#### United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

## National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms* Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Nam	e S	suite miss	TI A	<u></u>	
historic Sout	th Ward Room		· ·		
and/or common_	South Meeting	House (preferre	ed)		
2. Loca	ation				
street & number	-Corner Marcy S	treet & Meeting	House H	i11 _	not for publication
city, town Port	smouth	vicíni	ty of	congressional district	One
state New Ha	mpshire	code 33	county I	Rockingham	code 15
3. Clas	sification				
Category district _X_ building(s) structure site object	Ownership X public private both Public Acquisition in process being considere	_X_ yes: restr	rogress icted	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park private residence religious scientific transportation other:
4. Own	er of Prop	erty			
name City o	f Portsmouth				

street & number 126 Daniel Street

city, town Portsmouth \_\_\_\_

\_ vicinity of

state New Hampshire 03801

state New Hampshire 03833

# 5. Location of Legal Description

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: received	MAR 1	, <b>`</b> } ,	· -	32
date enti	APR	1	9	1982
•	AFIN	•	•	Ì

street & number Hampton Road

city, to	wn Ex	eter		_		
6.	Rep	resen	tation	in	Existing	Surveys

title	An Inventory of H Portsmouth, New H	listoric Structures ampshire	has this property been deter	mined elegib	le? yes _ <u>X</u> no
date	1972		federal	state	county <u>X</u> local
depos	itory for survey records	Planning Departm	ent		
city, to	own Portsmouth			state New	v Hampshire

# 7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
excellent good X fair	<pre> deteriorated ruins unexposed</pre>	<u>X</u> unaltered	X original site moved date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Occupying the former site of a 1731 meeting house, this mid-Victorian ward house and school atop Meetinghouse Hill "has for a century been the major landmark in the South End" of Portsmouth. 1

The South Meeting House is a rectangular wood frame building of two stories and attic, situated gable end to Marcy Street. It has a one story Doric porch on the front, a two story gable-roofed back stairway projecting from the rear, and a cupola rising in two stages from just behind the front of the roof ridge. The facade of the building is composed of three bays, the sides five each, and the rear originally had three before the twentieth century when the middle bay was covered by the rear stair tower. Fenestration consists of a 9 over 6 round-headed window in the upper facade gable, 9 over 6 round-headed windows throughout the second story, and rectangular 6 over 6 windows throughout the first story. A central double door forms the main entrance, facing east, while a single double door with transom lights occupies the second bay from the front on the south side and another is located on the south side of the rear stair-tower.

Stylistically the South Meeting House is Italianate with numerous Greek Revival features. The principal Italianate features include: strongly projecting cornices on the building and cupola; paired brackets supporting the upper cupola cornice; rounded openings with eyebrow cornices and keystones on the upper stage of the cupola; the braking cornice of the lower stage of the cupola ( containing the three faced clock) over projecting corners which contain vertical lozenge panels; the round-headed window in the facade gable; and the verticle iron band of cresting which survives only above the south cornice of the original slate roof. The elongated proportions of the first story window lights (9 3/4" x 19 1/2") is also typical of the local Italianate style.

The major Greek Revival characteristics include: a four-column Doric porch with full Ionic entablature, the fluted columns set on circular stone plinths, and the recessed front doorway. The Greek Revival detailing also includes the ubiquitous use of ogee moldings in window and door casing backbands, for borders of door panels and elsewhere as well as the use of razorback window sticking, a motif based on the raised arris between flutes on a Doric column.

A few features look forward to the heavier features of the mid-Victorian details of the 1870s and 1880s, such as the massive newel posts inside and the bolection molding separating the architrave from the frieze in the porch entablature.

