

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 02000785

Date Listed: July 15, 2002

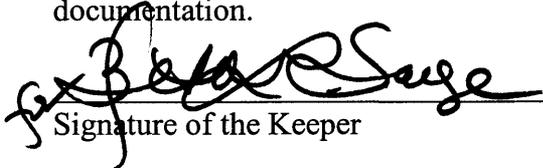
Property Name: Old Town House

County: York

State: Maine

none
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.


Signature of the Keeper

July 15, 2002
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

Section 8: Statement of Significance

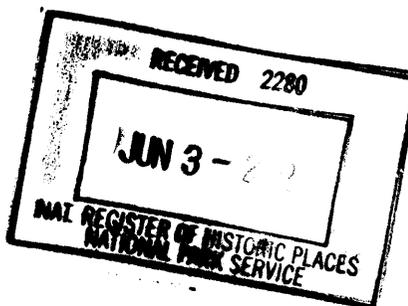
The period of significance is hereby changed to "1833-1952" since the property continued to have importance in the last fifty years but does not meet Criteria Consideration G.

The Maine State Historic Preservation Office was notified of this amendment.

**DISTRIBUTION: National Register property file
Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)**

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



1785

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 Old Town House

other names/site number Town House

2. Location

street & number East side of Merrill Hill Road, 500' north of junction with Middle Road N/A not for publication

city or town Parsonsfield N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME county York code 031 zip code 04047

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 of certifying official/Title

Date

51400
Maine Historic Preservation Commission

State or 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 this 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

Date of Action

7/15/02
Robert D. Savage

7/15/02

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
_____ _____ buildings
_____ sites
_____ structures
_____ objects
_____ _____ Total
1 0

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)
GOVERNMENT / Town Hall

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)
GOVERNMENT / Government Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)
Greek Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation Granite
walls Weatherboard
roof Tin
other

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

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YORK COUNTY, MAINE

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DESCRIPTION

The Old Town House in Parsonsfield Maine is a south facing one-and-a-half story, gable fronted Greek Revival frame structure, which is located adjacent to the Town House Cemetery, on the east side of Merrill Hill Road, in Parsonsfield, Maine. This sits on the north edge of Parsonsfield's Middle Road Village, which essentially remains an early nineteenth-century settlement with very little twentieth-century architecture.

The white clapboarded building is a remarkable example of the intersection of the Greek Revival style and the emerging democracy of the Jacksonian era. The building exterior is ordered and symmetrical, with classic proportions and clean lines. The overhanging roof, with a wide frieze and rake trim, terminates in cornice returns over broad pilasters on each corner. Boxed cornice eaves are accentuated by a wide frieze and crown molding. The south-facing gable facade is five bays across. The two entrances, each flanked by Doric pilasters and a wide entablature with a molded cornice, are set between three evenly spaced six-over-six windows. Two additional six-over-six windows are evenly spaced high on the gable end walls. The west and north elevations feature four evenly spaced six-over-six windows. On the east side of the building a small, shed roof, one-story privy extends off the northwest corner of the building, leaving space for only three six-over-six windows. Each window retains its original sash, and is trimmed with flat stock topped by a molded lintel. The building sits on a low granite foundation, and is roofed with corrugated tin, through which a single chimney protrudes from the south end peak. A poured concrete ramp is positioned in front of the southwest door, while the southeast door features a small, wooden landing with two steps.

On the interior, the structure has undergone several, minor alterations. Originally, the first floor featured a large single room, heated with a wood stove. Wooden benches faced a raised platform at the southern end of the room; the floor slopes down towards the platform, allowing each participant a clear view of the proceedings. The walls are finished in wide, horizontal, pine wainscot topped with plaster over lath. Interior trim is simple flat stock, and the ceiling is acoustic tile. Two posts have been positioned under the girts to add support.

