

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 New Hampton Town House

other names/site number New Hampton Meeting House, Center Meeting House

2. Location

street & number corner of Town House Road and Dana Hill Road not for publication N/A

city or town New Hampton vicinity N/A

state New Hampshire code NH county Belknap code 001 zip code 03256

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.)
Nancy C. Miller 1/29/98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
New Hampshire
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): _____

fw Signature of the Keeper 3/23/98 Date of Action
Beth L. Swage

New Hampton Town House
Name of Property

Belknap County NH
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	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	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

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Government / City Hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Mid-19th Century

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite
walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt
other Brick

Narrative Description

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

New Hampton Town House
Name of Property

Belknap County, N H
County and State

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 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Politics /Government

Period of Significance

1872 - 1948

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Samuel Kelley

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Name of repository:

New Hampton Town Office

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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**New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Description

The New Hampton Town House stands on the town common at the northeast corner of Town House Road and Dana Hill Road in the Town of New Hampton. The main block of the wooden town hall is now a mid 19th century vernacular structure, while the smaller additions on its rear are mid 20th century vernacular structures. The tall one and a half story, gable roofed main block is set with its main facade, the lateral south side, facing Town House Road across the wide common. In the center of the main block's south facade, a one story, gable roofed porch shelters the main entry. The main block's rear north side is entirely covered by three, one story, shed roofed additions for the kitchen, the stage, and the privies, and, at the east end, a small, one story, shed roofed rear entry porch. A wooden wheelchair ramp runs along the east gable end of the main block to the rear entry porch. The main block has a post and beam frame, while the three additions have balloon frames. The main block's exterior has seen little change since 1872, save for the additions on the rear. The main block's interior, a single large room, also appears much the same as it has since 1872, save for two doors and a stage opening placed in its north rear wall, when the additions were built. The additions are almost unchanged since their construction, probably in 1934 and in 1940.

The main block stands on a cut granite block foundation. Its clapboarded walls are framed by wide corner pilasters, with simple moulded capitals but no bases. A wide box cornice with mouldings, deep frieze, and returns trims the asphalt shingled gable roof. A plain brick chimney is found at each end of the roof ridge.

The one large meeting room that occupies the main level of the main block is lit by large 20/15 sash windows. Each window has a simply moulded frame, plain window sill, and is covered by a large plain single shutter, made of vertical boards, and hung on long metal hinges. Four such windows are found in the five bay main facade, arranged in two pairs of windows, one pair on each side of the central main entry. The main entry is a six panel door with a granite sill. (Mounted on the front of the door is a vertical wooden notice board with a simple frame.) The main door is flanked by pairs of pilasters, applied over flush boarding, and rising to an elaborate moulding at the junction of the wall with the entry porch ceiling. The inner pilaster of each pair stands on the granite door sill, while the taller outer pilaster stands on the porch floor. The porch floor is a large single smooth granite slab, which rests on a stone foundation and is reached by a granite step on the front (south) side. Two octagonal tapered pillars on square wooden bases at the southern corners of the porch support its gable roof. The asphalt shingled porch roof is trimmed by a box cornice with mouldings, frieze and returns. (Part of the moulding is now missing on the east return.) The south gable is mostly clapboarded, but the frieze is continued across its lower edge, beneath a simple horizontal board at the level of the cornice proper. A light fixture is mounted in the center of the porch's beaded board ceiling. A large painted wooden sign, with the

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Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Description (continued)

inscription " TOWN HOUSE ERECTED 1798", is mounted on the facade above the main entry. A modern spotlight is mounted on the upper east corner of the main facade.

The four bay east and west gable ends are virtually identical in appearance. Each main level has four 20/15 sash windows, with large board shutters. The windows are again grouped in two pairs. In each gable is a smaller 15/15 sash window with the same moulded frame, plain window sill and large board shutter seen on the main level windows. Most of the rear wall of the main block is covered by the three rear additions, leaving visible only short sections of the wall above the kitchen and privy additions, and a narrow section, a little over a yard wide, at the east end, behind the rear entry porch. A plain wooden railing is mounted on the main block walls behind the rear entry porch and along the wheelchair ramp that runs along the entire east gable end.

The three rear additions are similar in design. All three are sheathed with novelty siding and trimmed by cornerboards. (A cornerboard separates the novelty siding on the privy section and the stage addition. But, the siding is continuous on the north walls of the kitchen and stage additions, which were built at the same time.) The additions' corrugated metal shed roofs are trimmed by open overhanging eaves with beaded board soffits, exposed rafters on the north, and fascia boards on the east and west half gables. The central stage addition is about four feet taller than the kitchen addition to its west and the privy addition to its east. The privy addition has a full concrete foundation, while the stage and kitchen additions were set on concrete posts.

The western kitchen addition has two plain framed windows, a 6/6 sash window on the west, and a double casement window with six pane sash on the north. Rising from its roof is a modern round metal chimney flue. (This chimney rises at an angle, as it is set perpendicular to the slanted roof.) The short dirt floored space under the kitchen addition is protected by a solid wall of plain horizontal boarding on the west end. But, on the north rear side, the space is open between the concrete posts. The three openings are covered by wire mesh mounted on plain wooden frames.

The stage addition is windowless. Because the stage is raised above the main floor level in the building, the dirt floored space under the stage addition is taller than the space under the kitchen addition and can be used for storage. At the west end of the north wall are short double doors that provide access to this storage space. The doors have vertical boarding and a plain frame. To the east of the double doors are three more openings between the concrete posts, again filled by wire mesh on simple wooden frames. In the storage space can be seen the older walls of the main block (with its granite foundation and clapboarding) and the privy addition (with its concrete foundation and novelty siding), and the unfinished wall of the kitchen addition.

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**New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Description (continued)

The privy addition is lit by two small, high, plain framed, four paned windows, one in the western half of the north wall, and one in of the northern half of the east wall. In the north side of the foundation are two privy cleanout doors, with horizontal boarding and simple wooden frames. Mounted on the north wall of the privy and stage additions is the venting for the privies, made of round plastic pipe. Two pipes from the privy chambers enter a horizontal pipe that runs west to a vertical pipe that rises to a vent just below the eaves of the stage addition, near the stage addition's east corner. At the north end of the east wall is the building's rear entry, a plain framed door with a large nine pane builtin window above four triangular panels. The door opens onto the small rear entry porch. The porch, placed in the northeast corner of the main block and the privy addition, is supported at the northeast corner by a wooden post set on a concrete block. A single square corner post rises from the porch's board floor to support a beam on which rests the porch roof rafters. The asphalt shingled shed roof has a beaded board underside, exposed rafters, and open lateral eaves on the north. The porch is now served by a long wooden wheelchair ramp which starts from an asphalt paved ramp at the southeast corner of the main block and rises along the entire east gable end of the main block to a landing on the east side of the porch. The ramp, supported by wooden posts, has a board floor, and a wooden railing with plain posts and rails.

Turning to the interior, we find that one large meeting room, over sixteen feet high, occupies the main level of the interior. The kitchen addition also contains one room, a small kitchen. The stage addition contains the stage area, which opens into the main meeting room. The privy addition has three spaces, two restrooms on the north side, and the narrow corridor serving them and the rear entry on the south side.

The main meeting room has a hardwood floor. Two L-shaped platforms, that once held pews, are found around three sides of the room. They cover the entire east and west sides and are interrupted only in front of the main entry on the south side. The platforms, raised about nine inches above the main floor, are approximately five and a half feet deep, save for a six foot long section at the north end of the east side platform, which projects another two feet into the room. The platforms have plain board fronts, and are topped by hardwood flooring, like that of the main floor. The high flat plaster ceiling features six electric lights hanging on chains and at the west end, the small, plain framed, plain board trapdoor to the attic.

