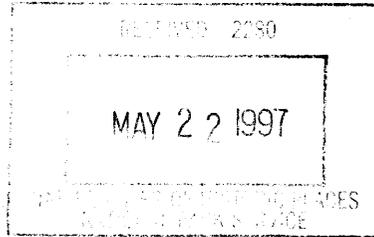


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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Center Meeting House and Common

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 476 Main Street N/A not for publication

city or town Oxford, vicinity

state Maine code ME county Oxford code 017 zip code 04270

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 5/16/97
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Maine Historic Preservation Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

[Signature] 6-20-97
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson W. Beall

Center Meeting House and Common
Name of Property

Oxford, Maine
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Government/City Hall
Religion/Religious Facility
Landscape/Plaza

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Government/Other
Religion/Religious Facility
Landscape/Plaza

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Federal
Gothic Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone/Granite
walls Wood/Weatherboard
roof Asphalt
other

Narrative Description

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

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or a grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Politics/Government

Landscape Architecture

Period of Significance

1829-1947

Significant Dates

1829

1830

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**CENTER MEETING HOUSE AND COMMONOXFORD, MAINESection number 7 Page 2

The Center Meeting House and Common consists of a rectangular gable roofed frame building that occupies part of the 1.35 acre Town Common. The meeting house is sheathed in weatherboards, and it stands on a granite block and rubble stone foundation. In overall form it has the typical characteristics of a Federal period meeting house, but it is adorned with Gothic Revival style louvered lancet arches above the window and door openings. The property is located at the intersection of Routes 26 and 121, an area that has witnessed substantial commercial development during the twentieth century.

Facing east, the symmetrically composed front elevation contains a pair of widely spaced six-panel doors topped by lancet arches that are infilled with louvers. These louvers radiate from an elliptical, decorative carved panel that is centered above the door. The doors and arches are framed by a wide symmetrically molded surround. Two eight-over-eight double hung sash windows are located above and between the doors. The arched cap and molded surround are utilized in these windows (as well as with those on the side and rear elevations). Narrow corner boards frame the elevation and rise to short gable end returns. A narrow cornice is located at the roof edge. A wooden ramp and railing in front of the right (northeast) door are relatively recent additions.

The fenestration pattern of the four-bay side elevations consists of symmetrically placed twelve-over-twelve double hung sash. A slightly overhanging cornice shelters a narrow frieze that meets the corner boards. There is a single window centered on the rear elevation adjacent to a modern cement block flue.

Inside, the front doors lead to a vestibule that spans the back of the nave and from which an enclosed stair at the northeast corner leads to the two-tier balcony. The nave itself contains three groups of box pews that are separated by side aisles. Both the unpainted seats and their painted and paneled entry doors appear to be original. The nave walls above the unpainted wide board wainscot and the coved ceiling are finished in plaster over lath. Presently, the pulpit area contains portable voting booths as well as an oil fired heater and oil tank. Judging from the elevated position of the window on this wall (in relation to those on the side walls), there was probably a raised platform in this area originally.

The 1.35 acre parcel of land associated with the meeting house comprises the remaining portion of the Town Common. This early designed landscape was established in the original transfer of the land, and was cleared, leveled, and fenced prior to the construction of the meeting house. Its original appearance has changed with the growth of deciduous trees around three sides of the building.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**CENTER MEETING HOUSE AND COMMONOXFORD, MAINESection number 8 Page 2

Constructed in 1830, the Center Meeting House is a well preserved example of a building type that served both religious and governmental needs in a rural Maine community. Although it shares a pattern of use with many other such buildings in the state, its particular blend of Federal and Gothic Revival style architectural features is unusual. The meeting house occupies a portion of the Town Common which was established in the original gift of land. The property is eligible for nomination to the National Register under criterion A for its association with local government, and criterion C for its significance in architecture and landscape architecture. Criteria consideration A also applies by virtue of the building's use for religious purposes.

