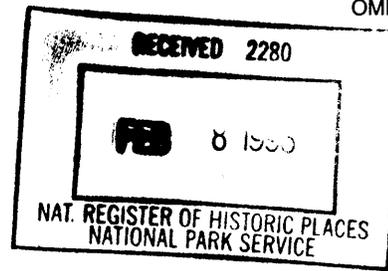


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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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 *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 Birch Island House

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

2. Location

street & number Birch Island N/A  not for publication

city or town Holeb  vicinity

state Maine code ME county Somerset code 025 zip code 04945

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.)

[Signature] 2/2/96  
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] 3/7/96  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

Edson A. Beall  
Entered in the  
National Register

Name of Property

County and State

0713330

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	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)

Domestic/Hotel

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Camp

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Wood/Weatherboard

roof Metal/Tin

other Engaged 2 story porch

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.)

- Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
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.
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:

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Entertainment/Recreation

Period of Significance

c. 1870-1946

Significant Dates

c. 1870

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

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:

Birch Island House  
Name of Property

Somerset, Maine  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 2

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 9	3 8 8 7 1 0	5 0 4 8 9 9 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

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 Kirk F. Mohny, Architectural Historian

organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date January, 1996

street & number 55 Capitol Street, 65 State House Sta. 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 \_\_\_\_\_

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. 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 Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number 7 Page 2

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The Birch Island House is a two-and-a-half story, five-bay vernacular frame building that has a two-story engaged porch on its front elevation, and a long sloping roof plane that gives it a saltbox profile. It is sheathed in weatherboards and it rests on a rubble stone foundation. The roof is covered by a standing seam metal roof that is painted red.

Facing southwest, the front elevation is distinguished by its two-story porch, the upper level of which is lower than the one below. Six square posts that are linked by a sawn balustrade support this structure on both stories. A central doorway flanked by four two-over-two windows comprise the symmetrical fenestration pattern on both levels.

The side elevations contain identical fenestration patterns (except that a door has been added at the southeast corner) comprised of a trio of windows on the first story, two windows on the second story, and two smaller units in the gable peak. There is one door and several window openings on the rear elevation.

In plan, the building has a central hallway located between the two main front rooms, the northern one of which features a fireplace. There are two rooms including the kitchen to the rear, each of which is accessed through large openings from the front. The second floor is divided into four bedrooms and two large storage areas under the sloping roof. Plaster board has been installed throughout these rooms over the original pine boards. Four additional bedrooms are located in the half story. Narrow tongue and groove sheathing covers the walls and ceilings of the interior.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number 8 Page 2

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Believed to have been erected about 1870, the Birch Island House is a two-story frame building that was the centerpiece of a remote private sporting camp said to have been established by a group of wealthy New Yorkers. It is the most significant remnant of the compound which consisted of several outbuildings and a number of individual camps. The property is eligible for nomination to the National Register under criterion A for its association with the early period of sporting camp development in Maine.

Although tradition maintains that Birch Island in Holeb Pond witnessed the development of a private sporting camp beginning around 1870, little documentation has emerged about the people who founded this enclave or its subsequent history. Standard reference materials relating to the numerous sporting camps established in Maine during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries fail to mention this camp, as does the one local history that covers the region. Several factors may account for this dearth of information, not the least of which is the island's remote location and the apparent fact of its restricted use. Unlike the popular and easily reached (relatively speaking) Rangeley or Moosehead lakes regions to the south and east, respectively, Holeb Pond was a very isolated spot. In fact, prior to the opening of the Canadian Pacific Railroad (whose line skirts the southern edge of Holeb Pond) in the late 1890s, access would appear to have been gained by way of the Canada Road up to Jackman and then a trek of some nine miles by canoe and foot. The difficulty of accessibility aside, the apparently private nature of the camp -- as opposed to the far more common commercially operated facilities -- would serve to obscure its existence.

It is thought that the Birch Island Sporting Camps, as the compound had become known by the first decade of the twentieth century, continued to be the domain of a private association until the 1950s, although its heyday had probably long since passed, particularly with the onset of the Great Depression. For the next thirty years, the camps appear to have been largely abandoned. However, in 1986, the property was acquired by a Massachusetts company and then subdivided with the extant individual camps becoming separately owned. Within the past several years the Birch Island House has been rehabilitated with the replacement of missing or deteriorated features based on historic photographs.

The significance of the Birch Island House derives from its association with the sporting camp of which it was a central feature. Although several reasonably intact sporting camps that were historically operated as commercial ventures survive in Maine, extant private camps -- particularly from the first period of their development -- appear to be rare. Furthermore, the function of the Birch Island House seems to have been both as a social hall and dining area as well as a lodging facility. This latter aspect differs from the traditional Maine sporting camp in which individual camps served this purpose, a fact which suggests that the Birch Island House may have been the first structure to be erected with the individual camps added sometime thereafter. A brief summary history of the origins of Maine

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number 8 Page 3

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sporting camps is provided in the following paragraphs. It is contained in a study of this property type titled "Maine Sporting Camps: A Phase One Survey" that was prepared by Stephen A. Cole in 1990 for the Commission.

