

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAR 10 1988

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Cleaves, Benjamin, House

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number South High Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Bridgton,

N/A vicinity

state Maine code ME

county Cumberland

code 005

zip code 04009

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

James L. Feltz S.H.P.O.
Signature of certifying official
Maine Historic Preservation Commission

3/7/88
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. 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:)

Patrick Andrews

4/20/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granitewalls Wood/Weatherboard

roof Asphaltother Shingled Ell and Rear Wall

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Benjamin Cleaves House is a two-story five-bay frame dwelling connected to a large barn via a one-story ell. Sheathed in weatherboards and shingles and resting on a granite foundation, it retains most of its Federal period detailing. In addition, the house contains decorative wall murals attributed to Rufus Porter.

Like many Federal style houses in Maine, the Cleaves house has a symmetrical (east) facade consisting of a centrally-located entrance and flanking double-hung sash windows. The entryway is composed of a six-panel door framed by narrow sidelights and a louvered segmental fan. There are four nine-over-six windows on the first story and five on the second story. A narrow boxed cornice carries across the facade.

There are five openings in the north gable end. A pair of replacement turn-of-the-century two-over-two windows are located on the first story, there are two nine-over-six windows in the second story and a small nine pane window in the attic. A cellar bulkhead is positioned at the northeast corner of the foundation.

The south gable end contains a screened hip roofed porch that shelters three windows and a door. A portion of the wall surface behind this porch is flush sheathed and retains what appears to be a chair rail. These unusual exterior features may indicate the former existence of a wing, a feature which tradition maintains was here. One window survives in the second story and a third small opening is located in the attic.

At the rear, the Cleaves House has a shed roofed addition at the southwest corner, a pair of interior chimneys projecting through the roof of the front block, and a long ell extending westward from about the central part of the elevation. There are four asymmetrically placed windows and a door on the south wall of the ell. Two-thirds of this wall is covered in weatherboards and the remainder in wood shingles. The opposite side is sheathed entirely in shingles and features five openings. The west end of this elevation is also offset from the remainder of the kitchen ell.

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The barn is covered in weatherboards and wood shingles. Its gable front facade has two centrally located doors, one above the other, and two windows. There is an irregular pattern of windows on the remaining walls.

Inside, the house has a floor plan that is typical of the period. The front door opens into a narrow hall containing an open string stair. The stair rises abruptly to the second floor through two inter-story landings. Like the single-pile plan itself, the woodwork resembles that found in many Maine farmhouses of the period.

The most significant features of the house, however, are the wall murals that appear in two separate spaces. One adorning the hall walls consists of a rural landscape of rolling hills dotted with trees of varying heights including large foreground willows. Among this landscape is a white painted two-story house with a hipped roof and wing.

The larger and more complex of the two murals exists in the northeast parlor room. Here, the west wall above the mantel shelf features a shallow hill rising from the corner of the mantel. Seven buildings of various shapes, sizes and colors are situated on this hill. Trees are interspersed among the buildings while two large willows anchor the edges. The flanking south wall contains a wholly different scene with large willows and land in the foreground and islands in a pale blue sea behind. There are three vessels in the water: a three-masted ship, a canoe, and a single-masted sloop. The remaining walls continue the general landscape theme of large foreground trees and smaller trees framing distant hills.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture
Art

Period of Significance

c. 1828
c. 1830-35

Significant Dates

c. 1828
c. 1830-35

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Porter, Rufus - Attributed Artist

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

The Benjamin Cleaves House is a two-story Federal style farmhouse believed to have been built about 1828. Typical on the exterior of numerous Maine houses of the period, the Cleaves house is distinguished by its two remarkably well preserved interior mural paintings that are attributed to Rufus Porter./1 Although a considerable number of Porter style murals have been identified in Maine, and a few houses which contain them are listed in the National Register, the Cleaves house is thought to be somewhat unusual in that it contains two distinct murals both of which are intact./2 The house is being nominated under National Register criterion C for its artistic and architectural significance.

Rufus Porter (1792-1884) was born in West Boxford, Massachusetts, the son of a prosperous farmer. Unlike his father, however, Porter would lead a life that carried him throughout New England, the mid-Atlantic states, and overseas, and expose his numerous talents as an artist, inventor and author. His work as an itinerant portrait painter spanned the period 1815-1824. In 1825 he published an instructional book called Curious Arts, and for the next two decades devoted himself to landscape murals. His tremendous interest in scientific matters reached a milestone in 1845 when he founded Scientific American.