The walls are plastered above a wainscoating of horizontal boards. The main block's post and beam frame is partly exposed in the walls. Projecting posts with chamfered edges divide the walls into bays, originally five bays on the lateral sides and three bays on the gable ends. The corner posts have straight sides, but the other posts have been cut back at the main level. The lower two feet are of the full depth, but then the posts are cut back three to four inches for the next four feet only to curve back to their full depth at a point almost seven feet above the floor. (These indentations

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Belknap County, New Hampshire****Description (continued)**

are presumably left over from the original interior, which had pews lining the walls, and galleries at the upper level.) The posts support plates, which are exposed at the tops of the north and south lateral walls. Also projecting slightly into the room just below the window sill level are horizontal beams in all of the bays, save in the central bays on the south, east, and west, and where the stage has been constructed on the north. These beams mark the top of the wainscoating and the bottom of the plaster walls. Built on the platforms and against the walls on the south, east and west, again save in the three central bays, is a plain wooden bench with a plain plank seat which is held up by simple wooden supports and by the indentations of the wall posts. The room is lit by large 20/15 sash windows with plain frames and sills that rest on the projecting horizontal beams.

The south front wall is divided into five equal bays by the posts. In the central bay is the main entry, a six panel door with a wide plain frame. In each of the four other bays is a single 20/15 sash window. The east and west gable end walls are each divided into three bays. The end bays each contain two 20/15 sash windows. The central bay features the chimneys. The lower portions of the chimneys are boxed in by horizontal boards, with a metal cleanout door on the side facing the main space. These boxed lower portions extend back to the wainscoating on the wall. The narrower upper portions of the chimneys are plastered with wooden cornerboards and are separated from the main plaster wall, leaving some six inches of space between the chimney and the wall. Directly in front of each chimney on the main floor is a metal stove, set on a metal pad to protect the floor. The western stove is an older Waterbury stove, a large metal cylinder embellished with embossed Victorian floral and geometric designs. The east stove is a plainer and smaller modern rectangular stove. Rising from each stove is a round stovepipe, which turns and runs horizontally into the chimney several feet above the floor. Built on the platform and against the wall beside each chimney (to the north of the west chimney and the south of the east chimney) is a large open woodbox, made of horizontal boards.

The rear north wall of the room was changed by the construction of the stage. Originally, four projecting posts divided it into five bays. But, the lower portions of the two central posts have been cut off for the stage opening in the center of the wall. To support the wall above the stage opening, a projecting horizontal beam made of laminated planks was run across the wall above the opening between the two surviving full height intermediate posts. This beam is also supported by two plain heavy posts flanking and framing the stage opening. The sixteen foot wide stage is raised two and a half feet above the main floor and projects about three feet into the main room. The front of the stage projection is covered by vertical beaded boarding. At each end of the stage projection, three steps rise from the main floor to the stage floor along the wall. These steps have board treads and risers and vertical beaded board sides. Along the wall besides the steps are simple wooden railings mounted on plain wooden posts at the bottom and on the posts framing the stage opening at the top. The front edge of the stage is now protected by a simple wooden railing. The stage opening

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Description (continued)

also features a painted cloth curtain that can be unrolled from the top. The curtain boasts a view of the Town House surrounded by elaborate painted draperies. A cast metal eagle is mounted on the horizontal beam above the stage opening. Each of the four other bays of the north wall still retains its large 20/15 sash window. The two eastern windows which open into the privy addition corridor, still have their wooden exterior shutters, which are usually kept closed. The two western windows open into the kitchen and can be used for serving food. Each has a folding wooden shelf attached to its window sill. The end bays of the north wall each has a plain framed door, a door with five horizontal panels to the kitchen in the western bay, a door with six vertical panels to the privy corridor in the eastern bay.

The stage has a hardwood floor. Its beaded board ceiling is flat save along the northern edge, which is slanted to follow the slope of the roof. The south wall is sheathed with vertical beaded boarding. The wide stage opening that occupies most of the south wall has no trim, save for a simple horizontal board at the top. Above the opening, the stage curtain is suspended by a system of pulleys from a horizontal timber nailed to the wall. Above that timber are mounted three electric lights. The rear and side walls of the stage area are board walls with exposed studding, save for much of the east wall which preserves the original exterior novelty siding of the privy addition. Each side wall contains an untrimmed door of vertical beaded boards, to the kitchen to west and to the privy corridor to the east. Built against the north wall are six voting booths made of plywood. Each booth has a short door with an opening below on the south, a plywood writing shelf on the north, and short plywood walls on the north, east and west. The booths are lit by three simple light fixtures mounted on a board above them on the north wall.

The kitchen's board floor is covered by linoleum. The slanted board ceiling has exposed rafters and a single central light fixture. The south wall is the original exterior wall of the main block, with clapboarding and two 20/15 sash windows with their original moulded trim. Each window now has a folding wooden shelf attached to its sill. Between the two windows is the plain framed five panel door to the main meeting room. The east wall is sheathed with horizontal beaded boarding. Three steps with board risers and treads and beaded board sides lead up to the plain framed beaded board door to the stage in the center of the east wall. South of the steps at floor level is a short panel of vertical beaded boarding that can be removed to provide access to the storage space under the stage. The outer west and north walls are sheathed with plywood and trimmed by simple baseboards. The west wall has a central plain framed 6/6 sash window. North of the window is a small unshathed portion of the wall, the now covered hole for the stove pipe to the former chimney. In the center of the rear north wall is a plain framed double casement window with six pane sash. Beneath the window is a large rectangular metal sink mounted on an open wooden framework, with a builtin wooden shelf below the sink. In the northwest corner of the room is a large ornate

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metal wood fired cookstove. A stovepipe rises from the top of the stove to a metal box on the ceiling beneath the chimney flue. Metal panels are set beneath the stove and over the adjacent portions of the north and west walls to reduce the fire hazard. (The kitchen now also features an electric stove and a refrigerator set against the east wall.)

The narrow corridor that occupies the south side of the privy addition and the two restrooms to its north share the same board floor and the same slanted beaded board ceilings with exposed rafters. The south wall of the corridor is again the original exterior wall of the main block, complete with clapboarding, and two 20/15 sash windows with their original moulded frames and large board shutters. Between the windows is the plain framed six panel door to the main meeting room. The east and west end walls of the corridor are unfinished board walls with exposed studding. At the west end of the corridor, three steps with simple board treads and risers ascend to the untrimmed vertical beaded board door to the stage. At the east end of the corridor is the plain framed modern door with nine pane window and four triangular panels to the rear entry porch. The corridor's north wall is made of horizontal beaded boarding. An electric light fixture is mounted high on the wall. The two doors to the restrooms have five horizontal panels, plain frames, and small painted signs for the "GENTS" to the west and the "LADIES" to the east. The two restrooms are quite similar. Their walls are unfinished board walls with exposed studding, except for the Ladies room western wall which is sheathed with horizontal beaded boarding. A privy bench occupies the north end of each room. Both are two-holers, with board front and top, and hinged board covers for the holes. Three of the holes are now equipped with modern toilet seats. Above the privy benches, short sections of the northern walls are sheathed with horizontal boarding. Plain frames surround the southern doors to the corridor. An electric light fixture is mounted on each southern wall. Both rooms have plain framed four pane windows, a northern window in the Gents room, an eastern window in the Ladies room.