The institution known as the sporting camp thrived in every region of Maine from the 1870s through the 1950s, and exists even today in more modest scope and number. Simply described, a sporting camp is a complex of structures situated on a lake or river erected to serve as accommodations for sport fisherman and to a lesser degree, hunters. The feature which defines the classic sporting camp is its juxtaposition of single and multi-purpose buildings: individual camps or cottages in which sports sleep and relax flanking the central lodge, where meals are prepared and served and where sports socialize. Other buildings within the complex may vary, but camps and a central lodge will always be found. This applies whether the complex is a commercial venture open to the public, privately held for the use of family and guests, or owned collectively by members and serving as a club.

As a cultural icon, the sporting camp is a product of several interrelated events and themes: a budding interest among Americans in wilderness, the ability of natives in a remote, heavily forested state to turn that interest to their economic advantage, the strength of the late nineteenth century industrial economy coupled with the wealth it produced and the growth of a national rail transportation network.

It is not ironic that the mid-nineteenth century interest in the American wilderness originated in the East's metropolitan areas and among intellectuals and writers. The seaboard cities from Boston to Washington, D. C. had longest been alienated from nature, and it was here that a new and sympathetic view of the natural world emerged. This early appreciation of things and places not yet subdued and civilized would soon be transmuted by urban sportsmen, who returned to the wilderness with rods and guns. Their arrival prompted the establishment of sporting camps by local fishing guides and entrepreneurs who saw a rare opportunity to make a living in their native place.

In Maine, two wilderness regions, the Rangeley Lakes and Moosehead Lake became destinations for sportsmen early on. Both were brought to public notice via journalism, but each by gentlemen of very different intents. Henry Thoreau was an early reporter on the Maine woods, and his impressions were in print during the middle years of the last century. Thoreau's notes on an 1846 journey up Mt. Katahdin and down the west branch of the Penobscot River were published in *The Union Magazine* during 1848. In 1858, *Atlantic Monthly* printed his description of a trip made five years earlier to Moosehead lake and Chesuncook Lake. *The Allagash and East Branch* was brought out posthumously in 1864, recounting Henry Thoreau's last Maine excursion of 1857. These published writings did much, no doubt, to bring the remote and exotic Maine wild lands to the attention of an educated populous, and to encourage their own journeys north and east. Even by the time of Thoreau's trip, Moosehead Lake

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number 8 Page 4

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had become a destination for rusticators and sportsmen. Three public houses (including the 1844 Mt. Kineo House) were found along its shores in 1853, all served by the steamer *Moosehead*. Yet few arrived in the great woods with Henry Thoreau's intentions, to learn what the wilderness was and appreciate its mere existence. He observed, "For one that comes with a pencil to sketch or sing, a thousand come with an axe or rifle."

In the Rangeley Lakes region of western Maine, the early visitors generally came with fishing rods. Gentlemen from Providence, Rhode Island and New York fished Rangeley and Mooselookmeguntic Lakes during the early 1840s, and in the following decade, Yale collegians exploring these waters put up a camp on an island in Mooselookmeguntic which remains known as Students' island. The visits of travelers and sports were sporadic, however, until 1869.

That year saw the publication of *Brook Trout Fishing, An Account of a Trip of the Oquossoc Angling Association to Northern Maine in June 1869*, which marked the Rangeley Lakes as a sportsmen's destination forevermore. The O. A. A., comprised largely of cosmopolites from Massachusetts, New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania joined by a few Mainers, had been founded in the previous year with the goal of preserving the splendid fishing of the Rangeley waters. By the date of the printed account, the club had purchased considerable acreage at Rangeley, encompassing several trout ponds and streams and established a headquarters at Indian Rock on the shore of Cupsuptic Lake. Two log cabins and a frame building had been erected, with many more to come. A few Oquossoc Angling Association members may have had private camps on the Rangeley Lakes prior to the founding of the club.

In an appendix to his study, Cole provides a list of known sporting camps that is largely derived from a 1924 publication titled: *Accommodations in Vacationland the Year Round*. This list contains the names of over 250 camps that existed in virtually every region of the state; a figure that underscores the popularity of this recreational diversion, and supports the cultural and architectural significance of the buildings that represent it.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number   9   Page   2  

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Cole, Stephen A. "Maine Sporting Camps: A Phase One Survey." Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta. 1990.

Letterhead of the Birch Island Sporting Camps, dated 190\_. Copy on file at the Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta.

