
(Rev. 8-86)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

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1. Name of Property

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historic name: Sarah Orne Jewett House

other name/site number: Jewett Mansion

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2. Location

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street & number: 5 Portland Street

not for publication: N/A

city/town: South Berwick

vicinity: N/A

state: ME county: York

code: 031

zip code: 03908

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3. Classification

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Ownership of Property: private

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 1

Name of related multiple property listing: _____

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6. Function or Use

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Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current : Recreation and Culture Sub: Museum

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

Colonial
Georgian

Other Description: _____

Materials: foundation: Granite/Rubblestone roof: Shingles
walls: Clapboard other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: B
NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK CRITERIA: #2
Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : N/A

Areas of Significance: Literature

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK THEME: XIX-Literature
B-Fiction
1-Novel

Period(s) of Significance: 1877-1901

Significant Dates : 1896

Significant Person(s): Sarah Orne Jewett

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder:

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

9. Major Bibliographical References

X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
x 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
X Other -- Specify Repository: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property: less than one acre

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A 19 353970 4788310 B
C D

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ___ See continuation sheet.

The property, designated lot #78 on Town Map 28) is bounded on the South (Portland Street) by a white picket fence which turns and continues along the West (Main Street) boundary to the driveway. Henceforth the West is bounded by a cement wall. Across the North or rear boundary of the property there is an arbor vitae hedge. The boundary turns West again at the Post Office paved parking lot, and North by the fire station lot. The line returns on the east and is bounded by a fence and trees. The separation between the Jewett House property and the Eastman (South Berwick Public Library) property, is marked by granite posts.

Boundary Justification: ___ See continuation sheet.

The boundary is that of lot #78, see town map tracing). Lot 78A was split off in 1984 when the Jewett Eastman House was sold to the town for use as a public library. The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities holds historic easements on the property as part of its stewardship program.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director, NCC

Organization: National Coordinating Committee Date - October 5, 1989
for the Promotion of History

Street & Number: 400 A Street, SE Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington State - DC ZIP - 20003

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

Sarah Orne Jewett's home is considered a fine example of the exceptional craftsmanship and distinguished Georgian architecture of the colonial maritime community that settled along the Piscataqua River in southern Maine.

Originally built for John Haggins in 1774, it is surmised that the modest exterior was finished prior to the Revolutionary War, and the interior, far more ornately wood-worked, was completed with the help of post-war profits.¹ The house has a steeply hipped roof with flared eaves, a trademark of builders in the Portsmouth, New Hampshire area, that slopes up to the ridge between the two chimneys that serve back to back fireplaces in the main rooms. A two story ell which projects from the right rear of the house, contains the laundry and kitchen. At the exterior entrance, a pedimented portico with two doric columns is centered on the facade. Three front dormer windows, in the Neoclassical style, complete the effect. They were added by Sarah and Mary Jewett in 1890.

A keystone arch with fluted pilasters supports the central hallway leading to the superbly carved staircase. It is recorded that the elaborate joinery of the front hall took two men one hundred days to complete.² Showcased is the distinctively carved newell post with an interior central spiral. On the landing, a recessed window seat with a large round-headed window above it, has deeply carved dado panelling.

There are four major rooms, downstairs and upstairs, off the main hallway, each containing elegant panelled wainscoting, and dentiled cornices. The furnishings in these rooms include the French flocked wallpaper, ornamental rugs, mahogany tables and chairs, representative of the Jewett sisters decorative style of the late 19th century. Sarah Orne Jewett's bedroom remains unchanged since the day she died in 1909. The house retains an extremely high degree of integrity with no changes in interior nor exterior since Jewett's occupancy.

¹ Armentrout, Sandra. "Sarah Orne Jewett House - Architectural Significance" (Unpublished - Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1989) p. 2

² Maine Catalogue - Historic American Buildings Survey, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, 1974, p. 23

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HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE:

Sarah Orne Jewett, who lived and wrote in this house for most of her life, brought the local color novel to its highest degree of artistic perfection in nineteenth century American literature. Within the context of the National Historic Landmarks Program thematic framework, the Sarah Orne Jewett House has national significance under theme: XIX. Literature, (B.) Fiction, (1.) Novel.

