

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

ROCKINGHAM MEETING HOUSE

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: ROCKINGHAM MEETING HOUSE

Other Name/Site Number: Old North Meeting House

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Meeting House Road

Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Rockingham

Vicinity: N/A

State: VT County: Windham Code: 025

Zip Code: 05101

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: ___
Public-Local: X
Public-State: ___
Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X
District: ___
Site: ___
Structure: ___
Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2
1
1

Noncontributing

___ buildings
___ sites
___ structures
___ objects
___ Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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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.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

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
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: GOVERNMENT
RELIGION
FUNERARY

Sub: City Hall
Religious facility
Cemetery

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: Museum
FUNERARY Cemetery

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Georgian

Materials:

Foundation: Stone
Walls: Weatherboard
Roof: Shingle
Other:

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Rockingham Meeting House, begun in 1787 or 1788 and finished in 1799-1801, sits with its related burial ground in a nearly rectangular four acre lot atop a small, steep hill in the village of Rockingham which overlooks the Williams River valley north and west. The Meeting House is an ample two-story, forty-four feet by fifty-six feet by forty-four feet tall, wood-frame New England meeting house typical of the eighteenth century, one of the last built remaining. It is of massive post-and-beam construction, five by three structural bays, with four kingpost trusses uniting the walls and supporting a gable roof covered in cedar shingles. Clapboarded and resting on low, flat foundation stones, it has its double-door formal entry centered on the broad, twenty-four-foot tall eaves-side wall facing south. The symmetrical twelve feet by twelve feet by twenty-four feet tall, gabled stair-towers are centered beneath each gable end, each with entries also centered on south-facing nineteen-foot walls. Styled in a late Georgian mode, it shows its richest embellishment in fluted pilasters and a pediment framing the formal entry, though this is balanced by the similarly ornamented but smaller, identical stair-tower entry surrounds. The whole is united by a full entablature at the eaves of the same Order as the entry pediment and lesser entablatures capping the first floor windows. On this front wall, there are thirteen double-hung sash, three feet by six feet high with twenty over twenty lights each, which are arranged one on the second floor over the entry and three on each floor both left and right of center in a subtle, symmetrical pattern that always leads the eye to the formal entry. Inside, this entry opens to a center aisle leading to a raised pulpit with the original sounding board above. Box pews fill the first floor and the perimeter of the second floor gallery, which descends from three walls and faces the pulpit. Today remaining largely unchanged from its completion in 1801, apart from a light-handed restoration in 1906, the Rockingham Meeting House is without a doubt the most intact eighteenth century public building remaining in Vermont.

The historic setting and context of the Meeting House are also very much intact. The village of Rockingham, composed of a half dozen early homes and Grange Hall, is designated a local historic district, and the 1960s Vermont Route 103 bypass along the river carries most traffic well north of the village and the Meeting House. The present meeting house lot covers most of the hill with the burial ground surrounding the Meeting house on the north and west sides while Meeting House Road forms the south boundary following the base of the hill. From the east, a drive begins from the road, steeply ascends up the hill past a stone wall to the west, and enters the southeast corner of the lot on the open hilltop, then passes the front of the Meeting House before descending almost as steeply by the south end of the burial ground to the southwest corner and again to the road.

Seen from the south, the Meeting House appears on the hilltop above and slightly east of the storage vault, and scattered mature maples line portions of the drive, particularly at the south cemetery wall. This is the historic viewpoint for appreciating the vernacular site design and primary formal facade (facing south-south-east), which is fifty-six feet in length, plus the two, smaller, set-back twelve foot stair towers at each end. The focus of the facade is the formal entry, consisting of an eight-panel, double door on a step recessed within a simple architrave. Surrounding this are fluted pilasters applied on wide fascia boards that support a heavily-molded entablature with bulbous cushion frieze and a pediment with modillions. Most remarkable however is that the applied pilasters are doubled en-ressault (a projection or roll molding) from the pilaster base (which once also carried this treatment) through the modillioned cornice of the

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pediment base, so there the ornate entablature is in effect tripled. The entablature running the length of the roof eave (with returns on the gables ends) replicates the entry entablature with its modillions, while the entablatures over the first floor sash are similar but without the deep cornice soffit and modillions.