"What's Interesting Out There for \$100,000 or Less?" *Yankee Magazine*. December, 1995.

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

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE

SOMERSET, MAINE

Section number 10 Page 2

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## **Verbal Boundary Description:**

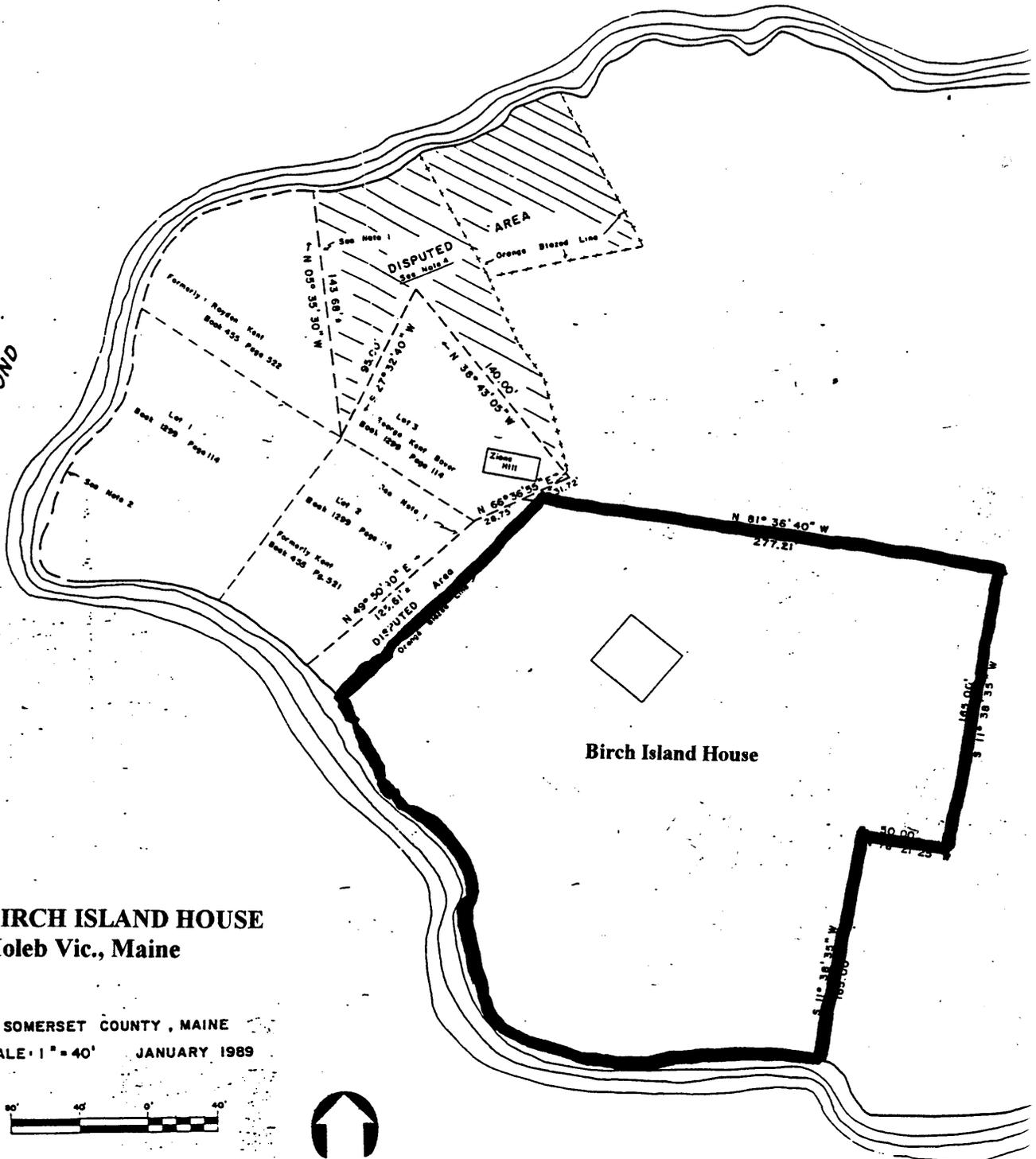
See Map

## **Boundary Justification:**

The boundary embraces the existing island lot that is presently associated by ownership with the Birch Island House. Although historically the entire island fell under the control of the association that originally developed the property and erected the Birch Island House, recent subdivision of the island into several lots with separate owners has altered this relationship. Therefore, the nomination is limited to the admittedly artificial property boundary that encompasses the subject building.

HOLEB POND

HOLEB POND



HOLEB POND

**BIRCH ISLAND HOUSE**  
 Holeb Vic., Maine

SOMERSET COUNTY, MAINE  
 SCALE: 1" = 40' JANUARY 1989