Willa Cather, among the first to proclaim Sarah Orne Jewett a writer of unique importance once attested: "If I were asked to name three American books which have the possibility of a long, long life, I would say at once, "The Scarlet Letter," "Huckleberry Finn," and "The Country of the Pointed Firs. I can think of no others that confront time and change so securely." ¹ While many critics of American literature have not placed her in such an elite group as Cather, her work is widely recognized and acclaimed. In recent years she has received considerable attention from scholars of women's literature who have explored the matriarchal and mythic qualities of Jewett's work. Sarah Way Sherman, who wrote in 1989 Sarah Orne Jewett, an American Persephone, refers to over a dozen scholars who have explored various facets of Jewett's works, from women's vision of transcendence, to witches, to women and nature.²

Sarah Orne Jewett, born in South Berwick, Maine in 1849, wrote over 20 novels and collections of short stories that remain quintessential in their description of the lives and landscapes of rural Maine in the late 19th century. Born to a country doctor, in an aristocratic shipping family, along the Piscataqua River, Jewett grew up revelling in the New England countryside, and taking careful note of its features and the characteristics of its inhabitants. As a child, Jewett's health was unstable, and her father often took her on rounds throughout the village to expose her to fresh air, and open countryside. Jewett was devoted to her father and, through him, learned about the local history and nature that she later incorporated into her stories. She commemorates him in one of her early novels, The Country Doctor. She was educated locally, and upon graduating from the Berwick Academy, ended her formal schooling.

Reading Harriet Beecher Stowe's The Pearl of Orr's Island as a teenager apparently inspired her to write about her own region with the same insight and accuracy.³ She made careful note of the distinctive characteristics of the New England countryside and its inhabitants, saving the details for her future work. Seeing the uncomfortable encounters between her local neighbors and the urban sightseers that began to populate the area in the late 19th century, she gained a personal purpose for her writing. "I determined to teach the world that country people were not the awkward, ignorant set those persons seemed to think. I wanted the world to know their grand, simple lives; and so far as I had a mission, when I

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first began to write, I think that was it." ⁴

Her first published writings were short stories under the pen name "Alice Eliot" and "Sarah O. Sweet." In a short time, her publications and her audience increased, and she wrote under her own name. As she gained popularity outside of Maine she also gained exposure to life and society in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and farther afield. She developed friendships with editors, including James Fields, Horace E. Scudder, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich, all who influenced and applauded her writing. Jewett came to know her literary contemporaries, developing friendships with Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry James, and Willa Cather. Cather, with whom she maintained a close connection throughout her life, claimed Jewett was a significant source of inspiration for her.

With her good friend Annie Fields, the widow of her former editor, James T. Fields, Jewett traveled extensively, throughout the eastern United States, to Europe, eastern Europe, and the West Indies. Although her travels took her to many exotic, more populous and well-known locales, and though she wrote a few lesser known pieces on locations outside of Maine, she never succumbed to the temptation to write about more urban experiences. As she described early in her career, "The real drama of life was to be found in a dull little country village. In the city only the glaring virtues and strident vices became apparent." ⁵

Josephine Donovan in her biography Sarah Orne Jewett notes that Jewett achieved her greatest renown for her book The Country of the Pointed Firs, published in 1896, earning praise and honor from critics, editors, and readers for decades to come, and a place of distinction in American literary heritage. ⁶ "By an artful balancing of intense and contradictory emotions, and by the unfailing clarity of her descriptive vision, Sarah Jewett achieved in The Country of Pointed Firs one of the unquestioned classics of American prose writing." ⁷ Despite her travels and her experiences in more sophisticated societies, she always returned to this house that was her grandfather's in Berwick that was the source of her inspiration and comfort. She described it as "the dear old house and home, it all seemed to put its arms around me." ⁸

Jewett's work attracted attention, not just for its subtle depictions of New England life, but for its more universal themes concerning community life in the nineteenth century. As one literary critic recently wrote of Jewett: "She writes to probe the distinctive character of the region until it reveals the universal, the point at which cultural and geographical autonomy gave way to general relevance, the point at which the private and idiosyncratic disclose a common inheritance." ⁹

Over the years, literary scholars have appraised Jewett's work and have found her themes both enduring and relevant. While she is recognized as one of the

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nineteenth century masters of the short story form, her work is also valued for the historical perspectives it contained. Jewett's subtle attention to detail offers modern society an accurate yet lyrical image of rural America on the verge of the industrial and technological revolution.¹⁰ In her first collection of short stories, Deephaven, she portrays the character of a small town steadily abandoned by the young people moving to the faster-paced cities and the opportunities in the west.

