

In Area no. A	Form no. 1
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MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, State House, Boston

1. Town North Reading

Address On the Common

Name Third Meetinghouse

Present use See continuation sheet

Present owner Town of North Reading

3. Description:

Date 1829

Source Parish Records

Style Federal

Builder Ebenezer and James Damon, Builders
Architect John Cutts of Boston

Exterior wall fabric wood

Outbuildings (describe) _____

Other features Tower with Henry N.

Hooper Co. bell (1860) and E.

Howard Co. clock (1909)

Altered Windows Date 1894

See continuation sheet for internal

Moved alterations Date _____

5. Lot size: 3.4 acre Common

One acre or less _____ Over one acre

Approximate frontage 490'

Approximate distance of building from street

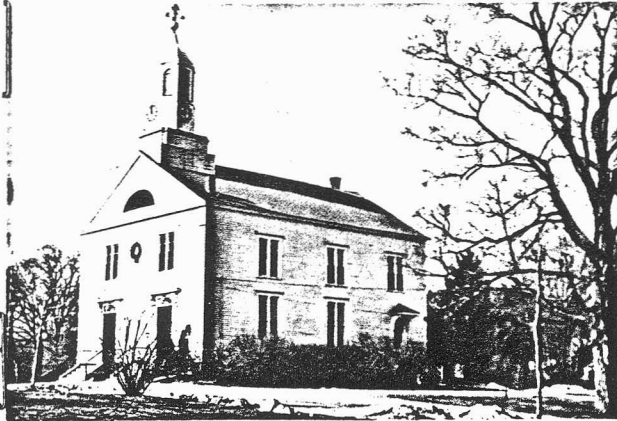
500'

6. Recorded by Church/O'Brien

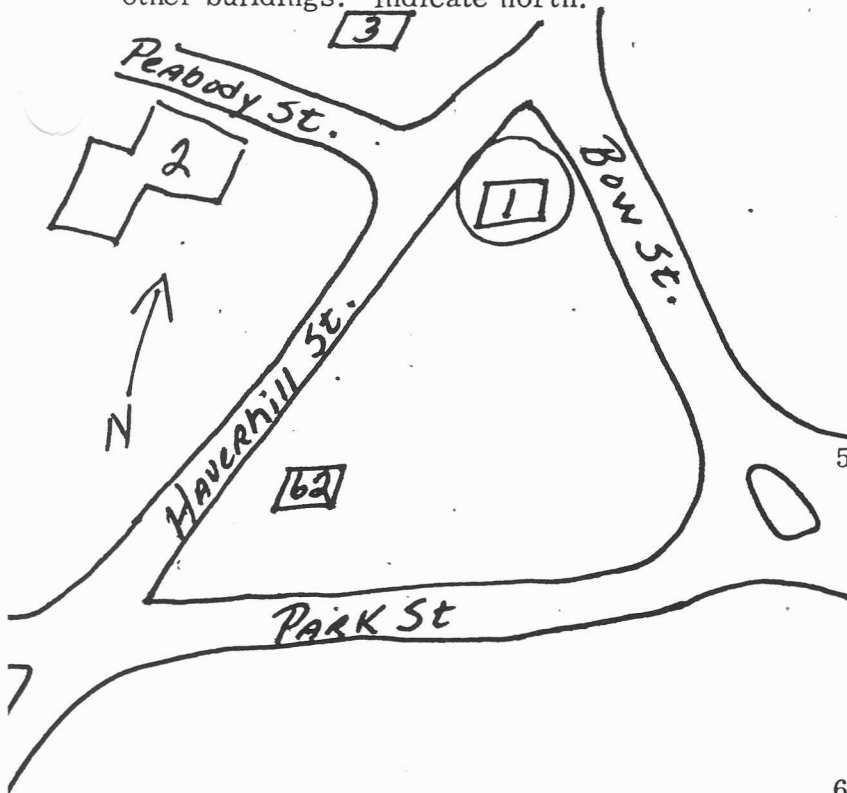
Organization Historical Commission

Date June 1978

2.



4. Map. Draw sketch of building location in relation to nearest cross streets and other buildings. Indicate north.



(over)

7. Original owner (if known) North Parish of Reading

Original use Meetinghouse, the third to be built on the Common

Subsequent uses (if any) and dates See #9

8. Themes (check as many as applicable)

Aboriginal	<u> </u>	Conservation	<u> </u>	Recreation	<u> </u>
Agricultural	<u> x </u>	Education	<u> x </u>	Religion	<u> x </u>
Architectural	<u> x </u>	Exploration/ settlement	<u> </u>	Science/ invention	<u> </u>
The Arts	<u> x </u>	Industry	<u> </u>	Social/ humanitarian	<u> </u>
Commerce	<u> </u>	Military	<u> x </u>	Transportation	<u> x </u>
Communication	<u> x </u>	Political	<u> x </u>		
Community development	<u> x </u>				

9. Historical significance (include explanation of themes checked above)

The Third Meetinghouse was built in 1829 replacing the Second Meetinghouse built in 1752 which replaced the First Meetinghouse built in 1713 when the Second Precinct (later North Parish) of Reading was incorporated.