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The interior contains shallow vestibules at the east end of both floors, connected by two sets of stairs doubling back and forming graceful spiral balustrades terminating in heavy newels at top and bottom of the north and south ends of the rooms. On the first floor, the vestible leads to two rooms which may previously have been one. Pairs of cast iron columns in both rooms help support the ceiling and second story. The upper floor is one large room behind the vestibule or hallway, impressive for its 14<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> foot ceiling and the ample daylight provided by five large windows on either side. All interiors in the building have match-board wainscoting 32" in height. An enclosed stairway to the attic winds up from the south end of the second

1. Bryant F. Tolles, <u>New Hampshire Architecture: An Illustrated Guide</u>, (Hanover, N.H., 1979), pp. 22-23.

### 8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 _X 1800–1899 1900–	Areas of Significance_C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture X architecture art commerce communications	Check and justify below community planning conservation economics education engineering exploration/settlement industry invention	law literature military music	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	Designed 1864 Constructed 1866	Builder/Architect Isa	iah Wilson, Architec mittee on Lands and	t Contractor - Buildings

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Architecture: As the most prominent landmark and only public structure in the South End, one of the city's earliest and most historic resndential areas, "the Old South Meeting House is one of Portsmouth's best mid-Victorian buildings."<sup>1</sup> It is architecturally significant as a well documented example of a Civil War era municipal building project in which a large part of the local building industry was involved with its construction.

The site, with the redundant 1731 South Parish former meeting house, was acquired by the city in 1863.<sup>2</sup> The old building was taken down and the graves of two early pastors removed from beneath the old communion table and interred in South Cemetery.<sup>3</sup> In response to public petition for a ward hall in Ward Three, the Board of Aldermen created a "Committee on Plans for a Ward Building" which in April 1864 presented "... a side elevation and floor plan for the proposed building." This plan and elevation, adopted by the Aldermen, as well as a complete set they authorized, were apparently the work of a local carpenter-architect, Isaiah Wilson, who was paid \$84.65 for "plans, etc." that year.<sup>4</sup>

In 1866 \$9600 was budgeted for "a building to be used as a ward and school room" to be erected "on the site of the Old South Church... to be finished this year."<sup>5</sup> The Board of Aldermen reconfirmed "the plan adopted by the Aldermen in 1864" and referred the matter to the Committee on City Lands and Buildings for specifications and to supervise the construction with labor to be hired "by the day."

This committee, acting as contractor for the city, ordered all building supplies and employed local craftsmen as needed over the summer and fall months. Payments to some 44 individuals and 33 suppliers or other firms are recorded in a 1866 ledger as well as published in the annual report of that year. Together, these are a virtual catalogue of the building trades in Portsmouth during the Civil War era.<sup>6</sup>

Compared to other public and private construction in Portsmouth just prior to the Civil War, (such as the 1854 North Church by Towle and Foster of Boston, the 1858 High School by William Tucker, or the granite U.S. Custom House by Ammi B. Young) or private building of the same years (the 1864-6 W.F. Parrot House by Gridley J.F. Bryant, or the Kearsage House of 1866) the South Meeting House is a simple vernacular example of the local Italianate-Greek Revival style consistant with its location

- 1. Bryant F. Tolles, Jr. New Hampshire Architecture, p. 23
- 2. Rockingham Co. Deeds 397:397, Portsmouth City Records, Vol. 3, pp. 391,401.
- 3. C.S. Gurney, Portsmouth, Historic and Picturesque, pp. 140-142.
- 4. City Records, Vol. 3, p. 469; City of Portsmouth Report 1864, p. 38.
- 5. Ibid, Vol. 4, pp. 231: Portsmouth Journal, July 28 and Aug. 4, 1866.
- 6. "Bills Approved, 1866," Portsmouth City Clerk's vault: <u>Annual Report of 1866</u>, pp. 45-48, South Meeting House Re-Use Feasibility Study, pp. 7-13

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE SUPPLEMENTARY PAGE

.

# **10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of nominated property Quadrangle name Portsmouth, 1	9,900 sq. f <u>NH</u> - ME	<u>t. (</u> .22 acres)		Quadrangle scale <u>1:24000</u>
UMT References				
A 1.9 3 5.7 3.0.0 4.7 Zone Easting Northi	71031716 ng		e Easting	Northing
c	1   1   1	D   1		
		E L		
		. H [		
Verbal boundary description and number 55 on Assessor's pla Hill Street, 71' on the rea side back to the point of k	an 7, front: ar lot line	ing 64' on Mar along Manning	cy Street Street,	, 142' on Meetinghouse
List all states and counties for p	roperties ove	erlapping state o	r county bo	undaries
state NA	code	county		code
state	code	county		code
<b>11. Form Prepar</b>	ed By			
name/title Richard M. Candee	and Woodard	d D. Openo		
organization Portsmouth Advoca	ates, Inc.		date Apr	il 16, 1981
street & number P.O. Box 4066			telephone	(207), 439–4653
city or town Portsmouth			state New	Hampshire 03801
<b>12. State Histor</b>	ic Pres	ervatio	n Offic	er Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