The attic of the main block is a large unfinished space. It has no floor, just the laths of the main room's plaster ceiling nailed to the ceiling joists. The ceiling is hung from four large queenpost trusses, made of heavy timbers. Each truss has a tie beam, two queenposts, two common rafters, two principal rafters running from the tie beam to the queenposts, and a collar beam connecting the two queenposts. The queenposts of the four trusses, which run north-south, are connected by horizontal beams running east-west, with large braces at each end, to tie all four trusses together. The gable ends are unfinished board walls with exposed framing, that is neither as heavy nor as elaborate as the four trusses. Purlins support the slanting board ceilings. In each gable end is an untrimmed 15/15 sash window. In front of each window is a brick chimney rising to the roof.

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**New Hampton Town House
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Description (continued)

The Town House stands in the center of the 5.5 acre common, but only the immediate vicinity is included in this nomination. These grounds are marked on the south by a dirt drive from Town House Road, on the north and west by a dirt drive from Dana Hill Road. The nominated grounds are mostly grassed. The area is generally level, but does slope down on the north side. Two signs mark handicapped parking spaces in front of the building.

The New Hampton Town House began its career as the meetinghouse for the Town of New Hampton, serving both for religious services and town meetings. At the annual town meeting in March of 1798, the voters of New Hampton decided to erect a meetinghouse.[1] Two more town meetings in April and September were required to settle all of the details of the building project.[2] But, the building was ready for use by the next annual town meeting in March of 1799.[3]

There are no views available of the building as it appeared before it was rebuilt in 1872. But, descriptions of the building in its early days make it clear that it was a standard late 18th century meetinghouse, similar to many other New Hampshire town meetinghouses of the period. "The style of architecture was simple" with little exterior ornament and, for many years, not even exterior paint.[4] The two story, gable roofed main block, had "a porch at each end", a stair tower serving the second story galleries.[5]

The main entry was presumably in the center of the south facade. The interior of the main block was one large, two story high room. The main floor was filled with square pews, with "the pews next to the walls ... raised about eight inches above the ground level".[6] The pulpit was probably located against the rear wall opposite the main entry. "The pulpit was so high that the preacher's head was ten feet above the floor; a flight of stairs closed by a rude door led to it."[7] Above the pulpit was an octagonal sounding board with a plastered underside. "A rod of iron framed into it attached it to the wall, the structure projecting a few feet above the preacher's head."[8] At the second

1. "New Hampton Town Records, Volume 1, 1755-1847"
(manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 14,17
2. Ibid., pp. 18-19
3. Ibid., pp. 24-26
4. Frank Harrison Kelley REMINISCENCES OF NEW HAMPTON, N.H.
(Worcester, Mass.: 1889), pp. 73-74
5. "New Hampton Town Records, Volume 1, 1755-1847", p. 17
6. Kelley, p. 74
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., pp. 74-75

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story level were the galleries, on three sides of the room.[9] The galleries were sloped with long seats reached by steps and "a single row of square pews, around the gallery, next to the walls" and a choir section, "the singing seats", "being opposite the preacher".[10]

The meetinghouse was transformed into a town hall in 1872, when meetings in April and September appropriated funds "to repair the Town House".[11] The project was actually a significant remodeling and renovation project. The porches and the second story galleries they served were removed. The roof was lowered to make the present one and a half story building. [12] No complete description of these renovations can be found. So, we must speculate on which features of the building are original and which date from this major remodeling.

The exterior of the main block probably does retain some original features, such as the granite foundation, the clapboarded walls and probably, the windows. The trim, the corner pilasters and the box cornice, must date from the lowering of the roof. The entry porch, which appears in the earliest known photograph of the building,[13] can also probably be attributed to the 1872 remodeling, along with the pairs of pilasters framing the entry itself. The chimneys are also likely to have been erected as part of the remodeling, as they occupy positions that would have interfered with the stairs in the porches.

Since the 1872 remodeling, the main block's exterior has seen little change. The large sign on the south front does not appear in the late 19th century photograph, but it does appear in a 1904 photograph.[14] The wooden floor of the front entry porch was replaced by a granite slab in 1963

9. Raymond C. Smith, "Historical Sketch of the New Hampton Town House" (1950), in "Historical Sketches of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), unpaginated
10. Kelley, p. 74
11. "New Hampton Records, Vol. IV" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 443,445,467-468
12. Pauline Merrill, "Straits-Winona Road Tour" (1959), in "A History of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton N.H.), p. 151
13. Photograph, believed to date from 1880's or 1890's (collection of New Hampton Historical Society, New Hampton, N.H.), reproduced in Pauline Swain Merrill, John C. Gowan and others, A SMALL GORE OF LAND (New Hampton, N.H.:1977), p. 21
14. Photographs (collection of New Hampton Historical Society, New Hampton, N.H.)

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Description (continued)

by Robert Moulton and Ken Torsey.[15] The wheelchair ramp was built along the west gable end by Howard Dow in August of 1987.[16] The railing for the ramp on the main block wall was not, however, installed until 1996.[17]

The major exterior change has been the additions built on the rear north side of the main block. The privy addition was clearly built first, as is demonstrated by the exterior siding that can still be seen on the interior wall the privy addition shares with the stage addition. But, unfortunately, there are no records that clearly date the addition. The use of novelty siding does suggest a date in the 1920's or later. In 1934, the town did appropriate \$500 for unspecified "repairs and alterations" at the Town House.[18] The town report records that \$447.90 of that appropriation was spent in October and November of 1934 for labor, lumber and other materials, but it does not describe what the repairs and alterations were.[19] We can only speculate that this project included the construction of the privy addition, and presumably, the rear entry porch. The stage and kitchen addition is better documented. The annual town meeting in March of 1940 voted \$800 "to build an addition at the Town House for a stage and kitchen".[20] The addition was built the same year by contractor Norman McDougall at a total cost of \$838.55.[21]

The exteriors of the additions have not changed greatly since they were constructed. The privy addition's rear entry door has been replaced by a more modern door. The rear entry porch lost its steps when the wheelchair ramp was installed in 1987.[22] An exterior brick chimney on the west wall of the kitchen was removed and replaced by the present metal chimney flue.[23] 1997 saw

15. Interview of Robert Moulton by Robert Thompson, November 14, 1997
16. Interview of Elaine Seaver by David Ruell, November 18, 1997; "Receipts and Payments, 1987-1989" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), unpagged
17. Interview of Elaine Seaver by David Ruell, November 18, 1997
18. "New Hampton Town Records, Vol. 6" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 884,886
19. ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD, AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1935 (Bristol, N.H., 1935), p. 15
20. "New Hampton N.H. Records, Vol. 7" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 16,18
21. ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD, AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1941 (Bristol, N.H., 1941), p. 16
22. Interview of Elaine Seaver by David Ruell, November 18, 1997
23. Interview of Willis Ober by Robert Thompson, November 5, 1997

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Description (continued)

the installation of the plastic vent pipes for the privies, the double doors for the storage area under the stage, and the wire mesh in the north side openings beneath the stage and kitchen additions.[24]

Turning to the interior of the main block, we must again speculate on which features are original and which date from the 1872 remodeling. The platforms on three sides of the floor are the only reminder of the row of raised pews that once lined the outer walls.[25] The plaster walls with their exposed framework and, probably, the window and main entry trim, presumably date from the original meetinghouse. The pews and pulpit may have been removed after the building ceased to be used for religious services.[26] The 1872 remodeling saw the removal of the galleries, the upper level windows and the doors to the porches, and the lowering of the room's ceiling.[27] We can presume that the chimneys, the woodboxes, and perhaps the older western stove, were also installed in 1872. The plank bench around three sides of the room may also date from the late 19th century, if not from the remodeling itself.

