

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**NHDHR INVENTORY #****Name, Location, Ownership**

1. Historic name Stoddard Town Hall
2. District or area Stoddard Center
3. Street and number 1450 Route 123N
4. City or town Stoddard
5. County Cheshire
6. Current owner Town of Stoddard

Function or Use

7. Current use(s) Town Hall
8. Historic use(s) Town Hall

Architectural Information

9. Style Greek Revival
10. Architect/builder unknown
11. Source _____
12. Construction date 1867-1868
13. Source Town records, written town history
14. Alterations, with dates handicap ramp, 1990s;
Wood frame oil shed, 1980s; privy, 19th century
15. Moved? no ☐ yes ☐ date: _____

Exterior Features

16. Foundation granite
17. Cladding clapboard
18. Roof material asphalt, shingles
19. Chimney material brick
20. Type of roof front gable
21. Chimney location one end, exterior single
22. Number of stories 1½
23. Entry location façade center paired
24. Windows double-hung

Replacement? no ☐ yes ☐ date: _____**Site Features**

25. Setting small town center
26. Outbuildings none

01/11/01

35. Photo #1 36. Date 7/08
37. Roll # 1 Frame # 13 Direction: NW
38. Negative stored at: Hist. Society of Cheshire County

27. Landscape features stone wall
28. Acreage 0.28 acres
29. Tax map/parcel # page 129, parcel #10
30. UTM reference Zone 18, 4773655 N 735127 E
31. USGS quadrangle and scale Stoddard 1:25000

Form prepared by

32. Name Alan Rumrill
33. Organization Preservation of Stoddard History (POSH)
34. Date of survey June 2008

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39. LOCATION MAP:

40. PROPERTY MAP:

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**NHDHR INVENTORY #****41. Historical Background and Role in the Town or City's Development:** see below**42. Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts:** 107 Local Government, 1630-present; Elementary and secondary education, 1770-present.**43. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation:** see continuation sheet**44. National or State Register Criteria Statement of Significance:** see continuation sheet**45. Period of Significance:** 1868-1958**46. Statement of Integrity:** see continuation sheet**47. Boundary Discussion:** see continuation sheet**48. Bibliography and/or References:** see continuation sheet**41. Historical Background and Role in the Town or City's Development**

The Stoddard town hall has been the most visible and important government building in the community for almost 140 years. The townspeople associate it with their traditional NH town government and as a public gathering place. The building still serves as a meeting place for many organizations: Stoddard Historical Society, Women's Fellowship, Stoddard Garden Club, weekly Yoga classes, monthly senior luncheons, annual Old Home Day bazaar and Christmas Eve town gathering. The selectmen's office is located in the building and all local, state and federal elections are held there. However, the annual town meeting is now held in the Lucy B. Hill Community Room at Faulkner Elementary School due to a lack of space in the original town hall.

The building is situated on a site that was previously the location of a two-story Unitarian church. A brick structure was built by the Unitarians in the 1830s. In 1841 the Town purchased the lower floor for use as a town hall. This progression was a result of the proliferation of denominations and the adoption of separate town hall buildings or spaces in New Hampshire in the 19th century following the passage of the Toleration Act in 1819. The town later purchased the entire building for use as a town hall.

In the 1850s the rear wall of the building began to collapse due to soil subsidence. Despite attempts to repair the building and correct the condition, the wall collapsed and the building was demolished. The town purchased the lot in 1866 to build a new town hall. The townspeople voted to build the new building in 1867 and the construction of the new town hall was completed in 1868.

Since then the building has been used for town meetings and other civic purposes such as plays, pageants and lectures. The selectmen's office is located in the building and the town records are stored there. The building has also been used for school plays, programs and graduation ceremonies. Furthermore, when Stoddard's one-room school burned in the winter of 1979, the town hall was used as schoolhouse for the remainder of the school year.