If one imagines a center line defined by the vertical center opening of the formal double door, the complete facade left and right is rigidly bilaterally symmetrical. Windows on the first floor are aligned with those on the second (which about the cornice) in a spacing between windows that starting from the second floor center window is approximately three feet, two feet, four feet, and seven feet to the simple fascia cornerboards. This arrangement subtly expresses on the facade the five-bay structure of the post-and-beam frame which leads to the pairing of the inner windows (two feet apart) within one structural bay.

The symmetry of the main facade extends to the identical end stair-towers or "porches" as they were described by contemporaries. The entries on each side are detailed in the same form and order as the formal entry, except they are slightly smaller, enclosing a single eight-panel door, and have only applied pilasters doubling the entablature en-ressault and no modillions on the pediment. Centered above each entry is one fifteen over twenty light sash abutting the eaves, which on the towers have a minimal entablature in contrast to the ornately molded entablature of the main mass. The towers each have one other fifteen over twenty window capped by the cornice found in the formal facade entablatures and centered on the first floor on their gable ends (east and west) and no windows on their north sides. The gable ends of the Meeting House have two twenty over twenty windows on each floor on each side of the towers and one above the tower gable lighting the attic beneath the main gable, all topped with the cornice which is also the standard window cap on the side and rear elevations.

The north side of the main mass is identical to the formal south face except in its central bay, where an oversized, fixed window of twenty-four over twenty-four lights under eighteen lights in a round arch radiating pattern is centered between floors (in place of the entry and window above found on the south face). This window, which lights the raised pulpit inside, is capped by flat spandrel boards supporting the standard window entablature used throughout.

The five-by-three bay post and beam structure of the main block, which greatly shapes the exterior fenestration and design, is most evident on the interior where the six massive posts of both the south and north wall are exposed, their gracefully tapered "gun-stock" or flair evident as they rise to meet their girt and plate hidden behind a shallow cove of the plastered ceiling. These principal posts are spaced on center approximately thirteen feet, ten feet, nine feet, ten feet, thirteen feet on each wall, with no tie beam between posts in the center bay of the north wall to allow for placement of the arched pulpit window. On the east and west walls, two evenly spaced, interior squared posts within the gable bents divide these walls into three bays each, with the first and second floor gable end windows in the outer bays and the stair towers filling and tied to the inner bays. Both the main flared and square posts are boxed in fascia with simple corner beads. In the lighted attic (accessed through an opening in the ceiling in the northwest corner) are four massive kingpost trusses that support the gable ridgepole and its rafters and are tied into the girts of the four inner posts on north and south walls. Three sets of cross bracing also tie the four king posts together laterally.

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Within the volume defined by this massive frame is set a first floor of box pews and a three-sided gallery above, all focused on a raised pulpit and arched window in the center of the north wall. The first-floor plan consists of a five-foot wide central aisle from the formal entry to the raised pulpit. The central aisle bisects a rectangle formed by three-foot wide aisles that service boxes around the perimeter and connect to four-foot wide aisles leading through a doorway into both side towers. Around the perimeter there are twenty-four slightly raised box pews, six by six feet square, except in the corners where they are six by eight feet and along the north wall where they are five by six feet to create more room in the center for the raised pulpit and its stair. In the center of the rectangle are twelve, six by eight foot box pews, three reached on each side of the main aisle and three reached by each of the side aisles parallel to the main aisle, as well as three long benches in front of the pulpit on each side of the center aisle which run to the parallel side aisles. "These pews were the 'official' pews occupied by the tything-men and deacons in the early years of the existence of the church."¹ Walls are white plaster and the finishwork is generally of aged white pine except the pews which have very worn grey paint on their aisle rails. The gallery front and posts and the trim of wall posts have fading grey-green paint, and the window surround around the pulpit window and the sounding board are painted an olive pastel.

