

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAY 22 1997

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name First Baptist Church of Bowdoin and Coombs Cemetery

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Off west side of Route 201, .65 miles north of Junction with
Route 125 N/A not for publication

city or town Bowdoin Center vicinity

state Maine code ME county Sagadahoc code 023 zip code 04287

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination
 request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of
Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property
 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant
 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Eugene Fitzgerald 5/16/97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional
comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the
National Register
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the
National Register.
- removed from the National
Register.
- other, (explain): _____

Edson W. Beall
Signature of the Keeper

6-20-97
Date of Action

First Baptist Church of Bowdoin
and Coombs Cemetery

Sagadahoc, Maine
County and State

Name of Property

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Facility

Funerary/Cemetery

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Religion/Religious Facility

Funerary/Cemetery

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Federal

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Wood/Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other _____

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

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

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Conservation

Period of Significance

1839 -

c. 1900

Significant Dates

1839

c. 1900

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF BOWDOIN AND COOMBS CEMETERYSAGADAHOC, MAINESection number 7 Page 2

The First Baptist Church of Bowdoin is a relatively small, gable roofed frame building with transitional Federal/Greek Revival architectural characteristics. It is sheathed in clapboards and it stands on a granite block foundation. Both the church and the adjoining Coombs Cemetery are located in a rural area at the end of a dirt road off Route 201.

Facing east, the front elevation is dominated by the central entrance. This feature is comprised of an eight-panel door that is framed by side panels (possibly replacing original sidelights), and a multi-light transom, the whole of which is surmounted by an elliptical fan with louvered slats. Wide Greek Revival symmetrically molded surrounds enframe the entry. At the corners of the facade, narrow corner boards rise to short gable ends that in turn meet a narrow raking cornice.

Both the north and south side elevations feature a pair of nine-over-six double hung sash windows and a narrow cornice that slightly overhangs the wall. There are an additional two windows on the rear elevation. A brick flue punctuates the roof several feet back from the front elevation.

The interior contains a vestibule at the rear from which two six-panel doors open into the nave. Two side aisles separate the unpainted pews into three principal groups facing the raised pulpit with a fourth group of two located to the south of the pulpit. The pew ends have armrests ending in unadorned volutes. The pulpit is comprised of a tri-partite paneled screen, the middle section of which projects forward. A pair of freestanding posts are located on either side of the pulpit. Both the vestibule and nave are finished in unpainted horizontal board wainscot up to the top of the pews with plaster over lath above and on the ceiling. There are no electrical fixtures in the church.

Located to the south of the church building is the Coombs Cemetery. This family burying ground contains a collection of modest marble and granite gravestones, the most notable of which is a centrally placed, truncated shaft marked COOMBS. The cemetery's most notable feature is the mortared field stone wall capped by granite coping that entirely surrounds the plot. This structure (which is about three feet in height) was constructed about 1900 at the same time that the church was restored by John and Viola Coombs. A pair of gate posts reached by a set of three granite steps is located in the southeast corner of the cemetery.

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Continuation Sheet**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF BOWDOIN AND COOMBS CEMETERYSAGADAHOC, MAINESection number 8 Page 2

Erected in 1839, the First Baptist Church of Bowdoin is a small wooden frame building that exhibits transitional Federal/Greek Revival style characteristics. It was built to replace a much larger edifice that was destroyed by fire several years earlier. Located adjacent to the church building is the Coombs Cemetery, a burial plot that was established at least two decades prior to the construction of the church, but whose subsequent history is linked to it. Both the church and the cemetery were the target of preservation activities at the turn of the nineteenth century. The property is eligible for nomination to the Register under Criterion A for its association with an early conservation effort in Bowdoin, as well as Criterion C for the church's local architectural significance. Criteria considerations A and D also apply by virtue of the religious use of the building and the presence of the cemetery.

The First Baptist Church of Bowdoin was founded on August 11, 1788 by Elder James Potter, an evangelist who had moved to Bowdoin in 1781 and had preached throughout the central part of the state. In 1787, Potter and two other elders organized the Bowdoinham Association, the first association of Baptist Churches in the District of Maine, and upon the establishment of the Bowdoin church he became its pastor. The new Church erected its first building in 1799. This structure remained in use until December 21, 1834 when it was destroyed by an arsonist.