The 1930's and 1940's were the next period of change. A door was cut through the north wall to the privy addition when it was built. Electric lights were first installed in 1937.[28] The addition of the stage and kitchen did change the north wall, by removing some posts and by adding the stage and its opening and the door to the kitchen.[29] But, the four exterior windows in the north wall were retained when the additions were made, although the kitchen windows did eventually acquire folding shelves to help with serving. In the 1940's, the Old Institution Group, a local women's organization interested in the Town House, commissioned John Thompson to paint the stage

24. Interviews of Robert Thompson and Elaine Seaver by David Ruell, November 18, 1997
25. Kelley, p. 74
26. Smith, unpagged
27. Merrill "Straits-Winona Road Tour", p. 151
28. "New Hampton Town Records, Vol. 6", pp. 926,929; ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1938 (Bristol, N.H.: 1938), p. 14
29. "New Hampton, N.H. Records, Vol. 7", pp. 16,18; ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1941, p. 16

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Description (continued)

curtain with its view of the building.[30] The hardwood floor was voted by the 1941 town meeting, but not installed until 1942.[31] The only recent changes to the main block interior seem to have been the replacement of the eastern stove and, in 1974, the installation of the railing on the front of the stage.[32]

The interiors of the additions have been very little changed since their construction. The stage has apparently seen no change. (The voting booths are said to have been installed when the stage was built.[33]) The privy must have acquired its door to the stage in 1940. Since then, it has probably only seen the addition of new toilet seats. Unless the plywood sheathing on two walls is a later addition, the kitchen is also little changed. The woodstove is probably the cookstove purchased by the town in 1939.[34] Its original flue which once entered a chimney through the west wall, has been replaced by a new flue that goes out through the roof.[35]

In summary, the building has seen almost no significant change in the last fifty years. The only notable exterior changes were the installation of the granite floor on the front entry porch in 1963 and the addition of the wheelchair ramp in 1987. The public exteriors of the main block, the south facade and the two gable ends, still appear virtually as they did in 1872. The rear wall of the main block was hidden by the additions of c.1934 and 1940. But that wall and the additions' own exteriors are little changed since 1940. Save for the rear north wall, the interior of the main block must appear much as it did in 1872. That north wall has really not changed since 1940, and neither have the interiors of the additions.

30. Mabel A. Lamont, "The Old Town House Remembers" (1961) in "Historical Sketches of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), p. 4
31. "New Hampton, N.H. Records, Vol. 7", pp. 48,51; ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD AND OTHER OFFICIALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1943 (Bristol, N.H.: 1943), p. 16
32. Interview of Robert Moulton by Robert Thompson, November 14, 1997
33. Interview of Willis Ober by Robert Thompson, November 5, 1997
34. "New Hampton N.H. Records, Vol.7", pp. 2,6,; ANNUAL REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN, CLERK, TREASURER, ROAD AGENT, SCHOOL BOARD, AND OTHER OFFICALS OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING JAN. 31, 1940 (Bristol, N.H.:1940), p. 20
35. Interview of Willis Ober by Robert Thompson, November 5, 1997

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Statement of Significance

The New Hampton Town House is eligible for the National Register under criterion A for significance in Politics/Government. It is the only structure in New Hampton built and used for this purpose. It has thus been the exclusive seat of town government beginning in 1799. The building retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association for the period 1872, when it was modified to its present configuration, to 1948, the 50 year cut-off date.

Belknap County was settled in the 18th century, the area being granted as townships to various groups of proprietors. The first two townships granted in what is now Belknap County, Barnstead and Gilmanton, received the right to local government along with their land grants in 1727.[1] (They did not however exercise this right of self government for decades, until after the actual settlement of the townships. Gilmanton held its first town meeting in 1766, Barnstead in 1775.[2]) The four other early townships were laid out as simple land grants. The citizens of these townships had to petition the legislature for incorporation as a town and the right to have legal local government. These four towns were all incorporated by the end of the 18th century, Meredith in 1768 [3], Sanbornton in 1770 [4], New Hampton in 1777 [5], and Alton in 1796 [6]. The other five towns in the county were created by legislative acts out of the territory of the already existing towns. Center Harbor was created from part of New Hampton in 1797.[7] Gilford was separated from

1. Jeremiah P. Jewett, HISTORY OF BARNSTEAD FROM ITS FIRST SETTLEMENT IN 1727 TO 1872 (Lowell, Mass.: 1872,) pp. 243-245; Daniel Lancaster, THE HISTORY OF GILMANTON (Gilmanton: 1845), pp. 16-22
2. Lancaster, p. 78; Jewett, p. 109
3. Daughters of the American Revolution, Mary Butler Chapter, OLD MEREDITH AND VICINITY (Laconia, N.H.: 1926), p. 5
4. Moses T. Runnels, HISTORY OF SANBORNTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE (Boston: 1882), vol. 1, pp. 50-52
5. Pauline Swain Merrill, John C. Gowan and others, A SMALL GORE OF LAND (New Hampton: 1977), p. 20
6. Albert V. Fisher III, THE HISTORY OF ALTON, BOOK I (1770-1800) (no place: 1979?), pp. 73-75; Barton McLain Griffin, THE HISTORY OF ALTON (Somersworth, N.H.: 1965), pp.25-28
7. Gladys Bickford, CENTER HARBOR, NEW HAMPSHIRE (Center Harbor: 1988), p. 8

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Gilmanton in 1812.[8] Laconia was initially created from part of Meredith in 1855.[9] Belmont was separated from Gilmanton in 1859.[10] And Tilton was set off from Sanbornton in 1869.[11]

The governments of all of these eleven towns were originally based on the town meeting, the public meeting of the town's voters held annually, and as required by special needs, to make governmental policy for the town, to appropriate funds for the local government, to adopt ordinances and regulations, and to elect town officials. The everyday governmental tasks were entrusted to a board of selectmen. But, major decisions were made at town meetings. One Belknap County town, Laconia, switched to the city form of government in 1893.[12] But, the other ten towns still retain the town meeting as the principal mechanism of their local government.

Town meetings do require a place to meet. And, in the 18th century and the early 19th century, town governments in New Hampshire were also required by law to support a town minister and to provide a building for religious services. Usually, in New Hampshire towns, town meetings and town supported religious services were held in a meetinghouse erected with town appropriations and/or funds obtained by the sale of pew privileges. Of the eight Belknap County towns that were incorporated before the state law changed in 1819, seven acquired such meeting houses, all built in the last quarter of the 18th century. The earliest were those in Gilmanton (1774-1790)[13], Sanbornton (1775-1789)[14], and Meredith (1786-1790)[15]. The Gilford meetinghouse actually predated the town, being built in 1794 for the Gunstock Parish, but becoming the town meetinghouse after its 1812 incorporation.[16] The last three meetinghouses were erected at the very end of the