All box pews have flat seating boards supported on three sides facing the pew entry door with seat backs and aisle walls surmounted by an open rail filled with delicate six inch high spindles spaced approximately six inches on center. All first floor boxes have centered pew doors nineteen inches wide each on two offset hinges and with one raised face panel and two spindles in their open rails, except for the corner pews where doors enter a corner of the pew and are eighteen inches wide. The pew walls along all aisles are defined by raised panels, three regular panels between pew doors and a larger one at corners, except on the north and south walls of the central bank of pews where ten regular panels run across the sides of the two pews. The two north center pew walls form the seat-back of the rear-most of the three benches that face the pulpit on each side of the center aisle; the other benches have plain backs also topped by open rails filled with spindles although they are six inches lower in height than the pew walls. Their top rails are supported by the bench end walls which are solid up to the seat-board and then curve in a semi-circle to the bench-back and proceed vertically to support the rail. Both sets of benches are fronted by a simple open rail between them and the front aisle.

The pulpit is seven feet wide centered at the end of the main aisle and its bold top rail entablature is nearly nine feet above the floor. It is accessed by a stair to its left (west) side, recessed one step from the aisle before ascending six steps to a platform and then turning two steps into the pulpit. Simple rails with square balusters and square, capped newel posts line both sides of the six steps and the west side of the platform. In front of and beneath the pulpit, is a shallow box pew, ornamented like the others, with a seat projecting from the base of the pulpit and its door next to the stair. Above the seat the face of the pulpit is divided into roughly three bays, two by three by two feet wide, with the upper portion of the wider center bay a polygonal, three-sided, paneled projection on an ogee base where the speaker stands centered in front of the round-arched window on the north wall. Raised panels decorate the sides and beneath the projecting speaker's bay, as well as each side bay, which have an upper and a lower panel. (Note: all of the pulpit as described in this paragraph is a conjectural recreation made during the 1906 restoration of the meeting house.)

¹ Lyman S. Hayes, *History of the Town of Rockingham*, (Bellows Falls: published by the Town, 1907), 148.

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Behind and above the pulpit, the arched window and sounding board exhibit the most elaborate original detailing, appropriate to the focal point of the interior design. The window is centered within a flat rectilinear surround capped by a full entablature with denticulated cornice and is flanked by twin applied Doric column pilasters (most similar to those on the exterior stair tower door surrounds) which also carry through as a decorative cap en-ressault as a projection in the entablature. An applied console keystone above the arch supports a similar decorative projection of the entablature. Covering the top of the entablature cornice and projecting out almost at a right angle to cover the speakers bay of the pulpit is the sounding board, which projects from the wall in a rectilinear fashion before its front half becomes polygonal (half a hexagon), no doubt echoing the design of the original pulpit once below. It is trimmed with another full entablature, with en-ressault capital projections at its corners and centered between corners, which is surmounted by a set-back wide fascia band with cornice topped by a low ogee cap. The underside, directly above the pulpit, has a large button pendant on a raised, flat circle with seven arms radiating out to the sounding board soffit.

The three-sided, rectilinear second-floor gallery, oriented to the pulpit, projects thirteen feet from the east, south, and west walls, its inner edge resting upon six posts, one each at the two interior corners of the gallery, two between these corners, and one each equidistant between each corner and the north wall, all in placement aligned with the "gun-stocked" posts of the principal frame. The nine-foot posts interrupt the central bank of box pews and the rearmost of the front benches and are detailed as square, tapered columns on pedestals. They support the over seven-foot front wall of the gallery, which is detailed as an oversized entablature with a raised paneled frieze and coved-modillion cornice. As elsewhere, the columns carry through the entablature applied en-ressault, each with a vertical raised panel within. Between these projections in the entablature the regular raised frieze panels are quite large, about four feet long, with only two between each post on the south wall and three between each post on the east and west walls. Behind the entablature wall the plastered ceiling below the gallery gradually angles up three feet, flattens, and then curves downward to meet the exterior walls, forming a complex coved ceiling around the perimeter of the first floor.

On all sides the gallery consists of five broad steps and then a platform that carries around the perimeter raised pews (four by five feet on the aisle but six by five feet in the two corners), which are detailed in the same manner as on the first floor and are interrupted only by three foot aisles which lead through doorways into the second floor of both stair towers. On each of the three center steps runs a board bench and back that turns the two corners and has end pieces curved from seat to back were also interrupted by the aisles to the stair towers. The bench-side of the front wall of the gallery is also trimmed as an entablature, here without panels.