Although her work focused specifically on southern rural Maine, communities that appeared insular and the dialogue colloquial, the maritime villages of that era had far more exposure to the far reaches of the world than did many more cosmopolitan inland towns. Jewett often juxtaposed the mariners stories of exotic locales and the unusual merchandise they brought back from voyages against the quiet orderly traditions of the Maine villages. As the shipping communities declined with advent of rail and steam travel, Jewett mourned their passing. Rather, "...she resisted the unqualified acceptance of change. She abhorred the mechanization of life and argued for the importance of human values in the face of impersonal industrialization."¹¹ Deeply concerned with the preservation of small town values and customs, Jewett's work has been described as "one long elegy for lives rooted in values of order and clarity--lives which she has preserved for us in the timelessness of her fiction."¹²

Despite her conservative views on modern industrialization, critics have come to recognize that her perspective on the roles of women was both unique and progressive for her time. In her early novel The Country Doctor she addresses the daring concept of a woman doctor, including the prejudices and discrimination such a choice would elicit in nineteenth century America. Sarah Way Sherman stresses that while Jewett's works do not have easily discernible plots they are profound commentaries on the bonds between women -- mothers, daughters, cousins, and friends.¹³ The novel is considered somewhat autobiographical, possibly indicating some of the struggles Jewett herself faced as a professional writer.¹⁴ In The Country of the Pointed Firs, and in other pieces Jewett is concerned with women who are not simply passive shadows of the men. Instead, "...Jewett creates a world in which women's concerns---home, family ties, sense of community--- are the serious subjects of literature. In doing so, she gives us fully developed women characters, who are self-reliant, resourceful and in charge of their own lives."¹⁵

Even as she addressed these grander concepts in her writing, Sarah Orne Jewett specifically wanted to commemorate the area and the home in which she grew up. Towards the end of her life, she wrote "I have always meant to do what I could about keeping some of the old Berwick flowers in bloom, and some of the names and places alive in memory for with many changes in the old town they might soon be forgotten."¹⁶

From the publication in 1877 of her first novel to gain her widespread recognition to the accident in 1901 that reduced her productivity during the last eight years of her life, Sarah Orne Jewett contributed her perspective on rural American life to the field of American literature.

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Footnotes:

- 1 Cather, Willa, Preface to The Country of the Pointed Firs (New York, 1982) p.
- 2 Sherman, Sarah Way, Sarah Orne Jewett, an American Persephone, (Hanover: University of New Hampshire, 1989), p. 275.
- 3 Matthiessen, Francis Otto, Sarah Orne Jewett (Gloucester, MA, 1965) p. 32
- 4 Cary, Richard. Sarah Orne Jewett (New York, 1962) p. 23.
- 5 Ibid., p. 41.
- 6 Donovan, Josephine, Sarah Orne Jewett (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1981).
- 7 James, Edward T. ed. Notable American Women 1607-1950 Vol. II. (Cambridge, 1971) p. 276.
- 8 Fields, Annie. Ed. The Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett (Boston, 1911) p. 90.
- 9 Holstein, Michael E. "Art and Archetype: Jewett's Pointed Firs and the Dunnet Landing Stories" Nineteenth Century Literature (September 1987) p. 202
- 10 Nagel, Gwen L. and James. Sarah Orne Jewett: A Reference Guide (Boston, 1978) p. xiii.
- 11 Keyworth, C.L., Master Smart Woman (Unity, ME, 1988) p. 158.
- 12 Ibid., p. 162.
- 13 Sherman, Sarah Orne Jewett, p. ix.
- 14 Keyworth, Master Smart Woman, pp. 134-36.
- 15 Ibid., p. 172.
- 16 Matthiessen, Francis Otto, Sarah Orne Jewett (Gloucester, MA, 1965) p. 117