The wall murals in the Cleaves house are believed to have been painted in the period 1830-35. Stylistically, they differ from his earlier period in their use of bolder designs and richer colors. This is particularly evident in the overmantel village scene in which the buildings are vividly embellished with deep yellows, reds and whites. The accompanying landscapes and seascapes are equally vibrant.

It is tempting to imagine that the murals such as those in the Cleaves house depict local scenes and buildings. However, this apparently was not the case, it being generally acknowledged that they are representative of the New England landscape as a whole. This explains the presence of a coastal scene in a Bridgton house that is somewhat removed from the sea. Porter's own

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Shorey, Eula M., ed. Bridgton, Maine 1768-1968. Bridgton: Bridgton Historical Society, 1968.

Lipman, Jean. Rufus Porter: Yankee Pioneer. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Incorporated, 1968.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of property 2 acres

UTM References

A

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

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property of two acres occupies the Town of Bridgton, Tax Map 30, Lot 2.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary of the Benjamin Cleaves House embraces the remaining property associated with it that was also historically associated with the farm.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kirk F. Mohney, Architectural Historian
organization Maine Historic Preservation Commission date January, 1988
street & number 55 Capitol Street, Station #65 telephone 207/289-2132
city or town Augusta, state Maine zip code 04333

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guidelines for laying out the design as published in Curious Arts puts any further doubt to rest:

. . . .As a general rule, a water scene,—a view of the ocean or a lake,—should occupy some part of the walls. . . . Other parts, especially over a fireplace, will require more elevated scenes, high swells of land, with villages or prominent and elegant buildings. On the more obscure sections of the walls, especially such as are expected to be obscured by furniture, high mountains with cascades or farm-hills may be represented. Small spaces between the windows and the corners, may be generally occupied by trees and shrubbery rising from the foreground, and without much regard to the distance./3

Among the labor saving devices that Porter utilized in his murals were stencils for vessels and buildings. As he stated in Curious Arts:

In painting the pictures of steamboats, ships, and other vessels, it is convenient to have a variety of outline drawings of vessels of various kinds, sizes and positions, on paper; the back sides of these papers are to be brushed over with dry venetian red; then by placing one of the papers against the wall, and tracing the outlines with a pointed piece of iron, bone, or wood, a copy thereof is transferred to the wall ready for coloring . . . the painting of houses, arbors, villages, &c., is greatly facilitated by means of stencils . . . for this purpose several stencils must be made to match each other; for example, one piece may have the form of the front of a dwelling house . . . another the form of the end of the same house . . . a third cut to represent the roof; and a fourth may be perforated for the windows./4

It is this method which enables our understanding the remarkable similarity between a number of the buildings that appear over the mantel in the Cleaves house with those, for example, in the scene depicted at the Wagner house in Lyme, New Hampshire, or those in the Daniel Carr house in North Haverill, New Hampshire./5

The Cleaves house was built for Benjamin Cleaves, a tinsmith by trade, whose locally prominent descendants include Henry Bradstreet Cleaves, Governor of Maine from 1892-96. The house apparently remained in the family only until the late 1830s after which it passed through a number of owners, the original

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farm dwindling in size until it assumed its present two acres.

Architecturally, the Cleaves house is an intact, representative example of a late Federal period Maine farmhouse. The symmetrical five-bay facade with its elliptical louvered fan is the most highly ornamented of the elevations, whereas the opposing rear side contains the modest one-story ell that extends to a barn. Bridgton itself retains only a small number of similarly intact late Federal style houses, the majority of the remaining building stock dating to the mid and late nineteenth century.

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Endnotes

- /1. The attribution to Porter is stated in the checklist of known murals that appears in Jean Lipman's excellent study entitled Rufus Porter: Yankee Pioneer (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Incorporated, 1968), pp. 172-182, hereinafter cited as Lipman, Rufus Porter.
- /2. This fact was confirmed in telephone conversations between the author and Curator Jane Radcliffe of the Maine State Museum, who has recorded many of the murals in Maine.
- /3. Lipman, Rufus Porter, p. 97.
- /4. Lipman, Rufus Porter, p. 97.
- /5. The murals in both the Wagner and Carr houses are illustrated in Lipman, Rufus Porter, p. 91 and p. 120 respectively.