8. Hector L. Bolduc, *THE GILFORD STORY* (Gilford: 1962), pp. 10,12,13,15,16,18,19
9. Charles W. Vaughan, *THE ILLUSTRATED LACONIAN* (Laconia: 1899), pp. 3,12
10. Wallace F. Rhodes, *REMINISCENCES OF A NEW HAMPSHIRE TOWN* (Concord, N.H.: 1969), pp. 22-24
11. Mrs. Kenneth Randall and Mrs. George Stone, *CENTENNIAL, TILTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE 1869-1969* (Plymouth, N.H.: 1969), pp. 2-4
12. Vaughan, p. 3
13. Edward J. Maher, *A BRIEF HISTORY OF SMITH MEETINGHOUSE, GILMANTON, NEW HAMPSHIRE* (Gilmanton: 1970), p. 6; Lancaster, pp. 181-182,187-189; David Ruell *THE HISTORIC CHURCHES OF BELKNAP COUNTY* (Meredith, N.H.: 1995) p. 61
14. Runnels, pp. 65,68-69; Ruell, p. 166
15. Carl F. Blaisdell, *MEREDITH PARADE* (Meredith:1958), p. 56
16. Adair Mulligan, *THE GUNSTOCK PARISH, A HISTORY OF GILFORD, NEW HAMPSHIRE* (West Kennebunk, Maine: 1995), pp. 61-62

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century, in Barnstead (1796-1799)[17], Alton (1797-1800)[18], and New Hampton (1798)[19]. (The small town of Center Harbor, not incorporated until 1797, never built a town meetinghouse. The early Center Harbor town meetings were held in private homes, a schoolhouse, and eventually, in a small privately owned meetinghouse.[20])

In 1819, the relationship of church and state in New Hampshire changed radically when the legislature adopted the Toleration Act, which prohibited the use of town funds for the support of ministers and of meetinghouses used for religious purposes. The Act did allow towns to continue to maintain meetinghouses that they already owned.[21] But, the ultimate effect of the Toleration Act was the physical, as well as the financial, separation of church and town. In most New Hampshire communities, two new public buildings, the church and the town hall, replaced the old meetinghouse.

The other development threatening the town meetinghouses was the growth of new villages. The old meetinghouse, typically located on a hilltop near the geographic center of the township, was often left isolated from the new centers of population. As early as 1797, Gilmanton moved its town meetings from the town meetinghouse on its remote hilltop to the hall in the Gilmanton Academy building in the village of Gilmanton Corners.[22]

The result was the loss of three of the seven Belknap County meetinghouses in the 1830's and 1840's. After the town voters decided to build a new town hall in the village of Sanbornton Square, the Sanbornton meetinghouse was demolished in 1834 and the materials used to build a new

17. CENTENNIAL EXERCISES OF THE BUILDING OF THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGHOUSE AT BARNSTEAD PARADE, JUNE 10, 1896 (Concord, N.H.: 1897) pp. 24-25; Ruell, p.32
18. Fisher, pp. 77-79; Griffin, pp. 30-31
19. Merrill, Gowan and others, p.62; Ruell, p.150
20. Bickford, p.68; interview of Barbara Benoit by David Ruell, October 28, 1997; "Town Records of Center Harbor, vol. 1, 1797-1825" (microfilm copy, N.H. State Library, Concord, N.H.); "Center Harbor Records, 1802-1855" and "Center Harbor Records, Book 3, 1841-1866" (manuscripts, Center Harbor Town Offices, Center Harbor, N.H.)
21. LAWS OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, VOL. 8, SECOND CONSTITUTIONAL PERIOD, 1811-1820 (Concord, N.H.: 1920), pp. 820-821
22. Lancaster, p. 115, Maher, p. 8

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Congregational church, also in the village.[23] The Gilmanton meetinghouse was demolished in 1838 or 1839 and its materials used to build a smaller church on the same site.[24] After a new town hall was built in Gilford village in 1841, the old Gilford meetinghouse on its hilltop site was sold and demolished c.1844.[25]

The four other town meetinghouses survived into the 20th century, but only by converting to a single function. Two became churches. The Barnstead meetinghouse was not used for town meetings after a new town hall was built in Center Barnstead in 1847. This standard meetinghouse was converted to a church, beginning in 1851, when the porches and galleries were removed and the entrance moved to the gable end. The conversion was completed by the addition of a bell tower and further renovations in 1866.[26] The Meredith meetinghouse fell into disuse after a new town hall was built in the village in 1855. So, the building was given to the Free Will Baptists and moved to the village to serve as a church in 1859. It was later sold to the local district and used as a gymnasium. After a new school was built, the property was sold, the building demolished c.1979, and the materials used to build a house in Moultonborough.[27]

The other two meetinghouses became town halls. After a union meetinghouse was erected next to the Alton town meetinghouse in 1838, the older meetinghouse was used as the town hall until a new town hall was built in downtown Alton in 1893-94. Although there is some disagreement among historians on the date, the Alton town meetinghouse was demolished in the 20th century.[28] The New Hampton meetinghouse was, as we have seen, rebuilt as a town hall in 1872. Today, only two Belknap County town meetinghouses, in Barnstead and New Hampton, survive, still in use in their second careers as the Barnstead Parade Congregational Church and the New Hampton Town House.

23. Ruell, pp. 166-167; Runnels, p. 262; Mildred Coombs SANBORNTON, N.H. 1770-1970 (Sanbornton: 1970), pp. 4-5; ADDRESSES AND PROCEEDINGS AT THE ONE HUNDREDTH AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN SANBORNTON, N.H., NOVEMBER 13 AND 14, 1921 (Bristol, N.H.: 1921), p. 47
24. Lancaster, p. 190; Maher, p. 14; Ruell, p. 61
25. Mulligan, pp. 143-144, 377
26. Ruell, p. 33; CENTENNIAL EXERCISES OF THE BUILDING OF THE CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGHOUSE AT BARNSTEAD PARADE, N.H., JUNE 10, 1896, pp. 26,95
27. Blaisdell, pp. 56-57; Solon B. Colby et al., EARLY MEREDITH (Meredith: 1976), pp. 34-35; interview of Esther Wyatt by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; interview of Jane Ambrose by David Ruell, October 27, 1997
28. Griffin, p. 31; Fisher, p. 77; Alton Old Photograph Committee, ALTON, A TOWN TO REMEMBER (Alton: 1987), pp. 22-23

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Three towns in Belknap County never built town halls. Over the years, Belmont used upper level halls in three store buildings in the village. The last of these was the Community Hall in the Bryant block, built in 1894, where the town meetings were held from 1928 through 1966. In 1948, the town purchased the Bryant block and converted it to a town hall, with town offices in the first story (formerly occupied by stores) and the meeting hall in the upper story. (Since 1967, town meetings have been held at the local school.) [29] The Laconia town meeting minutes are now missing, apparently destroyed in a fire, so there is no formal record of where the meetings were held. The Town of Laconia never built a town hall, and probably held its town meetings in rented halls.[30] Some town meetings in the 1880's and 1890's are known to have been held in Folsom Hall, a hall in a privately owned business block.[31] (After Laconia became a city, the city government rented offices in downtown commercial blocks, before moving into a former house in 1926. It was not until the 1970's that the city finally erected its present city hall.[32]) As already noted, Gilmanton moved its town meetings to the Academy hall in 1797, where they continued to be held for most of the 19th century.[33] The meetings then moved to Gilmanton Iron Works, where they were held in the shoe factory from 1894 through 1903, and thereafter at the Odd Fellows Hall, built in 1902-1904 by the local Odd Fellows organization. In 1926, the town purchased the Odd Fellows Hall, where town meetings continued to be held, with a couple of exceptions, until 1972, when they moved to the local elementary school.[34]