The gallery doorways lead four steps down to a platform that fills each stair tower, except where interrupted on the interior north side by two steps to a turning landing then down seven steps to a turning landing and down seven more steps facing south, where to the left is the centered exterior stair tower doorway. Vertical wide boards line the exterior walls and rail walls of the stairs, which have a four-slope pointed square post at each interior turn.

All material throughout the Meeting House appears to be original except for the work done in

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redwood (to match the unfinished, patina of the existing original woodwork) in a restoration of 1906 and a c.1981 window replacement on the front and front-sides. In 1906, based on only two remaining rail spindles, new spindles were added to all pew and bench rails, and the front two benches on either side of the first floor aisle and the pulpit and its stairs and pew were reconstructed on conjectures of what might originally have been there before removal by the Town about 1840. The height and aisle-meets of the benches do not seem to match the rest of the interior, and the pulpit, perhaps appropriately, seems much simpler than its window surround and sounding board. The shape of the speaker's projection also seems quite mismatched to the sounding board. The plaster walls have been patched some, siding and the bases of entry-pilasters replaced. About 1981, the first floor window sash in the south façade were replaced in kind. In the 1990s, deteriorated wood foundation sills were replaced, the timber roof system was reinforced, the slate roof was replaced with wood shingles, and the north wall window sash was restored and the exterior painted. Currently the window sash in the other three walls are being restored and their exteriors will be painted. In late 1999 the exterior of the building began restoration according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation. This includes reglazing and painting all windows.

Predating construction of the meeting house, the burial ground (a contributing site) contains more than one thousand head stones, more than fourteen hundred burials and many more unmarked graves, dating from 1776 through the present. The cemetery is defined by a white picket fence hung on granite posts on its two interior sides facing the Meeting House, and stone walls in a tree line along its east and west boundaries and up the west entry drive. More than half of the headstones date from the period when the site was actively used for regular church services (1774-1839) and perhaps another fifth date from years while it was still used for town meetings (until 1869). Most all of these headstones are directly north of the meeting house aligned in north-south rows, generally facing west. The west end and "L" of the burial ground contain most of the late Victorian and more recent stones in less regular rows, many facing east. Many of the earliest, shouldered slate stones are notable for their vernacular carving, with winged-head, sunburst, urn and willow, tree-of-life, Masonic, and other motifs. There are funeral poems and paens and quite a number of dual husband and wife stones, many with two or five or ten children who died before reaching adolescence.

On top of the hill east of the Meeting House, between the drive and the south boundary of the cemetery, there is a small, gabled, clapboarded nineteenth-century hearse house (a contributing building), with plain double-doors oriented west and an attached tool shed on the cemetery side.

A burial vault (a contributing structure) is set into the hillside below and to the south of the meeting house. Employed for body storage, particularly in winter, the arch-shaped stone vault has large, plain double-iron doors. While its date of construction is unknown, the date certainly falls well within the period of significance.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Rockingham Meeting House, built 1787 or 1788-1801, is nationally significant as a rare eighteenth century New England meeting house of the "second period" type, virtually unaltered on the exterior or interior. With its associated burial ground, and standing prominently on a rural hill within a locally-designated historic district, the Rockingham Meeting House retains to a high degree its integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. Within the evolution and development of the New England meeting house, the Rockingham Meeting House occupies a unique place as a late "second period" eaves-entrance meeting house, whose barn-like massing and austere appearance evoke Medieval and Puritan forms, and yet which is styled in the Georgian manner to a degree apparently unmatched among surviving New England meeting houses of its type and period. From the formal symmetry of its exterior and its extraordinarily detailed entrances, to the subordinated but consistent detailing of its interior, it is a highly-styled example of the Georgian Classical and the only non-domestic building so highly styled in Vermont. The Rockingham Meeting House is significant under Criteria 4 as it is the most intact eighteenth century public building remaining in Vermont. It is also a distinctive survivor from the period of settlement by European immigrants when structures built to some degree at public expense were employed for both religious and civic purposes.

