

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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

1. Name of Property

historic name Harris, Nathan, House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 425 Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Westbrook, N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county Cumberland code 005 zip code 04092

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.)

Earle S. Peterson 9/3/93  
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:)

Signature of the Keeper Delores Byrum **Entered in the National Register** Date of Action 10/14/93

Harris, Nathan, House  
Name of Property

Cumberland, Maine  
County and State

**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
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		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)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

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**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade/Professional

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**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Early Republic/Federal

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**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite

walls Synthetic/Vinyl

roof Asphalt

other Cedar Clapboards Rear Ell

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**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 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Art

**Period of Significance**

c. 1836

**Significant Dates**

c. 1836

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Prior & Hamblen, Artists (Attributed)

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Harris, Nathan, House  
Name of Property

Cumberland, Maine  
County and State

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property .27 acre

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	9	3	9	1	2	9	0	4	8	3	7	1	6	0
Zone			Easting					Northing						

3 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

2 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

4 

Zone			Easting					Northing						

See continuation sheet

### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Thomas B. Johnson, Architectural Historian Consultant

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date July, 1993

street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/287-2132

city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333-0065

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Ray R. & Pamela Pallas

street & number 425 Main Street telephone 207/854-2521

city or town Westbrook, state Maine zip code 04092

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetHARRIS, NATHAN, HOUSECUMBERLAND, MESection number 7 Page 2

The Nathan Harris House is a one-and-a-half-story, five-bay, Federal style frame house with a central entrance embellished with a semi-elliptical over-door panel. It has a gable roof, paired rear chimneys, and rear ell. The walls of the structure are sheathed at present in vinyl siding and the roof is of common black asphalt shingles. The foundation is comprised of rubble fieldstone footings topped with cut granite slabs above grade, and chimney construction is of hard fired waterstruck brick. The fenestration retains its original configuration but the present large pane sash is an early twentieth century replacement of what was probably nine-over-six (first floor) and six-over-six (second floor) original sash. The interior displays finely crafted Federal style woodwork and a remarkable set of murals decorating the walls of the parlor and entrance hall.

The house fronts on Main Street in Westbrook and is in an urban neighborhood that retains a significant concentration of both early and later nineteenth century buildings. Converted to commercial uses in the 1980s and presently in use as a law office, the small front and side yards of the house are presently paved for vehicle parking. The rear of the lot extends to and faces on Cumberland Street, where maturing trees effectively screen the rear ell of the house from passing traffic. It is one of the few extant examples of a basically unaltered modest home of a local merchant that was once common in the vicinity. The modest exterior, however, belies the existence of remarkably preserved muraled walls in two interior spaces that are further distinguished by finely crafted and scaled woodwork more typically found in the larger and more elaborate dwellings of the period.

The front (south) elevation is symmetrically divided into five bays with a central doorway flanked by paired windows. The entrance exhibits molded pilasters enframing a six-panel door and four paned side transoms, the whole capped by a semi-elliptical blind arch opening with molded enframing and keystone. A narrow cornice is somewhat obscured by the later synthetic siding applied to it. Rising above the roof ridge pole are paired chimneys that are placed on the rear wall and serve the four fireplaces within.

The gable ends exhibit paired windows that light the upper chambers. A one-and-a-half-story ell is attached to the rear northeast corner of the house and continues the wall plane established by the east gable end of the main structure. At the extreme end of this ell is a one room, grade level addition, evidently built as a storage shed with access to Cumberland Street, sometime in the early twentieth century, as it is of sawn stud balloon frame construction.

The interior of the Harris House has a number of unusual details, chief among these are the aforementioned wall murals in the front hall and parlor which are believed to have been painted about 1836. They are unusual in that

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetHARRIS, NATHAN, HOUSECUMBERLAND, MESection number 7 Page 3

they are painted in oils directly on the wall plaster, unlike the more familiarly known (and more numerous) distemper murals of the Rufus Porter-Jonathan Poor School, and appear to be derivative in at least two places of period prints as yet unlocated. Beyond this, the spaces that these murals embellish have architectural detailing that is much more elaborate and sophisticated than what one would normally expect to find in such a modestly scaled house. The front hall, which rises the full height of the house to a coved ceiling, contains a finely detailed "S" curve stairway and woodwork combining Federal and Greek Revival influences. The door surrounds are deeply fluted and set with bulls-eye corner blocks. The balustrade that curves up the stair has tapered balusters supporting a nearly round cherrywood or mahogany railing that ends in a spiral at the lower stair decorated with a turned ivory button. Beneath this button, the central baluster is made of iron that becomes a bolt and passes through to the cellar framing, where it is fastened with a hand forged nut. Stair ends exhibit an elaborate fan design. Encircling the hallway between the first and second levels is an unusual band of rectangular panels created with applied molding.