29. Rhodes, pp. 28,33,49; interview of Wallace Rhodes by David Ruell, October 27, 1997
30. Interview of Warren Huse by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; interview of City Clerk Ann Dearborn by David Ruell, October 28, 1997; interview of Gilbert Center by David Ruell, October 30, 1997
31. Interview of Ann Dearborn by David Ruell, October 28, 1997; Laconia Democrat (Laconia, N.H.), March 14, 1884
32. Interview of Warren Huse by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; interview of Gilbert Center by David Ruell, October 30, 1997
33. Rhodes, p. 49 ; "Gilmanton Town Records, vol. 11, 1859-1883" and "Gilmanton Town Records, Vol. 12, 1883-1902" (manuscripts, Gilmanton Town Offices, Gilmanton, N.H.)
34. "Gilmanton Town Records. Vol. 12, 1883-1902" and "Town Records, 1902-1935" (manuscripts, Gilmanton Town Offices, Gilmanton, N.H.); interview of Richard Arms by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; interview of Town Clerk Betty Smithers by David Ruell, October 29, 1997

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The majority of the county's towns did build town halls, all in the 19th century. Of the eight town halls erected, seven still survive. Four were built in the 1830's and 1840's, in Sanbornton (1834)[35], Gilford (1841)[36], Center Harbor (1843)[37], and Barnstead (1847)[38]. These earlier buildings are all typical of early 19th century New Hampshire town halls, wooden, gable roofed structures with the main entrance in the gable end. With the exception of the two story Gilford town hall, they are one story high. The Sanbornton Town Hall has a short tower on its roof, as well as Federal and Gothic ornament. But, the other three are all plain vernacular buildings, with little ornament.

The one Belknap County town hall that has been lost was the first Meredith town hall, built in 1854-55.[39] It was demolished after a new town hall was built.[40] The second Meredith town hall is the earliest of the county's three Victorian town halls. Constructed in 1877, the building was erected as a joint venture with a local businessmen, with a store on the first floor, and the town hall in the upper levels.[41] The building is essentially a wooden Victorian vernacular business block. The Tilton Town Hall, erected in 1879-1880, had a similar layout, with stores in the first story and the town hall in the second story. Designed by Concord architect Edward Dow, the brick building is a fine Victorian commercial block with ornate brick and stonework and cast iron pillars in its

35. Runnels, p. 262; Coombs, p. 5; David Ruell, A GUIDE TO NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE LAKES REGION (Meredith: 1988), p. 155. The Sanbornton Town Hall was listed on the National Register as part of the Sanbornton Square Historic District on December 8, 1980.
36. Mulligan, p. 377; Ruell, THE HISTORIC CHURCHES OF BELKNAP COUNTY, p. 51
37. Bickford, p. 68; "Center Harbor Records, Book 3, 1841-1866", pp. 21-23,28
38. Jewett, p. 172
39. D. Hamilton Hurd, ed., HISTORY OF MERRIMACK AND BELKNAP COUNTIES, NEW HAMPSHIRE (Philadelphia: 1885), p. 839
40. Interview of Esther Wyatt by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SELECTMEN, TREASURER AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF TOWN OF MEREDITH FOR THE YEAR ENDING MARCH 1, 1877 (Meredith:1877), p. 9; "Meredith Village Historic Walking Tour" brochure (Meredith: no date)
41. Hurd, p. 839; interview of Esther Wyatt by David Ruell, October 27, 1997; "Meredith Village Historic Walking Tour"; ANNUAL REPORT OF THE SELECTMEN, TREASURER AND SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF TOWN OF MEREDITH FOR THE YEAR ENDING MARCH 1, 1877, p. 8; Deed, Josiah Sturtevant to Town of Meredith, dated June 5, 1876 (manuscript, Belknap County Registry of Deeds, Laconia, N.H.) Book 61, Pages 587-588

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storefronts.[42] The Alton Town Hall, built in 1893-94 was designed by Dover architect A.T. Ramsdell. The two story brick building is a fine example of the Romanesque Revival style, with a tall corner tower and a large arched main entry.[43]

The five town halls that are still town-owned have well preserved exteriors. The same cannot be said of the two buildings that have passed into private ownership. The Meredith town hall was sold in 1959, and apartments built in the upper levels formerly occupied by the public hall.[44]

The exterior has been covered with vinyl siding, and the windows and the storefronts have been replaced. The Gilford Town Hall was resheathed with vinyl siding before it was conveyed to the neighboring Gilford Community Church in 1990. The building was then moved back onto a new foundation and connected to the church.[45]

New Hampton was incorporated as a town on November 27, 1777. Unfortunately, the minutes of the New Hampton town meetings for the first twenty years were lost by fire.[46] "Tradition says early town meetings were held in houses and barns about the town." [47] The earliest surviving minutes do record the home of Jeremiah Marston as the site of town meetings in 1797 and 1798.[48] By then, the townspeople were already considering the construction of a meetinghouse. An article in the warrant for the annual March 1798 meeting asks "if the Town will vote to build a meeting house in

42. Randall and Stone, pp. 7-9,12,13; Ruell, A GUIDE TO NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE LAKES REGION, pp. 227-228. The Tilton Town Hall was placed on the National Register as part of the Tilton Downtown Historic District on July 7,1983.
43. Griffin, pp. 104-105; Ruell, A GUIDE TO NATIONAL REGISTER HISTORIC DISTRICTS IN THE LAKES REGION, p. 207. The Alton Town Hall was listed on the National Register as part of the Monument Square Historic District on March 15, 1984.
44. Deed, Town of Meredith to Berquest and Starks, dated March 31, 1959 (manuscript, Belknap County Registry of Deeds, Laconia, N.H.) Book 395, Page 147; interview of Esther Wyatt by David Ruell, October 27, 1997
45. Ruell, THE HISTORIC CHURCHES OF BELKNAP COUNTY, pp. 51-52
46. Merrill, Gowan and others, p. 20
47. Raymond C. Smith, "Historical Sketch of New Hampton Town House" (1950) in "Historical Sketches of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), unpagged
48. "New Hampton Town Records, Volume 1, 1755-1847" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.) pp. 7,14

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said town - how big to build it - where to set it and in what way to proceed in building it".[49] At the March 6 meeting, it was "voted to build meeting house on Minister's Lot near Phinehas Dolloff house"[50]. This site was undoubtedly chosen because of its central location as well as the availability of the land. An 1805 map shows that the site was then essentially at the center of the town's road system.[51] The meeting further decided that the meetinghouse should be 52 feet long by 40 feet wide. And it was agreed that the town would build the frame and foundation, "to fraim up of the meetinghouse and a porch at each end and underpin it with hewed stone by middle of September next, provided there comes forward 40 associates to bind themselves to finish the house in five years for the pews agreeable to a bond of this date."[52]

The meeting was continued until April 4. Either the forty associates did not come forward or the town voters changed their minds about that method of building the meetinghouse. The April 4 meeting rescinded the prior vote. It was then voted that the Town "build the meeting house and finish the house and dispose of it as the Town shall think proper". The meeting reaffirmed the dimensions already voted, "with a porch at each end of sufficient bigness". A committee of five men, William B. Kelly, Thomas Simpson, Josiah Magoon, Jeremiah Marston, and Benjamin Smith was chosen "to draw a draught of the meeting house and sell the pews and lay the money out on the meeting house". The meeting then voted "to give Samuel Kelly, Jr. two hundred dollars" for "building a certain meeting house frame fit to raise...the frame to be done in a workmanlike manner at the spot of ground where said town has voted to build it and be completed by the last of September next". Finally, \$333.33 was appropriated "to defray the charges of building the meeting house".[53]

The meeting was continued again until September 4, when it was voted to dismiss Thomas Simpson from the committee and replace him with Peter Hanaford. It was further voted that the committee was "to lay out forty pounds that the Town of New Hampton has already assessed to raise the meeting house and if that don't raise it to take the rest of the money out of the pews that is already sold". The meeting also voted to supply rum, cider, beef and mutton for the raising of the

49. Ibid., p. 14

50. Ibid., p. 17

51. Joshua Lane "A Map of the Town of New Hampton" (1805) (collection, N.H. Division of Records and Archives, Concord, N.H.)