The Meeting House served as a church until 1839, and as the site for town meetings until 1869. While it was unused for the next several decades, the building suffered interior vandalism and theft of some historic fabric. In 1906 the town restored the meeting house in a light-handed manner. The restoration represents one of the earliest historic preservation efforts in Vermont, and followed relatively soon upon other early famous restorations in New England such as the Whipple House. A well-known Vermont landmark, the Rockingham Meeting House is open seasonally as a public museum and tourist attraction, and is the setting for occasional weddings and special events; among the special events is an annual "Pilgrimage" in August, which was begun in 1907 to celebrate the restoration conducted the previous year

The establishment of towns in southeastern Vermont was complicated by the granting of charters by competing colonial governors in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Albany, New York, and Boston, Massachusetts. In 1735, present-day Rockingham was chartered by Massachusetts as "Number Two." In 1740, the northern boundary of Massachusetts was redrawn to the south, locating the town in the province of New Hampshire. On December 30, 1752, the town was chartered again, this time by Benning Wentworth, Governor of New Hampshire. At the first proprietors' meeting, held March 8, 1753, a committee was established to lay out six acres of land for a meeting house.² Permanent settlement of Rockingham by European immigrants did not take hold until the after the close of the French and Indians Wars in 1763. No more action was taken on the matter of a meeting house until at a meeting held June 20, 1771, a committee of three men was named to choose a location for the meeting house. At a meeting held April 23, 1772, the town rejected the committee's choice of a location and voted that "the Meeting-house be Set on the hill West of David Pulsiphers house about thirty or forty rods." This was the land upon which the first meeting house was built, as well as the present one. At a meeting held August 25, 1773, it was voted to "Build a small house thirty-five feet Long and twenty-five feet Wide, for a

² Proprietors' Records, Town of Rockingham.

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meeting-house until the town be able to Build a Larger." Town meeting was held for the first time in the meeting house on December 12, 1774, in a building completed earlier that Fall. It was voted then "that there be a Row of Wall Pews Round the meeting-house and eight pews in the middle and three seats each side the Alley next the pulpit."³ This is essentially the plan also followed for the first floor of the present meeting house. The land on which the building was constructed was purchased from David Pulsipher, although the sale was not recorded until August 26, 1782, after the death of Pulsipher. While the exact location of the building is not recorded, it is believed that this first small meeting house was located just east of where the present meeting house stands. The first meeting house stood until about 1793, when a committee was formed to sell it.⁴

Three years after the end of the War of Independence, the town decided to build a larger meeting house, and petitioned the General Assembly to grant a land tax in order to raise money for this purpose.⁵ The petition apparently was granted, for on April 10, 1787, the town meeting approved the following:

2 ly Voted that the Committee appointed by the Legislature of the state of Vermont to build a town house in Rockingham are Directed to sell pews in sd House to the highest bidder for to raise money to be Laid out for the purpose of finishing sd House

3 ly Voted that the Committee Build the town House Just as Large as Charlestown Meeting House as to the square of it

4 ly Voted to Build two porches one at each end.

5 ly Voted to have the plan of the inside of sd House agreeable to the inside of the Meeting House in Charlestown."

At an adjourned town meeting held two weeks later, on April 24, 1787, it was voted to increase the size of the meeting house to "forty-four feet wide and fifty-six feet long," which are the dimensions of the present building.⁶

The meeting house in Charlestown, N.H., said to be a model for the Rockingham Meeting House, was constructed over a period from 1763-1798, to be "forty-eight feet long, thirty-eight wide, and twenty-five between posts."⁷ According to diagrams drawn when its pews were sold, in 1768 and 1774, the interior of the Charlestown meeting house first floor substantially resembled the later Rockingham Meeting House in plan, having box pews around the perimeter, two side aisles, and a main aisle flanked by box pews with three benches on each side in the front. (There are eight fewer pews in the Charlestown Meeting House due to its smaller size.) The plan of the gallery shows box pews around the perimeter on three sides, but no benches in the gallery as there are in

³ Town of Rockingham Records, Volume I.

⁴ Hayes, *History of Rockingham*, 141-142.

