCH PLAN – NOT TO SCALE

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	X RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
X 1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	X EDUCATION	X MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X 1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		X social history

SPECIFIC DATES 1699-1702, c. 1730/31 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Portsmouth Friends Meeting House is important primarily as an architectural and religious landmark, but it also has significance for Rhode Island's social, educational, and military history.

Built between 1699 and 1702, the Portsmouth meeting house was one of the first Quaker meeting houses in the American colonies; it and the meeting house at Newport, built at the same time, are the oldest ones in existence today. Both meeting houses were among the earliest structures built specifically for religious use in the "heretical" colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations and they are now the oldest extant religious structures in the State.

The Society of Friends, founded in England in 1647 by George Fox, made its first appearance in America in 1656 at Boston, where its members met severe Puritan persecution. Fortunately for the new religion, other colonies--among them North Carolina, New Jersey, Maryland, and especially Rhode Island--were more tolerant. Well before the settlement at Pennsylvania in 1691, the Friends had found a haven in Rhode Island, literally--on the island of Rhode Island (Aquidneck), and established a strong and prospering community there.

The first Friends arrived in Rhode Island in 1657, aboard a small coastal vessel "Woodhouse," out of London, built, given to the Friends, and captained by Robert Fowler. The "Woodhouse" carried eleven Quakers, of whom six, unhappily, disembarked to face persecution at New Amsterdam; five continued to a warmer welcome at Newport.

Several decades before this, in 1638, Anne Hutchinson, William Coddington, and other dissenters from Massachusetts, had purchased Aquidneck Island from the Narragansett Indians and settled in Portsmouth. Although Anne Hutchinson left the colony in 1641, William Coddington and other Hutchinsonians had remained, removing from Portsmouth to establish Newport at the south end of Aquidneck in 1639. The faith of many of these Newport settlers was very close in spirit to that espoused by the Quakers, and within a few years of the Quaker arrival, many of the principal men at Newport--among them William Coddington and soon-to-be-Governor Nicholas Easton--had joined the Society of Friends. By 1660

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3.75 acres

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	19	312020	4606620
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Plat 39, Lot 40

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Ancelin V. Lynch, National Register Coordinator

ORGANIZATION
R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

DATE
August, 1978

STREET & NUMBER
150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE
401-245-4961

CITY OR TOWN
Providence

STATE
Rhode Island 02903

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL X 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer DATE September 29, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 11.24.78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11/22/78

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(some sources say as early as 1658), there was a monthly meeting of Friends on Rhode Island which met in private homes in Newport and Portsmouth. By 1661, there were sufficient numbers to warrant formation of a Yearly Meeting. The Yearly Meeting soon drew Quakers from throughout New England and, although there were several such yearly meetings in the region, the one at Newport quickly became the most important. In 1672 the Quakers at Newport and Portsmouth were in such numbers that George Fox found it worthwhile to visit there.

As a direct result of Fox's visit and recommendations, the Society of Friends became an increasingly organized institution; thorough records of its meetings were kept and direct connections were maintained through correspondence with Quakers in all parts of New England as well as in England, Ireland, and such British colonies as Barbados and Antigua. These connections, at first strictly religious, soon were social and commercial as well, and formed an important part of the framework supporting the power and prosperity enjoyed by the Rhode Island "Quaker Grandees" (as Royal Governor for New England Sir Edmund Andros called them in the 1670s). By 1690 almost half the population of the colony of Rhode Island was of the Quaker persuasion, and Quakers frequently were elected to the office of Governor.

As Newport became increasingly urban and urbane, and as Quakers residing there rose to political and mercantile prominence within the colony, the meeting at Newport took precedence over that at Portsmouth, which was composed primarily of rural but prosperous landowners and farmers.

Although the meeting of Friends at Portsmouth began about 1658, the first reference to a public meeting house--a proposition that such a building be procured--does not occur in the Rhode Island Friends Monthly Meeting Records until October 22, 1691. This proposition was approved in February, 1692, and a committee was appointed to find a suitable building. In September, 1692, the committee presented an account for their expenses in securing a small lot and a house from Robert Hodgson and converting it for use as a meeting house.

The Friends in both Portsmouth and Newport had outgrown their meeting houses by December, 1698, and it was proposed to build new ones. It seems clear that the building of the present meeting house at Portsmouth was underway at least by November, 1699, when the committee for the new

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building (appointed in December, 1698) was given authority to dispose of the "land and house where ye ould meeting house is." The committee reported in February, 1700, that a buyer had been found. No record of the amount or actual receipt of Joseph Mosey's purchase money has been discovered, but, in June, 1700, the Friends decided that the amount should be applied to the cost of the new building. Progress on the meeting house seems to have been far enough along by October of that year for Friends to consider having a shed for horses built nearby.* The first definite reference to "a monthly meeting at our new meeting house in Portsmouth," however, is dated February 28, 1702.

Additions made to the building in 1705, 1719/1720, and 1731 are indicative of the continuing growth of the Friends meeting at Portsmouth, as well as elsewhere in Rhode Island, throughout the eighteenth century. The American Revolution, however, brought serious disruptions to Rhode Islanders, particularly to those residents of Aquidneck Island and even more particularly to those of Quaker persuasion.