52. "New Hampton Town Records, Volume 1, 1755-1847", p. 17

53. Ibid., p. 18

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frame.[54] These votes suggest that the committee had sold at least some pews, and that Samuel Kelley had completed or nearly completed the frame, according to the town's previous vote. Unfortunately, there are no further recorded town meeting votes on the construction of the building. So we can only speculate that the frame was raised on schedule in the fall of 1798.

By March 5, 1799, the meetinghouse was sufficiently completed to house the annual town meeting.[55] By the end of the year, the town could consider hiring a town minister. A December 16 town meeting voted, under an article "to raise some money...to support the preaching of [the] Gospel in the meeting house", to appropriate \$50 "to support preaching". It was also decided to have Salmon Hibbard "preach 6 Sabboths upon probation".[56] Rev. Hibbard, a Congregationalist, was subsequently chosen as the first town minister, and was ordained on June 25, 1800. As part of his agreement with the town, he received 100 acres of the Minister's Lot, with the town reserving six acres around the meetinghouse for its own use.[57]

It is not exactly clear when the meetinghouse was completed. The warrant for the March 1800 meeting included an article to "release Benjamin Smith, Jr. or any of the others of the Meeting house committee and choose others in their room". No action was taken on the article.[58] But, this does suggest that the committee still had some work to do, perhaps finishing the interior of the building. According to a descendent who wrote a history of the town, Samuel Kelley "planned and built the first meeting-house". Kelley (1733-1813), one of the town's first settlers, "was a carpenter by trade".[59] So, it seems not unlikely that he did the finish work for the meetinghouse as well as the framing. But, in the absence of any documentary evidence, we can only speculate on his role in the construction of the building.

When completed, the meetinghouse was apparently a standard late 18th century meetinghouse. It was a two story, gable roofed wooden building, with a stair tower on each gable end serving the upper level. The main entrance was presumably in the center of the south facade. There was little exterior ornament. Inside was a tall, two story high room, with square pews covering the main

54. Ibid., p. 19
55. Ibid., pp. 24-26
56. Ibid., p. 33
57. Merrill, Gowan, and others, pp. 58-59
58. "New Hampton Town Records, Volume 1, 1755-1847", p. 34, 36
59. Frank H. Kelley REMINISCENCES OF NEW HAMPTON, N.H. (Worcester, Mass.: 1889), pp. 91-95

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Statement of Significance (continued)

floor, a high pulpit beneath a sounding board, and galleries with more box pews and seats on three sides.[60]

The use of the meetinghouse for town supported religious services was relatively short lived. The number of New Hampton's Congregational church members declined from 135 in 1801 to just 12 in 1820. After Rev. Hibbard was dismissed in 1817, the Congregational church did not have a minister until 1833, when it briefly revived. But, finally in 1842, the 19 remaining church members dissolved the New Hampton church and joined the Bristol church.[61]

There were other religious groups interested in the meetinghouse. The Baptists, for example, used the building for their larger regional meetings.[62] It was the interest of one Baptist church that led to the first recorded attempt to modernize the meetinghouse. In November of 1840, a town meeting "voted to give the First Baptist Society in this town the liberty of altering and repairing the Center Meeting House", provided that the changes did not interfere with the Town's use of the building.[63] There is no record of any alterations following this vote, but it suggests that the meetinghouse was seen as old fashioned and in need of updating.

Three town meetings in 1844 considered changes to the meetinghouse. The annual meeting in March "voted that the Selectmen make such repairs and alterations on the Center Meeting or Town House as they shall think best for the convenience of the Town" and appropriated \$184 for the work.[64] This vote promptly led to a wider debate on the future of the Town House. A special meeting was called for April 9 to consider warrant articles with different options: "to see what disposition the Town will make of the Meeting House", "to cut down the old house and repair it or build a new one on the same ground where the old one stands", or "to locate some suitable place for a town house or choose a committee to do same". The meeting chose instead to raise another \$100 to add to the \$184 already appropriated for repairs and alterations. Probably as a concession to the Baptists, the meeting also "voted to let the Baptist Society have the meeting house every other Sabbath to hold meetings of public worship if they should so desire." [65] It is not known if the selectmen actually spent any of the \$284 during the spring and summer of 1844. In September, another special

60. Kelley, pp. 74-75; Smith, unpagged
61. Merrill, Gowan, and others, pp. 60-62
62. Smith, unpagged
63. "New Hampton Town Records, Vol. 2, 1824-1859" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 189-190,192
64. Ibid., p. 219
65. Ibid., pp. 220-221

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**New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Statement of Significance (continued)

meeting was called to consider a petitioned article to repair the meetinghouse and an article to appropriate funds for those repairs. The September meeting at first voted to not repair the meeting house. But, then it reconsidered and "voted that the selectmen repair Center Meeting or Town House on condition that the selectmen receive satisfactory bond from some person or persons that the house shall not be improved[?] at the expense of the Town".[66] Again, there is no record of any changes following these votes.

In 1853, the school now known as the New Hampton School moved from its original location on and around the town common, near the town house, to Smith's Village, today known as New Hampton village. After the departure of the school, the village around the meetinghouse, known then as the Center and now as the Old Institution, lost some of its importance. Some houses were actually sold and moved away.[67] The rise of Smith's Village led to a proposal to move the Town House there. But, the 1866 town meeting dismissed a warrant article to move the building to Smith's Village.[68]

By the 1870's, the old meetinghouse must have seemed quite out of style and obsolete for use as a town hall. In 1870, E.C. Lewis "and others" presented a petitioned warrant article "to build a Town House or repair the present one", but the town meeting dismissed the article.[69] The March 1872 meeting dismissed another petitioned article "to build a Town House".[70] Undaunted, the proponents of a new or rebuilt town hall tried again the following month. A special meeting was called for April 13, 1872, to consider an article "to see if the Town will vote to locate and build a town house or repair the old one either in its present, or some other, location, and what appropriation of money they will make for the same agreeable to the petition of E.C. Lewis and others". This proposal was finally successful. The meeting decided "to repair the Town House where it now stands" and appropriated \$700 for the project.[71]

- 66. Ibid., pp. 221-222
- 67. Sadie Smith, "Historical Sketch of the Old Institution and Straits Road" (1951) in "Historical Sketches of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), p. 4
- 68. "New Hampton Records, Vol. IV" (manuscript, New Hampton Town Offices, New Hampton, N.H.), pp. 226,230
- 69. Ibid., pp. 344,354
- 70. Ibid., pp. 434,440
- 71. Ibid., pp. 443,445

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**New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Statement of Significance (continued)

The rebuilding of the town house proved to be more expensive than originally estimated. Another special meeting had to be called on July 20 to authorize the Selectmen to spend more money, up to \$500, on the Town House.[72] Virtually all of the \$1200 appropriated was spent, with contractor J.S. Piper receiving \$1195.74 for his work.[73] No complete description of the work survives. We do know that the galleries and porches were removed, and the roof was lowered to its present height.[74] Presumably the main block acquired its present appearance, on both the interior and exterior, in this 1872 remodeling.