The stairway to the second floor is an unenclosed straight run starting from the back (northern) wall of the building and climbing towards the south. The northern half of the second floor is unfinished and the hewn and sawn rafter-purlin framing system is readily seen. To the south is a finished room variously used by the selectmen and tax collector. Two windows light the plaster and sawn lath walls and ceiling which is beveled at the corners by the roof. A built-in cupboard in the west wall features three shelves and sixteen pigeon holes covered by two twelve-light hinged windows with original cylinder glass. Below the shelves rests a small counter top and additional cupboard space. The built-in cupboard still contains a few old town record books.

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On the first floor, a small meeting room has been partitioned off the west side of the main room. In the northwest corner of this room is a brick vault used to store municipal documents. The front of the vault consists of a heavy metal door, covered with slate, which was decoratively painted with a landscape view. The wooden header above the door is also painted "1785 Parsonsfield 1897", suggesting the vault was installed in the later year. Moveable voting booths are set up in the middle of the main room, in front of the platform. Other than the addition of the booths, the first floor partitioned rooms, and a hot-air heating vent in the ceiling, the building has undergone no physical alterations since its construction.

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.)

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture
- Politics / Government
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Period of Significance

1833 -present

Significant Dates

1833

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Molton, William, Jr., builder

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:

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SIGNIFICANCE

The Town of Parsonsfield Maine is comprised of several small village settlements: Kezar Falls, Porter, East Parsonsfield, North Parsonsfield, and Parsonsfield, also known as Middle Road Village, which is located in the geographical center of the town. It is an overwhelmingly rural town, currently supporting 1550 people in its sixty-four square miles. In Middle Road Village there are several Federal era houses, a one-room school house, two nineteenth-century stores, the Victorian vernacular church, and the 1834 Greek Revival Town House next to the ancient burying ground. The Parsonsfield Town House is eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, as the location of the town's government for 150 years, and under Criterion C, as a fully expressed example of the Greek Revival Town House form.

The Old Town House was not the first civic structure erected in Parsonsfield. Between 1771, (when Thomas Parsons settled the land) and 1794, town meetings were conducted in the Parsons home, Job Colcord's tavern (see pending National Register nomination: Andrew Welch Homestead, January 2002), or other houses in the village center. After ten years of planning, a Meeting House was erected on the western side of Merrill Hill Road, for use by the town and the Congregational Society of Parsonsfield. However by 1825, the two uses of the building were no longer compatible under a single roof, and over the next two years the "town of Parsonsfield starts suit to recover the lot on which the Congregational Meeting House now stands." (16 November 1825, Town meeting). Perhaps both the location and the choice of the Greek revival style reinforced for the residents the separation between the town's civic and religious entities, and reflected the democratization of the general public.

In April of 1832 the process of selecting a location for the new town house began. As the town was sixty-four square miles in size, there was concern about minimizing the distance that any resident would have to travel to the governmental center.

"Voted that a committee of seven be raised, to be selected from different sections of the town, for the purpose of ascertaining as near as practicable where the center of the Town, North and south is, on the road leading from the North to the Middle Road, by the old Congregational Meeting House and also to report where would be the most suitable place for the erection of the Town house....." April 2, 1832.

"A report of the committee to determine the center of the Town. It was initially thought that the center of the Town was South of Mr. Bennett's house but questions were raised about the Gore. It was decided that including the Gore the center of Town is South of Mr. Bennett's house and excluding the Gore it is between Mr. Ricker's and the Congregational Meeting House." 10 September 1832.

However, when Mr. Ricker refused to sell his lot to the town, it was then "Voted that the town house be

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built on land of Cutting Moulton on the East side of the road leading from the Middle Road by the dwelling house of Pelatiah Ricker South to the burying yard and nearly opposite the Congressional (sic) Meeting House." (January 28, 1833).

The town purchased 6 1/3 x 6 1/3 rod square lot south of the cemetery and William Molton, Jr., a local carpenter, was chosen to building the structure. There is no discussion in the town records regarding the style of the house which was overseen by a three person committee. It was completed in September of 1833, and the walls were "painted venetian (sic) red, the doors green, and the trimmings white similar to the school house in this vicinity." (9 September 1833). The seats were not installed until some time after 1834, and no mention is found about the sloping floor, or the interior use of space.