Surveyor's Evaluation:
 NR listed: individual _____
 within district _____

 Integrity: yes _____
 no _____

 NR eligible: individual _____
 within district _____
 not eligible _____
 more info needed _____

 NR Criteria: A _____
 B _____
 C _____
 D _____
 E _____

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**NHDHR INVENTORY #****42. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation**

Prepared by consultant Eric Lewtas, Daniel V. Scully/Architects

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

The building is in the simple common vernacular that is the remnant of the Greek Revival style that developed in the 1830's after the Federal style of the post-colonial era and early Republic. This style is characterized by simple pure rectangular massing of classical (or near classical) proportions, having little of no ornament, and the moving away from the earlier system for placing windows that is characteristic of the Georgian and Federal styles. Gable and eave roof edges are expressed and developed with classical moldings and given some visual weight. The eave and gable roof edges have the same moldings and overhangs, which is common to the style. The only elements that are any thing more than the most basic afforded by the vernacular Greek Revival is the window head trim, which are shallow pediments and the upper level windows on the front (south) elevation are strictly for architectural composition. There is not (and never was) any usable space for them to provide illumination for. The building has an integrated square steeple on the front (south) gable end. This was common with public and institutional building of the region. It is also typical of the mid to later 19th c. steeples that were a little larger than their predecessors of the 1820's to 40's, but are simpler and less elaborate – a “filtered” version. They didn't have the large roof edge overhangs, multiple “spike” spires or multifaceted lanterns. (The Sturtevant Chapel in Keene is a similar example done about the same time.)

At the time the building was built, the Greek Revival style was being displaced by newer styles in more urban and affluent areas. Italianate and Gothic Revival were predominate in Keene and Claremont at the time. But this building is not a revival, and it is not a throwback; it is a continuation of what was considered the proper form for a civic building in rural New Hampshire, continuing the common vocabulary of the other buildings on the main street – civic architecture.

The style is also reflective of materials entirely of local origin and proven local building technology.

STRUCTURE

The building is of heavy timber frame construction, with diagonal bracing at the corners and at the steeple. Posts and sills are hand hewn 8" x 8". Infill studs between the framing bents are approximately 3" x 6" sawn in vertical water powered saw mills. (They have the vertical marks that are caused by vertical sawing, which are distinct from rotary sawn marks or hand hewn marks.) This is typical of late frame buildings. The interior walls are furred out to cover the size of the frame, again typical of other town halls of this period. The structure of the roof is not visible, but is assumed to be some sort of timber frame that acts as a truss. The portion of the original ceiling visible in the south end of the building has not been disturbed, which indicates that the roof structure has not been reinforced as is often seen in similar buildings. There are no cross-tie rods visible, either original or added later. There is always the possibility that there are some above the later ceiling of the main hall. But the straight wall tops and roof line indicate that the frame is of sufficient design and construction to withstand the loads it has been subjected to.

The long frame members are hand hewn, the shorter are vertical mill sawn. This is consistent with the technology of the mid 19th c. Sawn lumber length was limited by the length of the carriage of local water powered saw mills. Joints are made with hand tools and held with wooden dowel pins (probably oak). The floor is framed by 5 lines of 10" x 10" beams supported at quarter points on stone rubble piers. The floor joists are 4" x 8" at approximately 2'-4" o.c.

The visible portion of the frame at the south end of the building indicates the frame including the steeple was all built at the same time and has not been altered. This is consistent with historical documentation and early photographs of the building.

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Overall the structure of the building is in sound condition. There is no apparent evidence of sagging, splaying, misalignment or wracking. The parts of the floor and steeple framing that are visible are intact and do not show signs of deterioration or over-stress. So long as the exterior of the building remains weather tight the framing will stay intact. However, the floor framing and crawl space are an issue that should be addressed (see below).

The one spot where deterioration is visible is the wall sill on the west wall south of the addition. A section several feet long of the clapboard, sheathing and sill are deteriorated right through, due to snow being held against the building above the foundation.

INTERIOR FINISHES

The original interior plaster finish is a 3 coat plaster system (scratch, brown and finish), presumably lime plaster (gypsum plaster came in later) on sawn lath. The Main Hall was covered with some a homasote board probably in the 1930's or '40's. This is a pressed wood fiber board, and seems to have a tongue and groove edge. Why this was installed is not readily known. It may have been installed to cover damage to the original plaster walls and ceiling, or it may have been done to make the room acoustically deader (hard plaster finishes on parallel walls can make a room acoustically harsh). No documentation is known that indicates when or why it was done. It has been painted at least once. The wood pediment trim over the windows is probably not original, but probably dates from the installation of the new wall board. The wood appears to be modern high-speed sawn, and does not have the same amount of paint build-up that the window jamb and sill trims have. Also it is installed over the new wall board. Whether it replaced an original pedimented head trim is not known.

The Main Hall has wainscoting of vertical tongue and groove v-match boards. This may or may not be original to the building. The chair rail at the top of the wainscoting becomes the window sills at the windows. This was a traditional treatment of interior trim for the previous 100 years at the time. But the wainscoting was wide horizontal pine boards or stile and rail panels. The vertical T+G became common by the 1880's. So it may have been added soon after the building was built, or if it is original, it represents an early transition.