<sub>-</sub> national X\_local state

	As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-
	665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated
-	according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Becreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature	here
Commissioner, NH Dept. of Resources & Economic Develo title NH State Historic Preservation Officer	opment date February 23, 1983
For HCRS use only I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
William H. Brainan	date 4,19.82
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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Continuation sheet	<b>Item number</b> 8	Page 2	

7. story vestibule, arching over the south stairway from the first floor.

The building was restored in the late 1960s and leased for several years to Strawbery Banke. During this renovation the central chandelier of 5 foot diameter in the second story room, an unusual and graceful nineteenth century lighting fixture originally located in the Second Christian Church of Kittery, Maine, may have been installed. In 1979 the city contracted to have the cupola fully repaired and repainted.

8. within a largely wooden residential ward. While nearing completion in October 1866 the local paper noted that its belfrey formed "another prominent object in the landscape" of the city.<sup>7</sup> This clock tower and Italianate cupola continues to dominate and serve as a visual focal point for the surrounding historic neighborhood. The orginality of its vernacular design and construction contribute to the character of the area and evoke a feeling for the era in which it was built.

<u>Politics/Government</u>: The South Meeting House is also significant as a locally unique example of a mid-nineteenth century public building type, the ward hall. In this it reflects the evolution of municipal governmental structure. Portsmouth adopted a City Charter in 1849 providing for a nine member Board of Aldermen and twenty-one on a Common Council elected from three wards. By the 1860s the Aldermen were being petitioned for a place of public assembly for a ward room in the third ward which covered the South End of the city.<sup>8</sup> From its erection in 1866 the upper floor of the South Meeting House provided the site for public and political assembly, caucuses, and ward elections. It continued to serve as a polling place well into the present century.

As originally designed the lower story also served another public function by providing a school room which supplemented the increasingly limited space in the nearby Haven School (1846) at various different times throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to its political and governmental functions, from the earlies years the city granted permission to use the building for religious meetings of a variety of sects without a permanent church. As early as 1865, in fact, the "City Missionary" began holding Sunday religious services, while in 1868 another group shared the space for Friday evening services. By the turn of the century, C.S. Gurney identified the building as "The Peoples Church and South Ward Room" indicating the continued linkage between its political and religious usage.<sup>10</sup>

- 7. Daily Morning Chronicle, Oct. 2, 1866.
- 8. Ray Brighton, Frank Jones, King of Alemakers, p. 83; City Records, Vol. 4, p. 94 ff.
- 9. Gurney, p. 154.
- 10. Gurney, p. 141.

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date entered

tinuation sheet	Item number	9	Page	1
C.S. Gurney, PortsmouthHistori	c and Picturesque (1	Portsmouth	, 1902) pp.	140-141.
John Mead Howells, <u>The Architectu</u> p. 194 (fig. 260).	ral History of the 1	Piscataqua	, (1965 rep	rint),
Bryant F. Tolles, <u>New Hampshire A</u> 1979), pp. 22-23	rchitecture: An Illu	ustrated G	<u>uide</u> , (Hano	ver, N.H.
<u>City Records</u> , Vols. 3-4 (minutes Office, City Hall, Portsmouth.	of the Board of Ald	ermen 1863	-1866), Cit	y Clerk's
Ledger, Bills Approved, 1866				
Portsmouth Journal, July 28, 1866	through Sept. 22,	1866 and F	eb. 13, 186	4.
Daily Morning Chronicle, July 26,	1866 through Oct.	3, 1866 an	d April 18,	1864.
Receipts and Expenditures of the Debt1864, pp. 32, 52;			tement of t	he City
The Thoresen Group, <u>South Meeting</u> Advocates, Inc. 1981.	House Re-Use Feasi		<u>dy</u> for Port	smouth
- ,				