Architecturally, the Old Town House is notable among its contemporaries for its distinct Greek Revival details. The Greek Revival was the preferred stylistic choice for many civic structures. From homes to churches in the 1820's to the 1860's, the adoption of the Greek forms symbolized the ideal of democratization over republicanism, the importance of Classical studies to the general school curriculum, and pride in developing a new, non-British, national style. (Bibber, p.11-12.)

"This high opinion of Greece might well have been strengthened by feelings of empathy in the 1820's, when the Greeks were engaged in a renewal of the struggle for independence from centuries-old Turkish rule. Only a few decades removed from their own war for independence, Americans had no qualms at all about perhaps having "exported revolution." More commonly, they delighted in the Greeks' having followed American example.....It may also have been important that, as Americans were very much aware of the uniqueness of their type of government in the modern world and as increasing emphasis was placed on democracy, a kinship with ancient Athens was felt. History showed that Athens had had the only earlier form of democracy. Was it not therefore logical to assume that buildings which were fitting for democratic Athenians might also be proper for democratic Americans. Jefferson had long insisted on the unsuitability of following English cultural leadership because of the differences in government. Perhaps Greek forms might provide an answer as to what was appropriate." (Bibber, p 12.)

Bibber's evaluation of the Greek Revival in Maine surmises that "when paint was applied on brick or on wood, the most-used color was white." (Bibber, p. 80). Interestingly, although now steadfast in its white exterior, both the Parsonsfield Town House and the small Greek Revival schoolhouse across the street featured red walls, green doors and white trim, colors that we now know more accurately reflect the original color combinations of the Ancient Greek Temples. Yet other town houses of the same period do not exhibit the same level of detailing as the Parsonsfield building. The Woolwich Town House (NR:78000199),1837, is somewhat similar in form, also containing two gable end doors with wide entablature, and symmetrical gable end windows. However, the overall completeness of the style is

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lacking: there is no frieze boards or lintels over the windows, the roof is flush with the gable end walls, and the rake board, cornice returns and corner boards are diminutive. While acknowledging the general Greek Revival style the Woolwich Town Hall does not claim it as boldly as the Parsonsfield building. Similar descriptions apply to the Wayne Town House, 1840 (NR:76000098), the (Former) Union Town House, 1840 (NR:01001419) or Fryeburg Town House, 1847 (NR: 92001295). In the geographic center of Parsonsfield, the Town House was not to be overlooked, nor its purpose understated.

Town meetings were held in the building until 1985 when they were moved to a new municipal building. However, a successful petition to reinstate the Old Town House as a polling station has enabled the structure to receive annual use in that capacity to the present.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

A History of the First Century of the town of Parsonsfield, Maine. ([Salem, MA: Higginson Book Co.], 1988.

Bibber, Joyce K. *A Home for Everyman.* (Lanham, Maryland: University Publishing Associates, Inc), 1989.

Clayton, W. W. *History of York County, Maine.* (Philadelphia: Everts & Peck), 1880.

Deeds. York County Registry of Deeds, York County Court House. Alfred, Maine.

Mallory, Steven C. "Building Condition Assessment: Old Town House, Parsonsfield, Maine". September 2001. Report on file at Maine Historic Preservation Commission, Augusta, Maine.

Town Records, Town of Parsonsfield, York County, State of Maine. Microfilm on file at Maine State Archives, Augusta, Maine.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is fully described on Town of Parsonsfield tax map number R-12, lot 14.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes all the land historically associated with the Old Town House in Parsonsfield.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1 of 4
Old Town House
November 2001
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
South facade; facing north.

Photograph 2 of 4
Old Town House
November 2001
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
North elevation; facing south.

Photograph 3 of 4
Old Town House
November 2001
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
First floor interior; facing northwest.

Photograph 4 of 4
Old Town House
November 2001
Christi A. Mitchell
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
Second floor interior; Selectman's room, facing southwest.