After the Meetinghouse was built, a sharp and bitter controversy arose over doctrines preached. The issue, which eventually tore the Parish Society asunder, came to a head when the active majority of the Society, those with orthodox views, denied the use of the Meetinghouse to those with liberal leanings. The liberal group consisted mainly of Universalists with a smaller number of Methodists and Unitarians. A large part of the liberal group, however, were inactive and did not attend Parish Meetings. The liberals managed to persuade the inactive members to attend meetings and vote to aid them in their cause. Some time later, the liberals managed to gain the use of the Meetinghouse a portion of the year and eventually had its use for half the year.

Eventually the liberals outnumbered the orthodox and at Parish Meetings continued to frustrate orthodox attempts to regain control of the Parish Society and the Meetinghouse. The orthodox left the Parish Society to form the Congregational Society and build another church (A-18). The puritanical ideology of the old Parish Society as preached by Rev. Daniel Putnam and Rev. Eliab Stone from 1720 thru 1822 was perpetuated by the Congregationalists in their new church. However the interests of the old Parish

10. Bibliography and/or references (such as local histories, deeds, assessor's records, early maps, etc.)

Parish Records

Mddlsx s. 's. Registry of Deeds

Reading Town Meeting Records

North Reading Town Reports

50th Anniversary Celebration, 1903

Genealogical History of Reading, Eaton, 1874

250th Anniversary of Ancient Town of Reading, Eaton, 1896

Story of a Musical Life, Root, 1894

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
Office of the Secretary, Boston

Community:

North Reading

Form No:

A-1

Property Name: Third Meetinghouse

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

#9. HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

Society, i.e. the records, communion set and real estate, remained with the liberal majority (Universalists) as decreed by a Supreme Court decision of 1820.

The Universalists and other liberals continued to struggle on as different groups broke away from the Parish Society to form new societies, some using the Meetinghouse and one group building their own. According to the Parish Records, the family of Ebenezer Abbott clearly controlled the Parish Society during the second half of the 19th Century and well into the 20th Century. The familiar family names of officers in the Parish Society recorded for over a Century abruptly stopped appearing in 1835-6.

#7. SUBSEQUENT USES:

- 1835-6 The orthodox Congregationalists left the Parish Society to build another church and the liberals, i.e. Universalists, Methodists and Unitarians, continued on in the Third Meetinghouse.
- 1836 - 1900 Used principally by the Universalists, periodically by the Methodists and Unitarians
- 1840 Town Meetings began being held in the vestry
- 1841 Members leave to form the Episcopal-Methodist Church; return in 1868 to use the vestry when available after selling their church; left again in 1892 to join the Congregationalists
- 1856 Parish Society conveys the Common and the USE of the first floor and a portion of the second floor for use of Town as a Town House (municipal office) providing the Town pays all the expenses of the alterations
- 1856 - 1859 George F. Root, poet, teacher, singer, patriot and originator of the Normal Musical Institute brings the Institute to North Reading under the direction of Dr. Lowell Mason assisted by Bradbury, Root, George James Webb and August Kreissman. Guests attending concerts included Harriet Beecher Stowe, Henry Ward Beecher, Dr. Lyman Beecher and Charles Beecher

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

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- 1860-1 Civil War presentation ceremonies for enlistees
- 1860 - 1866 Baptist Church burned; Baptists share the Meetinghouse
- 1873 Farmer's Club believed to have used the building (although no documentation)
- 1878 Knights of Honor lease a part of the building, probably the lower hall vacated by Town when Flint Memorial Hall was completed
- 1894 - 1917 School house, lower hall
- 1909 - 1950's Grange #239 leased upper hall
- 1919- 1978 American Legion, George F. Root Post #181, lower hall and basement
- 1927 - 1931 Baptist Church burned; Baptists share the Meetinghouse
- 1931 Parish Society conveyed the entire building to the town
- 1945 - 1955 School house, lower hall and basement
- 1964 - 1971 Masons use upper hall

#3. ALTERED:

- 1855-6 Originally there was but one floor with a high vaulted ceiling and a second story singing gallery. Warren A. Campbell was hired to raise the Meetinghouse 3' in order to construct a story under the building, to carry the floor of the gallery across the entire length of the building in order to provide a full second floor, and also to divide the gallery itself into two smaller rooms. However Campbell chose to raise the Meetinghouse 7' and left the gallery as one large room which he was later required to divide as specified in the contract.

Staple to Inventory form at bottom

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- 1860 Purchased the Henry N. Hooper Co. bell for tower
- 1894 Single windows replaced by narrow double windows in "fitting" the building for a schoolhouse
- 1909 Purchased E. Howard clock for tower
- 1910 Electricity installed
- 1930 Rebuilt chimney
- 1931 Heating system replaced stoves in lower hall only
- Installed water
- Repaired fire damaged tower; minor repairs to clock and bell
- c. 1945 Plumbing installed for use as school house
- Jail cells installed in basement, but State never allowed them to be used

#1. PRESENT USE:

North Reading Council on Aging
Golden Age Club
North Reading Minit & Militia Company
AA Meetings
Board of Health Immunization Clinics
Senior Citizen Health Clinics
Civil Defense Headquarters
Auxiliary Police Headquarters
Recreation Committee's facility
Political meetings, groups and organizations, by appointment