Whether the interior partitions are original is uncertain and would need more extensive investigation to determine more definitively. But what is visible above the ceiling in the kitchen indicates that the partitions are not original to the building, that it was all one space. Based on the physical evidence and the single historic photograph of the interior dating from the 1910's or 20's, it is most likely that the stage was original, but did not have a proscenium wall as it does now (the stage was free standing).

The narrow hardwood strip flooring is almost certainly not original to the building. Most likely it was added in the early to mid 20th c. as part of the partitions and wall paneling.

INSULATION

The spaces above ceilings in the south end of the building have been insulated with fiberglass batt insulation. The exterior walls do not seem to be insulated, and the floor is not. Whether the ceiling above the Main Hall is insulated is not known. The building does not have a vapor barrier at the interior.

WINDOWS

The windows are single glazed wood double hung with 6/6 sashes. The windows appear to have their original sashes. Visual inspection shows them to be of a profile and construction that would have been used at

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that time, and they match historic photographs of the exterior. They retain about 50 to 60% of their original glazing, mostly in the upper sashes. One has been removed for the HC door. All the remaining windows have modern double hung aluminum storm windows.

DOORS

The doors have not fared well and only one original door has survived; the exterior door to the left of the main doors that leads into the kitchen. This door is therefore significant in that it is the only door of the original type and having original hardware. For this reason it should be preserved and restored if necessary rather than replaced or altered. The location of hinge leafs on the front door jambs indicate that the original doors were the full height of the opening, and that the transom there now was created to accommodate shorter replacement doors.

ADDITIONS AND ALTERATIONS

- The first addition is a shed at the northwest corner. Construction materials and methods indicate late 19th or early 20th c. It was built as a privy.
- A brick chimney was added on the east side for stoves in the main hall and Selectmen's Office. It cannot readily be determined if the interior partitions were built before or after the chimney. The brick sizes and lime mortar used indicate late 19th C. construction.
- A wood frame oil tank shed at the north end of the east wall in the late 20th C.
- Toilet rooms and an oil fired hydronic heating system were installed in the mid to late 20th C.

44. National or State Register Criteria Statement of Significance

The Stoddard Town Hall is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history. The building represents and illustrates 140 years of New England town government and United States political history. The New England town meeting is a national symbol of democratic rule by the people. This building served as the annual town meeting location for this small New England town for 130 years. The meeting room is intact and the records that explain and describe the 130 years of democratic rule carried out in this building still survive.

The town hall also represents 140 years of US political history. Town residents have given their input on national political issues by casting their ballots in this building since 1868. Stoddard's responsibility to participate in the election of state and national candidates, including during New Hampshire's presidential primary, is carried out in this building. It was here that the women of the town first voted following the passage of universal woman's suffrage. This building is one of many historic New Hampshire town halls that survive, but it remains in essentially unaltered structural form, it is the only historic governmental building that survives in the town, at it represents democracy in action.

The building also embodies the distinctive characteristics of an architectural type and period. The town hall is a typical mid-19th century New Hampshire Greek Revival building with front gabled roof, pedimented windows and doors and a wide band of trim beneath the cornice. It is the only public building of its style in Stoddard and is, in fact, one of few buildings representative of the style in the town. This is true because it was built at a time when Stoddard was in a period of rapid decline and loss of population and few buildings were being constructed anywhere in the town. Furthermore, the building actually exhibits elements of more than one style (see #42 above), illustrating the fact that New Hampshire builders often combined elements of "new" or popular styles along with what they already knew and were used to when designing buildings, thereby creating the mixed eclectic styles typical of the state's rural areas.

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**NHDHR INVENTORY #****46. Statement of Integrity**

The most important thing to be preserved on this building is not a single detail or a unique important historical aspect, but its general character. It is a good example of a rural mid 19th c. town hall, which is largely intact. The main elements of the building have not been removed or altered. The largest threat to this building is the loss of "Historic Character" – that is the elements that make this building what it is aesthetically and culturally. These include the most basic of elements, such as the clapboards, the windows, the entrance and the doors. There is a great temptation to "modernize" such buildings governed by budgets, a public indifference to architecture that was not the case when the building was created by the town, and a practice of addressing problems in short term solutions. As simple as it is, it still is a strong architectural statement that reflects the priorities and values of its builders. The future of these buildings lies in their having a useful life. It is understood that turning such buildings into museums is not possible or practical. In that vein, this town hall can continue to serve the town without being stripped of its character. People will care more about it if it is not blurred and altered until its original state is unrecognizable. Once that has happened there will be no will or cause to keep it.

