

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	JUL 10 1979
DATE ENTERED	SEP 10 1979

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC
Rockingham Meeting House
AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER VT
Off State 103
CITY, TOWN Rockingham VICINITY OF
STATE Vermont CODE 50 COUNTY Windham CODE 025
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT VT

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: cemetery

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Town of Rockingham
STREET & NUMBER
P.O. Box 370
CITY, TOWN Bellows Falls VICINITY OF STATE Vermont

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Office of the Town Clerk
STREET & NUMBER
P.O. Box 370
CITY, TOWN Bellows Falls STATE Vermont

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Vermont Historic Sites & Structures Survey
DATE
1971
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Vermont Division for Historic Preservation
CITY, TOWN Montpelier STATE Vermont

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Rockingham Meeting House is the earliest public building in Vermont in nearly original condition; one other meeting house in the state dates earlier but has been severely altered.

The 2½-story, wood frame building, with a low stone foundation, is clad in clapboards and has a gabled roof sheathed in slate (added during the 1906 restoration). The main mass of the Meeting House is rectangular with enclosed "porches", or stairways, at each gable end. Following traditional meeting house form, the principal entry is in the center of the long side of the rectangle, and is directly opposite the pulpit.

The main (south) facade is 7 bays wide. The centrally located door surround has fluted Doric pilasters supporting a heavily molded entablature surmounted by a triangular pediment with a modillion cornice; the door is double leaf. The flanking first floor windows have molded heads; the second floor windows have plain surrounds and butt the entablature. All the windows are double hung and measure 6' x 3' with 20/20 sash and retain many of the original lights. The building has a modillion block cornice with returns but no corner pilasters.

The rear (north) side, overlooking the Rockingham Burying Yard, is also 7 bays wide. The first and second stories contain 6 windows each, with the same detail and spacing as the main (south) facade. Centrally located, and mid-way between the first and second floors, is a round headed, double hung window which frames the speaker on the interior. This side also has a modillion block cornice with returns.

The five-bay east and west gable ends are identical, each having a central 2-story projecting gable-roofed "porch" or stairwell. The porch is flanked on each side and at each of the two floor levels by two 20/20 sash windows with molded heads like those on the north and south facades. A window with the same detail is in the gable peak of the main block.

The porches at the east and west gable ends have no windows on the north sides. Each has a 15/20 sash window with a molded window head at the first floor level of the gable end; a simplified version of the main front door on the south facade below a 15/20 sash window; and a simple molded cornice with returns.

The interior of the Meeting House is in restored condition (see Statement of Significance). Around the perimeter of the space are 24 box pews which are raised a step above the main floor level. In the center are two groups of 6 box pews which are separated from the wall pews and from each other by an "alley" or aisle. Each box pew seats 10-15 people. Between the center pews and the pulpit are six long benches and in front of the pulpit is a narrow enclosed pew for the deacons, tithingmen and other church officers.

The pulpit, centrally located along the rear (north) wall, is 9 feet above the floor and is reached by stairs on the left (west) side. Above the pulpit and affixed to the wall is the original sounding board.

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The gallery, around three sides of the Meeting House, has about 3/4 the floor space as the first floor. This level is reached from the stairways in the enclosed porches at the gable ends. Here there are 24 box pews with three rows of narrow benches in front; the floor of the gallery slopes downward.

The interior of the Meeting House is painted white with the box pews, benches, pulpit, pulpit window and sounding board unpainted or unvarnished natural wood. The window sash, plain surrounds and gallery face are painted a flat light gray-blue.

Providing interest to the severe interior of the Meeting House are the turned spindles in the pew rails, the raised paneled gallery, the pulpit and the round headed window behind the pulpit which is enframed by fluted pilasters supporting an entablature, and the sounding board.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1787 or 8 - 1801

BUILDER/ARCHITECT General John Fuller

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Rockingham Meeting House is Vermont's finest example of an early public building. This building, replacing an earlier public meeting house, was started in 1787 or 1788 but not completed until 1801. The structure, which served for both religious and civil meetings, is located on a hillside overlooking the Williams River valley. At the time of its construction there was no concentration of population within the town of Rockingham and a site near the geographical center of the town was chosen for the Meeting House Lot. Although there are no original plans for the Meeting House, Rockingham Town Records show that by 1799 £ 189:0:7 had been expended for the building; the structure still had to be painted and the windows glazed.

The Rockingham Meeting House represents the second phase of meeting house style in New England. The first style was basically square with a hipped roof. This was followed by the Rockingham MEETING House type which is rectangular with a gabled roof. The entrance is on the long side with the pulpit directly opposite. Asher Benjamin, in his Country Builder's Assistant (1797) helped to bring about a third phase and major change which was strongly influenced by English ideas. Meeting houses were now called churches and the pulpit and entrance were relocated at opposite ends of the long axis of the buildings. The entrance was located in a tower at the gable end, as in the Strafford (VT) Town House (built 1799, entered on the National Register, June 20, 1974) and later with the tower incorporated within the building mass as in the Old West Church in Calais, VT (built 1832, entered on the National Register, May 8, 1973).