According to one source, the membership of the First Baptist Church of Bowdoin equaled some 110 persons at its height in 1810, but had dwindled to 25 members by 1843. This decline had a direct bearing on the design of the new church building, which is comparatively small in relationship to most other religious buildings erected in rural areas of the state in this period. The church was built on land acquired from Soloman Eaton, and it was located adjacent to the Eaton (later renamed Coombs) family cemetery. Although little specific information is known about the congregation after it built its new house of worship, local historians believe that it continued to decline until its dissolution prior to the beginning of the Civil War. Eventually, the property reverted to Boston attorney John C. Coombs and his sister Viola Coombs, the heirs of Soloman Eaton.

The Coombs' were keenly interested in preserving the church, and about 1900 undertook a major restoration of the building. Their motivation for this project was described in an article that appeared in the June 10, 1901 edition of the *Lewiston Weekly*:

Endeared to them by a thousand tender memories of the past they entered upon the work with feelings akin to love. It was in a deplorable condition. It was well nigh unroofed and wild weeds were growing through the floor. It mattered not. All things

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Continuation Sheet**FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF BOWDOIN AND COOMBS CEMETERYSAGADAHOC, MAINESection number 8 Page 3

are possible to unlimited means. The building was thoroughly renovated and repaired. It cost far more than it would to have built a new church but that was not the object. Everything was restored as in the days of old. The old wooden pulpit with its square posts was repainted, and the pewter communion service hunted up and put back in its proper place. The house was shingled, painted, and resilled. The old wooden benches were dragged out of an attic where they had been covered with cobwebs for thirty-five years and again restored to the place where they had once served before. They were brushed and smoothed until they shone like glass and were again fit to be put to the use of former days.

In addition to restoring the church building, the Coombs' had the family cemetery enclosed with the existing stone wall topped with granite coping stones. After its restoration, the church was rededicated on June 9, 1901. This effort marked what is probably the first historic preservation undertaking in the Town of Bowdoin. The long-term maintenance of the church and cemetery became the responsibility of Bowdoin College in 1927 when it accepted an offer from Viola Coombs to establish a trust fund whose income would be used in part to maintain the property. This agreement remained in force until 1994 when the college transferred its responsibility to the Bowdoin Historical Society, after the church building and the cemetery had once again been restored.

Architecturally, the church is rather atypical of religious buildings erected in rural Maine during the 1830s. Not only is it quite small, but its blending of Federal period features (such as the narrow profile of the cornice and gable end returns, as well as the elliptical fan) with the predominantly Greek Revival doorway is unusual. Many churches built in this period featured double doorways with characteristic Greek Revival surrounds, pedimented gable roofs, and bell towers. By contrast, the central entry with its sidelights is the most prominent exterior feature, the composition of which distinguishes this building from its peers. The interior treatment is more typical, particularly in the use of a vestibule with side aisles separating the three groups of pews.

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FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH OF BOWDOIN AND COOMBS CEMETERY

SAGADAHOC, MAINE

Section number 9 Page 2

A Unique Service, The Old School Baptist Church in Bowdoin Re-Dedicated." *Lewiston Weekly*. June 10, 1901.

Pictorial History of Bowdoin, Maine: 1788-1988. Bowdoin, Maine: Bowdoin Historical Society. 1988.

Burrage, Henry S., D.D. *History of the Baptists in Maine*. Portland, Maine: Marks Printing House, Printers. 1904.

Millett, Rev. Joshua. *A History of Baptists in Maine*. Portland, Maine: Charles Day and Co. 1845.

Small, Rev. E. S. *Minutes of the Associations and Bowdoinham Centennial Papers*. Portland, Maine: B. Thurston and Co. 1887.

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National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH

SAGADAHOC, MAINE

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Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property occupies the Town of Bowdoin tax map 6, lot 35.

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the entire rural lot that is historically associated with the First Baptist Church of Bowdoin and the Coombs Cemetery.