The National Parks Service Historic Preservation Briefs address the loss of historic character in buildings. One of the ways this occurs is "Death by a Thousand Cuts"; the incremental loss of detail and elements, no one of which seems that significant, but collectively they result in the loss of the original composition of the building. This is what should be avoided in this case. For example, future wiring should be done with regard for the integrity of the wood work in the hall that is an important part of the design and architectural character of the building, which until recently was intact. The walls of the hall are furred-out 8" to bury the framing timbers. This leaves lots of space for wiring. Wiring could also be run under the floor or in the attic. If restoration (or any work) is to be done, the National Parks Service Historic Preservation Briefs should be consulted and followed. These guidelines will help with making sure that appropriate work is done, and that appropriately trained and experienced tradesmen are used for the work.

Probably the most important action in being stewards of the building is what not to do. The original windows and siding materials remain. Replacing those with modern forms and materials would dilute the historic character of the building's appearance. The addition of the handicap entrance that has no relationship in form or materials to the building, while permanently removing a window in the middle of the row, has resulted in a loss of character. Dividing up the hall into rooms would be a significant loss of historic character.

Finally, the building is in its original location, on its original foundation, and fits the historic streetscape and character of the village where it is situated. The streetscape has changed very little since the building was built; only two structures in the vicinity are more recent than the town hall. It is a visual and aesthetic focal point for Stoddard Center, helping to define the nature of the village and the quality of life present in the town.

47. Boundary Discussion

The building stands on its original lot. The small parcel (0.28 acres) was taken from an adjoining house lot in the 1830s in a lease agreement for the construction of a Unitarian Church. When the church was removed in the 1860s, the Town purchased the very same footprint from the owner in order to build a new town hall. The building sits on the northwest corner of the lot, within a few feet of those two boundaries. The lot has decreased in size slightly over the years due to the widening of roads that border the property to the south and east, and a tiny strip of land to the northeast was purchased from the adjacent home owner within the last two decades (see map).

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM**NHDHR INVENTORY #****48. Bibliography and/or References**

Garvin, James L. *A Building history of Northern New England*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2001.

Gould, Isaiah. *History of Stoddard Cheshire County, N.H. From the Time of its Incorporation in 1774 to 1854*. Keene, N.H.: Maria A. (Gould) Giffin, 1897.

History Committee of the Stoddard Historical Society. *The History of the Town of Stoddard, New Hampshire*. Stoddard, N.H.: Stoddard Historical Society, 1974.

Lewtas, Eric. "Stoddard Town Hall Historical Assessment". Keene, N.H. Daniel V. Scully/Architects, 2008.

Peirce, Charles. Mss. and typescript historical research, notes and maps. On file at Stoddard Historical Society, Stoddard, N.H.

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Address: 1450 Route 123N, Stoddard Date taken: 7/08 Negative stored at: Hist. Society of Cheshire