The parlor is to the left of the entrance and also exhibits elaborate woodwork. Wainscoting surrounds the room and there is a molded chair rail. Fluted door surrounds rest on plinths that continue the lines established by the baseboard and base molding. On the north wall, the chimney breast extends into the room, and the fireplace mantle is basically Federal in shape with unusually elaborate panels on the end supports under the shelf. The mantle extends back along the sides of the chimney breast, and the corners of the breast are edged with a quarter-round rope molding. The doors to the closets on either side of this fireplace have the unusual (and apparently original) treatment of having solid panels in the lower and very top divisions, but with louvers for ventilation placed in the center panel opening.

The right front room and rear room behind the stairs exhibit extremely simple woodwork that is more typical of a modest home of the period, and the room behind the stairs exhibits a curious corner fireplace with severely simple mantle which has an eighteenth century feel about it. Behind these two rooms one enters the ell and the original kitchen space with large cooking fireplace and beehive oven intact. Upstairs rooms appear to have been finished during the initial phase of construction, but exhibit minimal woodwork and bare chimney breasts that might have once had openings for the insertion of stove pipes but are now plastered over.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
Continuation SheetHARRIS, NATHAN, HOUSECUMBERLAND, MESection number 8 Page 2

The Nathan Harris House, constructed c. 1828-1830, is a fairly modest story-and-a-half merchant's home of a type that was once typical in the Westbrook area. However, its modest exterior belies the existence of notably fine woodwork in its front hall and left (west) parlor and, most significantly, the unusual and well-preserved wall murals that decorate these two spaces. Believed to have been executed within the decade after the house was built, these murals are the most complete and intact murals executed in oil pigments in the style of the Prior-Hamblen School of artists now known to exist in the State. The house is eligible for nomination under criterion C for its artistic significance.

Attribution of the murals to the hand of either Sturtevant J. Hamblen or William Matthew Prior lies in photographic records of murals in the Nathaniel Hamblen House at 87 Forest Avenue in Portland (much damaged and now covered) which Arthur J. Gerrier attributed to the Hamblens in 1981. Additionally, comparison of the artistic technique in the Harris House murals with known paintings by the Prior-Hamblen School strengthens this attribution, especially in the use of the red drape that encircles the ceiling in the hallway; a feature which is similar to drapery that appears in both Prior's and Hamblen's "flat likeness" portraits (see especially Tillou, Nineteenth Century Folk Painting, plates 106-112). Besides this red drapery, two scenes used in the murals are notable and appear to be derived from printed sources. In the front hall, in the triangle formed by the ascent of the stairs, is a view of a stone obelisk with an arched gate bearing the title BUNKER HILL. This rendition is possibly derived from an 1836 view of the proposed Bunker Hill Monument that was engraved on the title page of the "Bunker Hill Quickstep," a musical score copyrighted in that year by H. Prentiss. Along the east wall of the parlor is a fairly detailed image of a naval battle between two full-rigged ships flying British and American flags, while in the background are two tall British brigs. While it is tempting to speculate that this is a rendition of the famous engagement of the ENTERPRISE and BOXER in Portland Harbor during the War of 1812, this is doubtful, if only for the reason that the combatants were brigs as opposed to being full-rigged ships as depicted here. Certainly the detailing and placement of these ships leads one to speculate that this design was based on a published source such as the monument in the front hall, but as yet this source (if it indeed exists) remains elusive.

Presently being expertly cleaned and conserved after having been wallpapered over for several decades, these murals are extremely important examples of a decorative wall treatment that is rarely encountered in Maine, and as such represent an art form that is of no small consequence in the artistic heritage of the State.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

HARRIS, NATHAN, HOUSE

CUMBERLAND, ME

Section number   9   Page   2  

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Bunker Hill Memorial. Boston, Massachusetts: Printed by Order of the City Council, 1890.

Gerrier, Arthur J. "Nathaniel Hamblen House, 87 Forest Avenue, Portland." Unpublished typescript, files of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.

Lipman, Jean and Alice Winchester. Primitive Painters in America 1750-1950. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company. 1950.

Little, Nina Fletcher. American Decorative Wall Painting 1700-1850. New York: E. P. Dutton. 1972.

Rowe, Ernest R. Highlights of Westbrook History. Westbrook, Maine: Unpublished typescript, files of Greater Portland Landmarks, Inc.

Tillou, Peter H. Nineteenth Century Folk Painting: Our Spirited National Heritage. Storrs, Connecticut: The university of Connecticut. 1973.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

HARRIS, NATHAN, HOUSE

CUMBERLAND, ME

Section number 10 Page 2

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## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property occupies the City of Westbrook Tax Map 40, lot 142.

## BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary embraces the entire city lot historically associated with the Nathan Harris House.