British forces occupied Newport from December, 1776, until October, 1779, harrassing and stripping for supplies the remainder of the island during that time. For most of these years Narragansett Bay was effectively closed to commerce. Newport's mercantile prosperity was thus destroyed and many of the wealthier Quakers removed to Philadelphia and New York as a result. At the same time, Quakers who remained in Rhode Island, and who, for reasons of conscience, refused to take the test act, to serve in the military, or to hire substitutes, were distrained of their property by colonial forces, in addition to being subjected to raiding expeditions of the British supply parties.

Both the Newport and the Portsmouth meeting houses were occupied by enemy forces in the course of the war. British occupation of the Newport building and subsequent French occupation of it have both been

*Discussion of building this shed continued intermittently until 1710; construction was not actually completed until 1711.

well documented. Less well studied has been the occupation of the Portsmouth meeting house. Local and congregational histories make vague, frequently conflicting references to occupation by British and/or Hessian troops; the meeting room is said to have been used for a barracks and the cellar, for an ammunition magazine. Lack of any specific dates or numbers in these accounts and the fact that most of the cellar was little more than a crawl space prior to 1955 place these traditions in some question. What can be verified of the role of the Portsmouth meeting house in the Revolutionary imbroglio are the following facts: (1) cannonballs were discovered in the process of excavating the cellar in 1955; (2) one encounter of the Battle of Rhode Island of August, 1778, has always been known as the Battle of Quaker Hill and did occur in the immediate vicinity of the meeting house; and (3) the Records for Friends Births and Deaths show that Jacob Mott, who died January 24, 1779, was buried near his home rather than in the Quaker burying ground "the Meeting house at Portsmouth and Burying Ground also ... Being at that time occupied by a number of German Troops for which Reasons it was Thought best by his Childrens (sic) and Freinds (sic) not to Inter him there." Further research is needed to determine how long the meeting house was occupied, whether it was so occupied at the time of the Battle of Rhode Island, whether British and American Forces held it, how they used it, and what damage was done to the property while it was in military hands.

Economic hardship and the sharp decline in numbers experienced by the Quakers on Aquidneck as a result of the Revolution, coupled with the decision by Friends following the war that Friends should no longer hold any public office, led to the decline of the social and political as well as religious force which the Friends had wielded in Rhode Island society for over one hundred years.

Despite this incipient decline and the immediate problems caused by the war, in 1777, the Friends began to discuss seriously establishing a boarding school for their children. Public schools did not as yet exist in Rhode Island, and the few private and proprietors schools which were extant offered an education of uneven quality and sporadic duration. Moses Brown, the prominent Providence merchant who had converted from the Baptist faith to Quakerism, was among the prime movers in the effort to establish the school. In 1784 the school opened in the Portsmouth

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meeting house; its thirty students boarded with local Friends and were instructed by Isaac Lawton, a prosperous Portsmouth farmer and miller, and formerly a clerk of the Yearly Meeting. Due to the unsettled money and trade conditions in the 1780s and the general impoverishment of the Quakers who remained on Aquidneck after the war, particularly those in Newport, the school closed for lack of financial support in 1788. Funds remaining from the school were entrusted to Moses Brown, who handled and increased them so skillfully that they were sufficient in 1819 to use in re-establishing the Friends Boarding School at Providence. Named for its early benefactor, Moses Brown School is still in operation in Providence, with a reputation as one of the finest private schools in the eastern United States.

Although the vitality of the Society of Friends on Aquidneck dwindled over the course of the nineteenth century, there seems to have been a resurgence in the Portsmouth congregation toward the end of the century. This produced the remodeling of the meeting house in 1887 and the building of the parsonage in 1891, by the meeting's first paid pastor.* The tricentennial history of the meeting mentions that the meeting was "full above and below" immediately preceeding the Revolutionary War and again in the 1880s and 1890s. The building of the parsonage marked this new life and reflected, as well, a new departure for the Quaker congregation; that of specifically asking (and hiring) someone to serve as parson. Prior to about 1890, the Portsmouth meeting adhered to the tradition of relying on its membership to produce individuals who by their thought and action showed forth their calling to minister to the congregation (on an unpaid basis).

Despite the alterations which have naturally occurred over the course of two hundred and eighty years of constant use, the basic fabric and plan of the meeting house remain essentially as they had developed by c. 1731; the essentially medieval quality of the meeting room is still palpable. So much can still be read of the building's earliest years that when restoration of the meeting house in Newport was undertaken in the late 1960s, the Portsmouth meeting house was used as a basis for comparison. It served as an especially valuable model since the history of both buildings was intertwined from the beginning; both were built in the same three-year period; subsequent alterations were often approved simultaneously and sometimes executed by shared building committees

*Seth Reese

and workmen; and many of the alterations on both buildings through the early nineteenth century date within a year or two of each other.

The Portsmouth Friends Meeting House, with its cemetery and parsonage, is of national significance, both for its architectural interest and its religious association. Its role in the Quaker life and leadership within eighteenth century colonial Rhode Island society, its still-to-be-explored use in the Revolutionary War, and its affiliation with the first Quaker boarding school in the country insure its lasting importance to the history of Rhode Island.

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