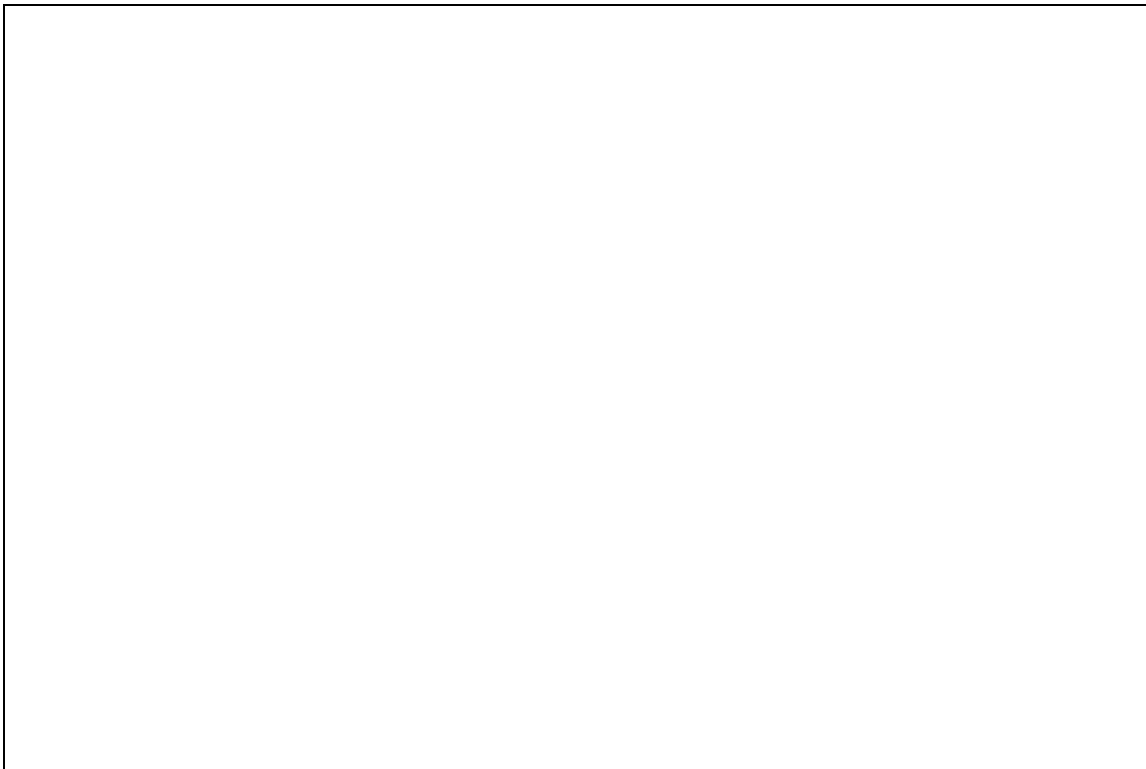


Photo #4 description: Stoddard Town Hall east elevation

Roll #: 1 Frame #: 19 Direction: SW

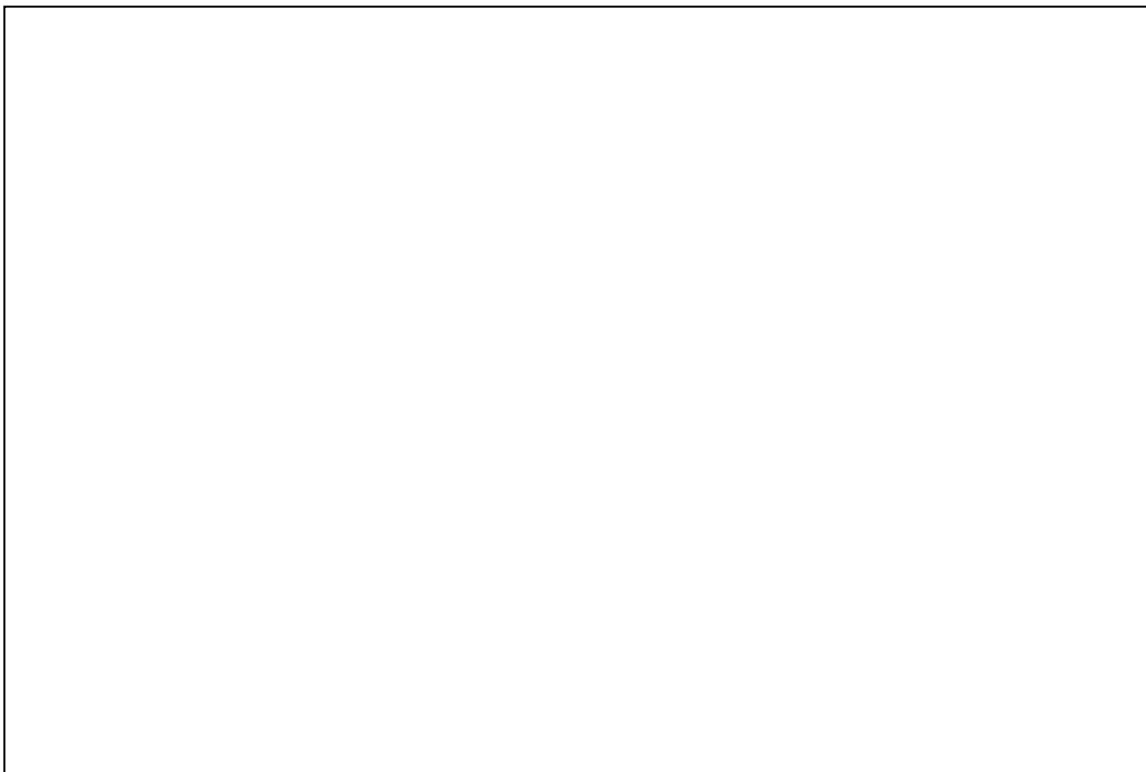


Photo #5 description: Stoddard Town Hall west side w/privy

Roll #: 1 Frame #: 22 Direction: N

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