⁵ Lyman S. Hayes, *The Old Meeting House and First Church in Rockingham, Vermont*, (Bellows Falls: The P.H. Gobie Press, 1907), 18-19.

⁶ *Town of Rockingham Records*, Volume I.

⁷ Rev. Henry H. Saunderson, *History of Charlestown, N.H., The Old No. 4*, (Claremont, N.H.: Claremont Manufacturing Company, 1876), 221.

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the Rockingham Meeting House.⁸ The Charlestown Meeting House was torn down in 1819.

The date upon which the Meeting House timber frame was raised is generally accepted to be June 9, 1787, about two months after the town vote. According to Lyman S. Hayes, town historian, there is also evidence that it may have been raised one year later, on June 9, 1788.⁹ Whatever the date, it is agreed that the erection of the building was carried out under the direction of General John Fuller, a prominent resident of Rockingham who lived about a mile north of Rockingham village. Records do not include the names of any other individuals responsible for erecting or completing the Meeting House. The meeting house apparently was first used for town meeting in March, 1792; at that time, it is probable that the interior was not finished, the pews consisted of rough boards set on short blocks of logs, the windows were not glazed, and the clapboards were not applied. At that meeting, it was decided that the building should be used "for public worship and town meetings," and that Congregationalists and Baptists – but not Unitarians – were given the right to hold services. In 1799, the selectmen were petitioned to call a special meeting to "agree upon some mode of finishing the Meeting House." The building probably was completed by 1801.¹⁰ In 1807, a meeting house was built in the nearby village of Saxtons River; it became known as "Old South Meeting-house," while the present Rockingham Meeting House was known as "Old North Meeting-house."

Over time, congregations which worshipped in the Rockingham Meeting House left to construct their own churches; in 1836, another Congregational Church was constructed in the nearby village of Saxtons River. In 1838, the church, which had been established in 1773 and was using the meeting house, dismissed its pastor, essentially ending the church organization, and marking the end of the regular use of the meeting house for church purposes.¹¹ The Meeting House was used for town meetings until 1869, when they were moved to the village of Bellows Falls.¹² By that time, Bellows Falls had grown into the area's largest industrial and population center.

The Meeting House underwent minor alterations in the nineteenth century. Small chimneys were installed at each end of the building for "box stoves." About 1850, the pulpit was removed and a low platform constructed in its place, and the front benches were removed.¹³ Apparently, at least one bench remained on each side, depicted in a photograph in an article published in 1903, as having paneled backs which also formed the front wall of the front box pews.¹⁴ For several decades after 1869, while the exterior was kept in good repair by the town, the interior was subjected to alterations by vandals and souvenir-seekers, who removed turned wood spindles and hand-forged pew door hinges¹⁵ and "even the nails that held the pews together – likewise hand-

⁸ *First Book of Town Records*, Charlestown, N.H., 111, 159.

⁹ Writing in 1915, Hayes concludes, "since this record is not indisputable, and the date 1787 has been commonly accepted for over thirty years, it will probably be best to let it so stand, unless incontrovertible evidence to the contrary should be brought forward."

¹⁰ Hayes, *The Old Meeting House*, 19-22.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 29, 38.

¹² *Ibid.*, 51.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52.

¹⁴ H.W. Desmond, "A Forgotten Colonial Church," *Architectural Record*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1903), 104.

¹⁵ Hayes, *History of Rockingham*, 148.

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wrought or whittled from wood."¹⁶

On May 15, 1906, at a special town meeting, it was voted to appropriate five hundred dollars to repair the Meeting House and to restore it to its original condition as far as possible. An additional seven hundred dollars was raised from private donations. Mrs. Horace W. Thompson of Bellows Falls was instrumental in starting this movement and obtaining funds. Mrs. Thompson was a great-granddaughter of one of the original members of the First Church after its reorganization in 1818. Restoration of the meeting house, supervised by Myron H. Ray, first selectman, included:

overhauling the underpinning, putting on a new slate roof, and repainting the outside with another coat of fresh, white paint; and the complete restoration of the interior to its original condition as shown by record and family legend. In accomplishing the latter, the stoves were removed and the long benches replaced; sixty pew doors replaced, using a replica of the old hand-wrought hinges; over fourteen hundred spindles put back into the rails separating the pews (only two old spindles were found in place, while 1,400 had been removed); the pulpit rebuilt at its old height and in as near its original form as could be determined; and the walls redressed in their original whiteness. In all interior woodwork, California redwood in its natural state was used, as most closely duplicating the weathered pine already there.¹⁷