When the 1872 remodeling was completed, the New Hampton Town House looked much like many other mid 19th century New Hampshire town halls, such as the buildings erected in the 1830's and 1840's in Sanbornton, Gilford, Center Harbor, and Barnstead. Like the typical early New Hampshire town hall, it was a rectangular, gable roofed, wooden structure, one story high, with clapboarded walls, little ornament beyond the usual vernacular window and roof trim, and one large room that served as the meeting place. The only significant difference from the standard mid 19th century town hall was the location of the main entry in the lateral side rather than the gable end, a choice that was either a concession to the building's past or, perhaps, the least expensive option. The main block has changed relatively little since 1872 and still conveys the character of a mid 19th century town hall.

This is not to say that the building has not changed. In the 1930's and 1940's, several changes were made to the Town House to increase its usefulness as a public meeting place, not only for town meetings, but for other community events, such as Old Home Day observances, suppers, etc. Much of the credit for this updating has been given to a group of women in the neighborhood who promoted the repair and remodeling of the building.[75] The first important change was probably the addition of the privies, perhaps in 1934. Electric lights were installed in 1937. An addition with a kitchen and a stage in 1940 made it much easier to use the hall for suppers, plays, and other public events. Hardwood floors were installed in 1942.

72. Ibid., pp. 467-468

73. REPORTS OF THE SELECTMEN AND SUPERINTENDING SCHOOL COMMITTEE OF THE TOWN OF NEW HAMPTON FOR THE YEAR ENDING MARCH 1ST, 1873 (Bristol, N.H.: 1873), p. 9

74. Pauline Merrill "Straits-Winona Road Tour" (1959) in "A History of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), p. 151

75. Mabel A. Lamont, "The Old Town House Remembers" in "Historical Sketches of New Hampton" (manuscript, Gordon-Nash Library, New Hampton, N.H.), p. 4; Raymond Smith, unpagged

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**New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire**

Statement of Significance (continued)

Changes to the New Hampton Town House have been very limited in the past fifty years. The only significant changes to the building exterior have been the addition of the wheelchair ramp and the replacement of the main entry porch floor. The only notable interior change has been the replacement of one stove in the main room. Basically, the Town House and its grounds retain their integrity for the period of significance.

Notwithstanding its present use for various social events and its past use for religious services, the most significant use of the Town House throughout its long history has been for town meetings and elections. Every town meeting and every election in New Hampton since March of 1799 has been held in this building.[76] Discussions of local politics and town affairs took place elsewhere in the community, in homes, stores, and other public buildings. But, the actual decisions of local government have been made at the town meetings in the Town House for nearly two centuries. No other building in Belknap County has such a long history of use for town meetings and elections.

Local government by town meetings has been the standard form of municipal government in New Hampshire from the colonial period to modern times. The town halls, where town meetings and elections have been held to decide major issues and to choose officials, have an historical importance in the area of local government comparable to that of state and federal capitols in the areas of state and national government. The New Hampton Town House is a well preserved, excellent example of these important buildings and should be recognized for its central role in the governmental history of this New Hampshire town.

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76. See the warrants and minutes of town meetings and elections in the New Hampton town records stored in the New Hampton Town Offices, and, in recent years, published in annual New Hampton town reports.

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Interview of Wallace Rhodes by David Ruell, October 27, 1997

Interview of Betty Smithers by David Ruell, October 29, 1997

Interview of Esther Wyatt by David Ruell, October 27, 1997

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property is indicated by the heavy black line on the attached sketch map

Boundary Justification

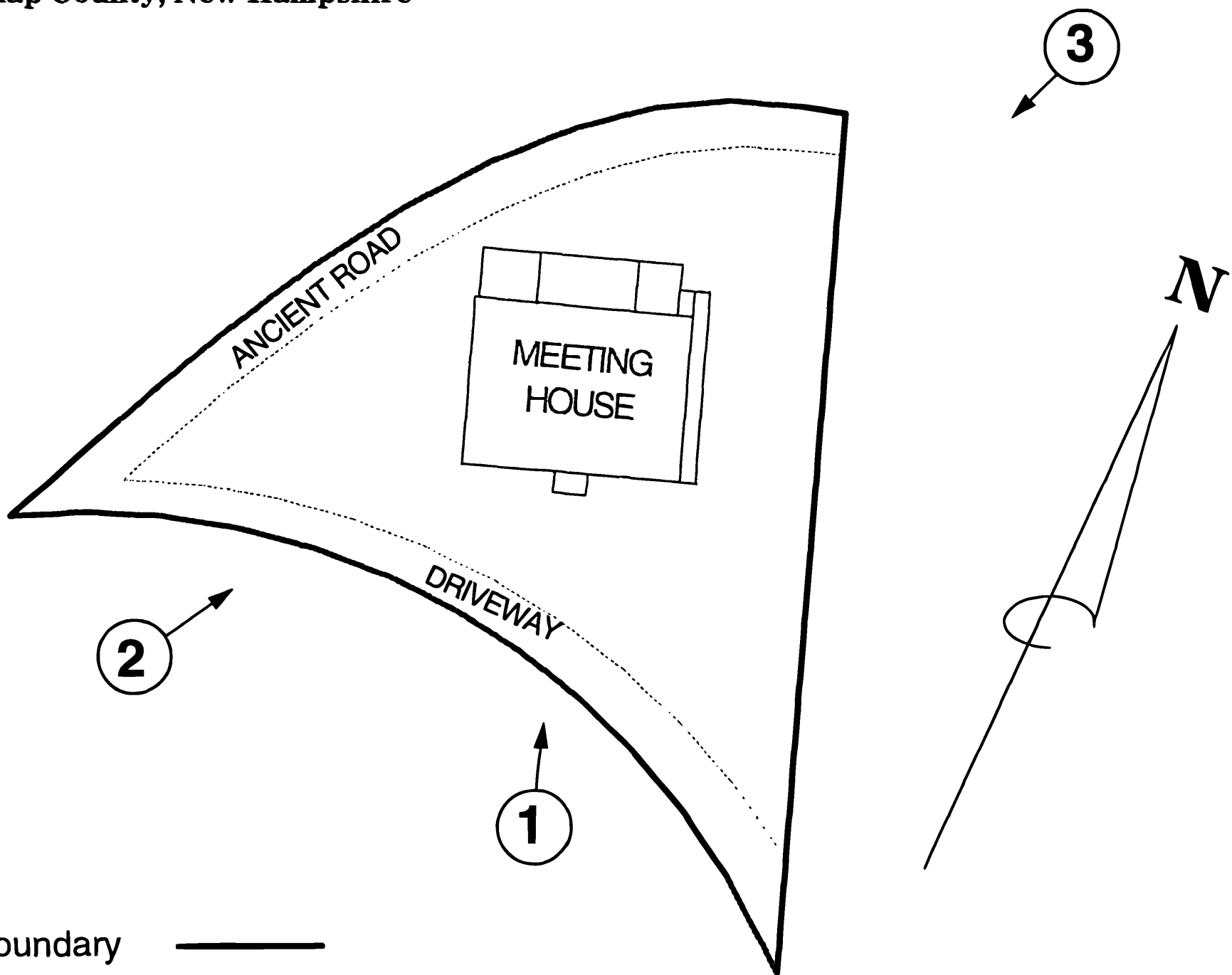
The nominated property includes the New Hampton Town House and the immediate site upon which it has stood since its construction.


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New Hampton Town House
Belknap County, New Hampshire



Boundary 

Site Area = .45 Acres


Scale: 
50 feet

Photo # & Camera Location 

New Hampton Town House
New Hampton, New Hampshire