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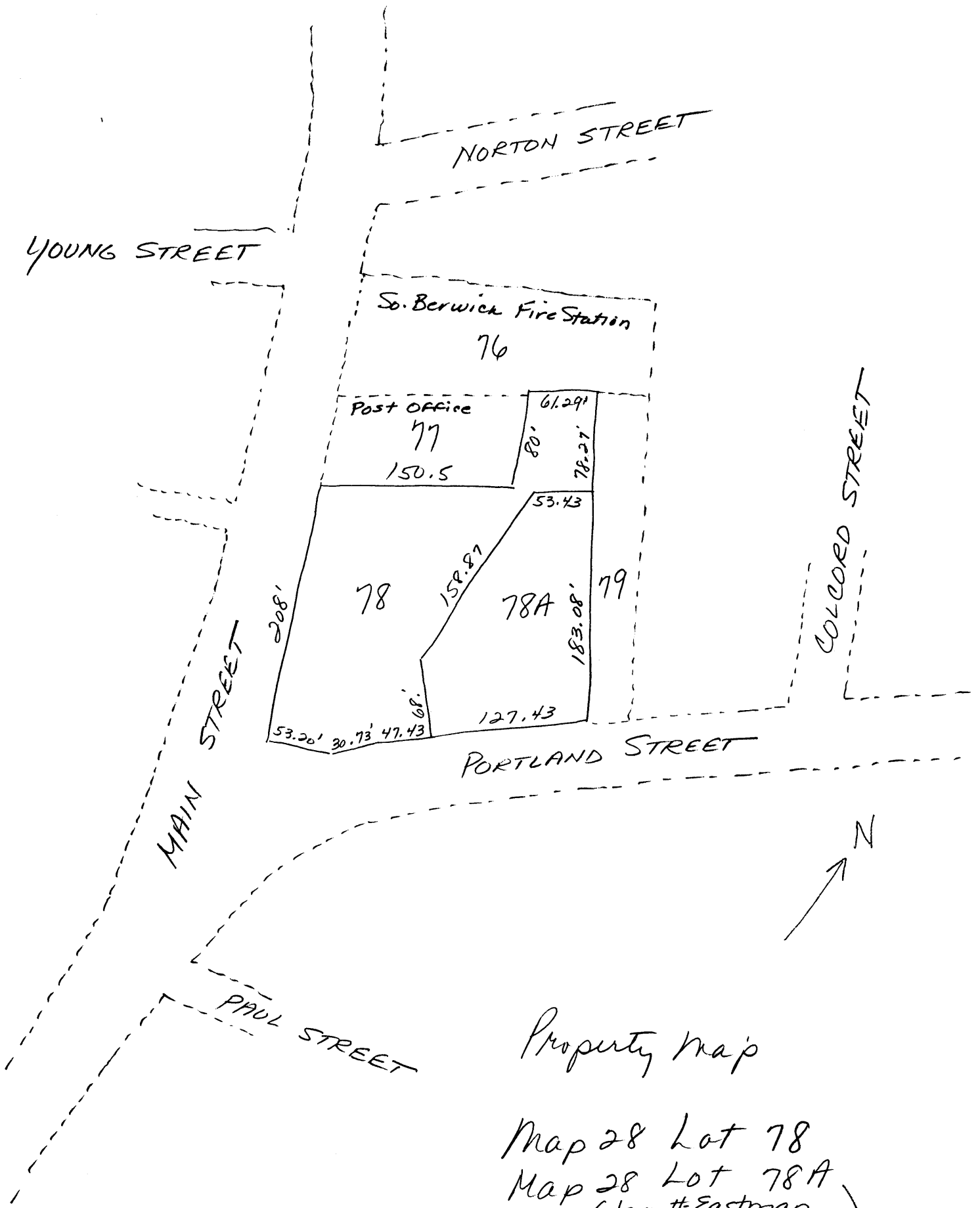
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- James, Edward T. ed. Notable American Women 1607-1950 Vol. II. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University. 1971.
- Jewett, Sarah Orne, Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories. New York, Norton, 1982.
- Keyworth, C.L., Master Smart Woman Unity, ME:North Country Press, 1988.
- Nagel, Gwen L. and James. Sarah Orne Jewett: A Reference Guide Boston, MA: G.K. Hall, 1978.
- Sherman, Sarah Way. Sarah Orne Jewett, an American Persephone Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1989.



Property map

Map 28 Lot 78
 Map 28 Lot 78A
 (Jewett Eastman
 Memorial Library)

9/21/89