The Rockingham Meeting House is the only example of its type in Vermont and is one of the best preserved examples in New England.

The Rockingham Meeting House served as town church until about 1838 when the Church organization began to fall apart. The last record known of a church organization using the Meeting House is September 16, 1840, by this time villages had developed in the town and the different church denominations had built their own structures. The Town of Rockingham continued to use the Meeting House for annual Town Meetings until 1869, at which time the village of Bellows Falls had become the center of Rockingham's population and meetings were moved there for convenience.

Over the years (1840-1905) minor changes were made to the interior of the Meeting House; the exterior was unchanged. In 1851 the pulpit was lowered and the row of benches in front of it had been removed for the convenience of the moderator at Town Meeting. Vandals and souvenir seekers had removed the hand-forged hinges from the box pew doors, whittled the unpainted wood, wrote graffiti on the white plaster walls, and had removed all but two of the turned spindles from the pew rails.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See Continuation Sheet 9-1

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 4

Quad: Bellows Falls, VT-NH
Scale: 1:62,500

UTM REFERENCES

A	1, 8	7 0, 4 2, 2, 5	4, 7 8, 4 5, 2, 5	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property consists of the Rockingham Meeting House & Burying Ground, located on the 4 acre lot of land purchased by William Simonds, David Palsipher, Charles Richards and Nathaniel Davis and presented to the Town of Rockingham in 1782, as recorded in the land records of the Town of Rockingham.

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

John P. Dumville, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

DATE

January 1979

STREET & NUMBER

Pavilion Office Building

TELEPHONE

802-828-3226

CITY OR TOWN

Montpelier,

STATE

Vermont

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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

William B. Pinney

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

7-2-79

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Carol Skell

DATE

9-10-79

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

[Signature]

DATE

9-10-79

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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In 1906 the Town of Rockingham appropriated \$500, which was matched by \$700 in private donations, to restore the deserted and vacant Meeting House. A leading force behind the restoration was Mrs. Horace W. Thompson, a great-granddaughter of one of the original members of the Rockingham First Church. The restoration was supervised by Myron H. Ray, First Selectman of Rockingham. In the restoration the old wood shingle roof was replaced by dark slate, the later added wood stoves removed, 60 pew doors reconstructed, replicas made of the forged pew door hinges, 1400 turned spindles installed in the pew rails, the pulpit rebuilt as near its original form as could be determined, and the row of front benches replaced. California Redwood was used for all new work; this resembles the original native White Pine but can be distinguished from it while not detracting from the visual impact of the simple interior.

To the north of (behind) the Meeting House is the first permanent burying ground established in Rockingham. The first burial in the Meeting House lot was in 1782 before the Meeting House was even erected. The cemetery, with both slate and marble stones, is known for its early slate stones with their naive spirit designs which, like many buildings built in Vermont, are a survival of an earlier style. These stones have been classified into four distinct stylistic groups carved by 4 or 5 different stone cutters.

The Rockingham Meeting House, cemetery and the surrounding acreage is one of the more important visual social documents of early town life in Vermont. The Meeting House, visible for miles because of its hillside location, has been carefully maintained since its painstaking restoration. It is open during the summer months for visitors and is the site of an annual "pilgrimage" in late July or early August when prominent speakers present a program on some phase of this historical or civil life of the area.

Early New England Meeting Houses sheltered both the religious and the governmental life of the community; the structures were in reality assembly halls. New Englanders had sought the freedom to remove elaborate ceremonies and forms from their worship. Ornamentation, however, was allowed in the pulpit area because it represented an area close to Heaven--a place thought to possess great beauty and richness. The Rockingham Meeting House exemplifies this 18th century thought and lifestyle and is Vermont's finest example from this period.

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1. Benes, Peter. "The Rockingham Carvings: Folk Ecclesiology in the Upper Connecticut River Valley" in The New England Historical & Genealogical Register, April 1978, Vol. CXXXII, pp. 97-114.
2. Hayes, Lyman S. The Old Rockingham Meeting House. Bellows Falls, VT. 1915.
3. Lowell, Frances Stockwell. "Rockingham Meeting House" in Vermont Life. Autumn 1948, Vol. 3 #1 pp. 44-47.
4. Peck, Thomas Bellows, ed. Records of the First Church of Rockingham. Boston: Press of David Clapp & Son. 1902. illustrations.
5. Wight, Charles Albert. Some Old Time Meeting Houses of the Connecticut Valley. Chicope Falls, Massachusetts: The Rich Press. (pp. 141-144) 1911.