Despite these alterations, the Rockingham Meeting House retains the majority of its features that illustrate its style in terms of the massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials, and ornamentation. The only important element missing is the original pulpit, which was removed about 1850; the current pulpit, constructed in 1906, is a simple interpretation of extent pulpits at the time of the 1906 restoration.

The first restoration of the Meeting House took place relatively early in the revival of interest in American history and among historic preservation efforts in New England, and the building and its site have continued to receive acknowledgement of their architectural and historic merits. Restoration was completed in the fall of 1906, but a re-dedication was delayed until the following summer to serve as an Old Home Day event. The meeting house was rededicated on August 17, 1907 at a gathering of twelve hundred people. The meeting passed a resolution to conduct an annual or biennial gathering, which resulted in the creation of what has become known as the Annual Pilgrimage, held in August. In a somewhat related movement, a local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the William French Chapter, was organized November 13, 1907. Then on May 1, 1911, the Rockingham Meeting House Association was formed; since that time, the non-profit organization has raised funds for, and public awareness of, the meeting house, and has advocated for its maintenance and preservation. Most notable among its early officers, and instrumental in the restoration of the meeting house, was the Association's first president, Prof. Franklin W. Hooper, of Walpole, N.H., and Brooklyn, N.Y., where he was director of the Brooklyn Institute of Arts and Sciences. Hooper was a great-great-grandson of David Pulsipher, an original member of the first church and one of four men

¹⁶ Hayes, *The Old Meeting House*, 52.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

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who donated land for the meeting house.¹⁸

The restoration of the Rockingham Meeting House followed relatively closely upon the 1898 restoration of the Whipple House, Ipswich, and may have been influenced by it. "Word of the Whipple house restoration spread among New England antiquaries, for here was a building saved primarily for its architectural value."¹⁹ Restoration of the Rockingham Meeting House preceded by several years the establishment of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in 1910. The Rockingham Meeting House was the subject of a 1927 monograph in the White Pine Series and it was recorded in the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1937, with sixteen drawings, eight photographs, and three data pages.

The Rockingham Meeting House retains its characteristics of form, proportion, structure, plan, and materials, and is exceptionally valuable for the study of its period and style. Of the many meeting houses constructed in New England in the eighteenth century, the Rockingham Meeting House built in 1787 is distinctive as it is styled as a second period meeting house in an austere manner that is unmatched among surviving New England meeting houses of its type and period. In the evolution and development of the New England meeting house, architectural historians define four "periods" which followed the earliest, temporary structures of no definite architectural style. "First period" meeting houses, which appeared in the seventeenth century, typically were wood framed and boarded structures with Georgian details. They were rectangular in plan, two or more stories high, with a gallery beneath a hipped roof and cupola. This type is best exemplified by the 1681 "Old Ship" Meeting house in Hingham, Massachusetts (a National Historic Landmark, 1960).

In the eighteenth century this type was followed by "second period" meeting houses, such as the Rockingham Meeting House, which typically were rectangular two-story structures having gabled roofs and double-sash windows. In some "second period" meeting houses, the entrance was contained within a relatively plain "porch" or bell tower or steeple placed at the center of an eaves side or at one gable end, while in others, like the Rockingham Meeting House, the main entrance was centered on an eaves side opposite the pulpit, and other entrances were located in porches on the gable ends. While there is no record of how many such meeting houses were constructed throughout New England, a 1963 inventory of early churches and meeting houses in the region found at least ninety examples with extreme integrity. These "second period" surviving structures had required few alterations to restore them to their original conditions.²⁰ Typical alterations involved the creation of a new entrance in a new tower or steeple on one gable end, and the moving of the pulpit from an eaves side opposite an eaves entrance to a gable end opposite a new gable entrance, and the removal of original box pews. Such were the alterations to the 1795 West Wardsboro Meeting house in Wardsboro, Vermont, moved and altered in 1834. Another notable example is the Old Meeting House (1775-1799) in Jaffrey, New Hampshire, which originally resembled the Rockingham Meeting House in size, massing, fenestration, stylistic details, and in having enclosed porches on each end. In 1823, however, the westerly

¹⁸ Ibid., 57-60.