The area that forms the Town of Oxford was first settled in the closing years of the Revolution by immigrants from Massachusetts. Industrial development of the local water powers was facilitated by the investments of Cambridge, Massachusetts land speculator Andrew Craigie, after whom one of the settlements, Craigie's Mills, was named. Originally part of the Town of Hebron, Oxford was incorporated as a separate municipality on February 27, 1829. By mid century its population stood at 1,233 persons, many of whom were undoubtedly engaged in agriculture although a significant proportion may also have been employed at the two woolen mills that had been established in 1839 and 1846, respectively. Of additional note is the fact that Oxford witnessed substantial growth in its population in the immediate post Civil War years, unlike many small Maine towns whose population declined. This growth is perhaps in large part attributable to the expansion of the local textile mill operations as well as the founding of a third woolen mill about 1861. By 1870 Oxford's inhabitants numbered 1631 persons, a figure that grew slightly in the next decade, and then began to fall thereafter.

Shortly after the town's incorporation in 1829, the heirs of Andrew Craigie wrote a letter to the Selectmen offering:

...to erect a meeting-house for the use of said town, to be located on the new county road leading from Poland to Paris, in such place as the said town shall determine, with the consent of said Whitney [their agent]; the said house no to cost more than twelve hundred dollars, and we authorize the said Whitney to promise the said town, not exceeding three acres of land round the said meeting-house for a common, burying-ground etc. not to be more than 16 rods in width on the road.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**CENTER MEETING HOUSE AND COMMONOXFORD, MAINESection number 8 Page 3

On May 11, 1829, a meeting was held in which the site selection committee reported on their identification of a suitable three acre lot, after which approval was given to acquire and clear it "...of all the natural growth..." and to see that the land was "...thoroughly plowed, leveled and well seeded to grass and well fenced with a good and sufficient log fence..." The meeting house was constructed the following year. Unfortunately, the name of its builder has not as yet been determined.

The intent of the donors was that the meeting house was to be used by any denomination. To avoid conflicts over scheduling, therefore, the town voted in 1832 that the Congregationalists were to have use of it the first Sunday of each month, followed by the Baptists, the Universalists, and the Methodists. For what period of time these and any other denominations made use of the meeting house is uncertain. In addition to its religious function, however, the meeting house has -- since its date of construction -- served as the place where town meetings are held.

Architecturally, the Center Meeting House has a very traditional form with its rectangular gable roofed configuration, interior gallery, and box pews. All of these characteristics descend from the eighteenth century meeting houses, although there are notable differences such as limiting the gallery to the rear wall as well as the orientation of the seating to face the nave end wall as opposed to the sidewall (as was typically done in the early period). On the exterior, the Federal period introduced the use of twin entrances on the facade, as well as a range of new architectural details including Gothic forms and towers. In its own unique blend of traditional form and architectural fashion, the Center Meeting House is an important example of a public building erected in a small rural town during the third decade of the nineteenth century.

At present, the meeting house stands on a 1.35 acre parcel of land representing the remainder of the original Common lot that was not developed as a cemetery. A recent survey of Maine's designed public landscapes reveals that Commons like this one in Oxford were the first such spaces created in the state. These Commons had several distinguishing characteristics: 1) they were typically associated with the Congregational (or first) meeting house; 2) they were relatively small, but centrally located; and 3) they may have been leveled for the purposes of public gatherings, but were not otherwise improved until the late nineteenth century -- if at all. The Common associated with the Center Meeting House appears to have all of these features. In addition, like many such places in rural areas that lay outside of village centers, it was not subsequently improved later in the century.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

CENTER MEETING HOUSE AND COMMON

OXFORD, MAINE

Section number 9 Page 2

Bennett, Randall H. *Oxford County, Maine: A Guide to Its Historic Architecture*. Bethel, Maine: Oxford County Historic Resource Survey. 1984.

King, Marquis Fayette. *Annals of Oxford, Maine, from its incorporation, February 27, 1829 to 1850. Prefaced by a brief account of the settlement of Shepardsfield plantation, now Hebron and Oxford, and supplemented with genealogical notes from the earliest records of both towns and other sources*. Portland, Maine. 1903.

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

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

CENTER MEETING HOUSE AND COMMON

OXFORD, MAINE

Section number 10 Page 2

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property of 1.35 acres occupies the Town of Oxford Tax Map U-37, Lot 4.

Boundary Justification

The boundary embraces the remaining parcel of land that contains the historically associated Town Common and Center Meeting House.