NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

1 NAME
HISTORIC Harpswell Meeting House
AND/OR COMMON Same

2 LOCATION
STREET & NUMBER State Rt. 123, 9 miles of Brunswick
CITY, TOWN Harpswell Center — VICINITY OF
STATE Harpswell Center — VICINITY OF

3 CLASSIFICATION
CATEGORY
DISTRICT X BUILDING(S)
— STRUCTURE
SITE
OBJECT
OWNERSHIP X PUBLIC
PRIVATE
BOTH
STATUS X OCCUPIED
UNOCCUPIED
WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
IN PROCESS
BEING CONSIDERED
YES: RESTRICTED
YES: UNRESTRICTED
NO
PRESENT USE _ AGRICULTURE
_COMMERCIAL
_PARK
_EDUCATIONAL
PRIVATE RESIDENCE
_ENTERTAINMENT
_RELIGIOUS
_GOVERNMENT
_INDUSTRIAL
_TRANSPORTATION
_MILITARY
_OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY
NAME Town of Harpswell
STREET & NUMBER Harpswell Meeting House
CITY, TOWN Harpswell Center — VICINITY OF
STATE Maine

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION
COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. County Clerk Cumberland County
STREET & NUMBER
CITY, TOWN
STATE Maine

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS
TITLE HABS 13 sheets of Drawings, 8 photos, 2 data pages
DATE 1937
_FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Library of Congress/Prints and Photographs Division
CITY, TOWN Washington
STATE D.C.
Built 1757-1759, probably by a man called Elisha Eaton, the Harpswell Meeting House is a 2-1/2 story clapboarded gable-roofed structure which is typical of a New England building form used a late as the nineteenth century. The linearity of the stark clapboard exterior is enhanced by the many-paned sash windows (12 over 12). The building is rectangular, but nearly square, as were most Meetinghouses. The exterior stairhall at Harpswell is a not unusual feature of the type.

The long axis does not feature, as one might expect, the pulpit at one extremity. Rather, the main entrance is through the shorter axis, and leads us directly into the pulpit on the opposite wall. The nave-like interior, with its flat ceiling here, somewhat different from some of the more exciting exposed ceilings of meetinghouses elsewhere, features a three-sided gallery, an aspect almost universally present in meetinghouses.

The panelled soffits and the sounding board around the pulpit, are also typical. Most of the pews of the Harpswell Meeting House have been removed, and the building has not been used for regular religious purposes since 1844. The building, although begun 1757, was still incomplete in 1774, and finished completely shortly thereafter. It measures 40 ft. 6 in. by 35 ft. 7 in.

The meetinghouse is located in a graveyard, wherein are buried, among others, Elisha Eaton (1702-1764) and Samuel Eaton (1736-1822), who between them, led the parish as Pastors, for its first 62 years.
The simple, clapboard, two-story frame Harpswell Meeting House is an excellent and little altered example of a typical small New England Colonial church. It is also the earliest remaining example in Maine of a building form that persisted in that area long after the seventeenth century social structure which bred it.

History

The construction of a meeting house was begun in 1757, at what is now Harpswell Center and for some reason was a long time being completed. Elisha Eaton, eldest son of the Reverend Elisha Eaton, made sashes and frames for the edifice and during his frequent sojourns in Harpswell, helped with the actual construction. The Reverend Mr. Eaton served as the parish pastor until his death on April 22, 1764. He was succeeded by his son Samuel who was ordained the following October. The building was used both a a church and town meeting hall from 1757 to 1844. The town took over the building in 1856, after it had been vacant for a period of 14 years. The building has been used ever since that date as a town meeting place.
10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1/4

UTM REFERENCES

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The Harpswell Meeting House is bounded on the east by the right-of-way of State Rt. 123 (about 15 feet east of the building), on the south by a dirt road about 50 feet south of the building, which runs perpendicular to the state highway, and on the west and north by the old stone wall of the cemetery which still remains in its original place. The area of the landmark is approximately 1/4 acre, and no structures contribute to the national significance of the landmark other than the Meeting House itself.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME/TITLE

James Dillon, Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey - National Park Service

DATE

9/7/76

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

(202) 523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

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 National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

11/24/78
Historic Preservation Survey

Cumberland Harpswell Center Rt. 123

Name of Building/site: The Old Harpswell Meeting House

Approximate Date: 1757-1759 Style: Colonial

Type of Structure: ☑ Residential ☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☐ Other: Community

Condition: ☑ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor

Endangered: ☑ No ☐ Yes

Surveyor: WK Organization: PHS Date: 4/32

Rating: 1770 map 1857 map "Town House" 1871 map "cem" designated Nat'l Hist

Historic Significance to the Community: The Harpswell Meeting House is said to have been built 1757-1759, although it appears from old documents that as late as 1774 the interior was unfinished. Old records suggest that Rev. Silas Eaton, the first settled pastor in Harpswell, enlisted his son, Jiles, to build the meeting house.

(For Additional Information - Use Reverse Side)

From a document prepared by the House and Building Survey: (1936)

"The building is carefully framed with the usual system of sills, girts, posts, plate and trusses. Over the outside of the frame 1" rough sawn sheathing is laid. Outside of this there appears to be a thickness of birch bark taking the place of the present system of using insulation paper. Outside of this again are the clapboards."

From The Story Of Harpswell's Old Meeting House, by Virginia Barnes Woodbury c. 1970

"The Meeting House interior was of the utmost simplicity. The high, dark green, pulpit with its sounding board backed by a multi-paned arched window, was typical of that period. Straight backed pews lined the walls. Later, the center pews were removed. In the deacon's box there is one floor board 29 inches wide. "Only the finest carpentry went into the pumpkin pine box pews for which the original occupants bid as high as $150 and also paid a fee each year for their use." "When the Reverend Eaton died in 1764 his son Samuel was asked to become the minister. His wig is now kept in the Meeting House as is his baptismal bowl which he used in baptising over 1100 persons. When his pastorate ended with his death in 1822, he and his father had occupied the pulpit for a total of 69 years." "When the town offices were located there, and the building also became a polling place, an oblong, broad side stove was installed." "John Allen of Harpswell, a master cabinet maker and a descendant of one of the families who worshipped in the Meeting House, has done much of the (restoration) work himself. Window frames have been especially milled and in the 7x9 panes of glass were obtained from the same firm that supplies Williamsburg. The off-white plaster...matches the original clam shell plaster. While repairing the plaster, a keg of bullets, believed to have been for use in the War of 1812, was found in the blind attic."

Further information may be found in the documents mentioned above or from the Meeting House itself.