¹⁹ Charles B. Hosmer, Jr., *Presence of the Past: A History of the Preservation Movement in the United States Before Williamsburg*, (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 113, 239.

²⁰ Edmund W. Sinnott, *Meeting house & Church in Early New England*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1963).

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porch of the Jaffrey meeting house was replaced by a tower and steeple.²¹ Other "second period" meeting houses in New England which have been designated as National Historic Landmarks were either originally designed with the bell tower, or steeple, or had it added in an alteration. Such examples are the Old South Meeting House in Boston, Massachusetts (a National Historic Landmark, 1960), Christ Church, Cambridge, Massachusetts (a National Historic Landmark, 1960), and First Baptist Meeting House, Providence, Rhode Island (a National Historic Landmark, 1960). These alterations reflected a transition toward buildings in the "third period" whose plan and style were more clearly associated with ecclesiastic purposes. Churches of the "fourth period" were characterized by steepled, temple-front structures in the Greek Revival style.

Another example of a "second period" meeting house is Harpswell Meeting House, Brunswick, Maine, begun in 1757 (a National Historic Landmark, 1968). Harpswell Meeting house differs from the Rockingham Meeting House in that it is more modest in scale, is styled to a much lesser degree, apparently has been altered to a higher degree, and includes a front porch on its eaves side, which provides for less formal symmetry on the primary façade than is exhibited by the Rockingham Meeting House. The Rockingham Meeting House has unique and distinctive significance as an intact eighteenth century "second period" meeting house (without the addition of a bell tower or steeple) with a high degree of Georgian styling.

²¹ Bryant F. Tolles, Jr., *New Hampshire Architecture*, (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1979) 128-129.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**Books**

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Articles

Desmond, H.W. "A Forgotten Colonial Church." *Architectural Record*. New York: McGraw-Hill, August, 1903

Maps, Plans, Reports

Beers Map, 1869

Plans and elevations, framing diagram: Elise Bates Russell, Jill Hassberger, Graduate Students in Architecture, University of Michigan, May 1998 (files of Certified Local Government, Rockingham Development Office, Rockingham, Vermont)

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: # VT-22
- 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):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 4.4 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	18	704240	4784510

Verbal Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point marked by a stone bound in the northerly limits of Meeting House Road, so-called, said point marks the southwesterly corner of the parcel herein described; Thence North 29°38' East 360.9 feet to a point marked by an iron pin, said point marks the northwesterly corner of the parcel herein described; Thence South 66°06' East on or near a wire mesh fence 440.1 feet to a point marked by an iron pin, said point marks the northeasterly corner of the parcel herein described; Thence South 13°10' West on or near a wire mesh fence 186.0 feet to a point in the intersection of a wire mesh fence and a wooden picket fence; Thence South 11°49' West on or near a wire mesh fence 81.1 feet to a point marked by the end of a stone wall; Thence along a stone wall the following courses and distances: South 73°06' East 26.0 feet, South 73°32' East 107.8 feet, South 72°24' East 45.3 feet to a point marked by the end of said stone wall; Thence South 57°49' East 50.4 feet to a point in the northerly limits of Meeting House Road, said point marks the southeasterly corner of the parcel herein described; Thence in a westerly and northwesterly direction along the northerly limits of Meeting House Road 789 feet more or less to the point and place of beginning.

The boundary of the nominated property is shown as the solid line on the accompanying map entitled "Property of the Town of Rockingham, Rockingham Meeting House." The nominated property includes the Rockingham Meeting House and Burial Ground, given to the town as described August 26, 1782, in Town Records, Volume I.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes the buildings, surrounding grounds, and adjacent cemetery which historically have been part of the Rockingham Meeting House and which maintain historic integrity.

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