



MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION
APPLICATION FOR INDIVIDUAL
NOMINATIONS TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER
OF HISTORIC PLACES

PART I: GENERAL INFORMATION

I. PROPERTY NAME

A. Historic Exchange Hall

(This is the name which has the longest association with the building at the time of its greatest significance. This will be the official name unless otherwise noted)

B. Common Exchange Hall

(This is the locally known name and in some cases may be the same as the historic name; please specify if you wish this to be the official name)

2. PROPERTY ADDRESS

Street Quimby Square, School Street at Main Street

Community South Acton

County Middlesex

Congressional District Fifth

3. PROPERTY OWNERSHIP

GLENN BERGER TRUSTEE

Name Wilbur Jones Tolman BLUEBIRD REACTY TRUST

(This should appear as legally recorded on an official list such as assessor's records or Registry of Deeds)

Street 77 Willow St.

City/Town Acton, Massachusetts 01720

State Massachusetts

Type: public _____ private other _____

PROPERTY SIGNIFICANCE continued

Areas of Significance-check and justify below

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic | <input type="checkbox"/> law |
| <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> literature |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> military |
| <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> music |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> philosophy |
| <input type="checkbox"/> communications | <input type="checkbox"/> politics/government |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> community planning | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religion |
| <input type="checkbox"/> conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> science |
| <input type="checkbox"/> economics | <input type="checkbox"/> sculpture |
| <input type="checkbox"/> education | <input type="checkbox"/> social/humanitarian |
| <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> theater |
| <input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> industry | <input type="checkbox"/> other (specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> invention | |

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(This section should list major sources from which information was obtained. Use standard bibliographic style, listing author, full title, publisher, date and location of publication)

Fletcher, James, Acton in History (Philadelphia and Boston: J. W. Lewis and Co., 1890)

Phalen, Harold R., History of Acton (n.p.: 1954)

"South Acton in 1840" (n. p.: n.d. [c. 1880])

"The Past and Present of a Notable Firm in South Acton" (n.p.: 1885)

Iron Work Farm in Acton, Inc. Files: Title and reference notebooks, Vol. 1

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreege approximately 7729 sq. ft.
(number of acres included in the nomination)

Quadrangle name Maynard
(name found on the full U.S.G.S. quad sheet)

Quadrangle scale 1 = 25,000
(scale of map: 1:25000 is preferred)

11. VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AND JUSTIFICATION

(This section must be exact since it defines the legal extent of the nominated property. The simplest way of providing this information is to include a copy of an assessor's map which shows the lot which the property occupies. Deed descriptions may also be used. The justification should explain the rationale behind the choice of boundaries)

See attached plate, H - 2A from Acton Assessor's Atlas

12. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/title Robert H. Nylander

Affiliation Acton Historical Commission

Street 144 Great Road

City/Town Acton

State Massachusetts

Date February 20, 1984

Telephone 264-4700

PART II: TECHNICAL INFORMATION.- DESCRIPTION

The description is a verbal record of the appearance of the property (both building and site). This section is intended primarily to describe visible, physical features of the property, but it also should note changes that have occurred over time. Keep your descriptions clear and direct, and remember that the main points should be complemented by the accompanying photographs. Additional information for any category may be included on a continuation sheet.

I. SITE CHARACTERISTICS

A. Describe the important topographical and landscape features associated with the property:

Exchange Hall stands on gently sloping land near the base of Great (formerly Prospect) Hill. In front of it, near the southeast corner, is a stone watering trough erected in 1896 by the Reform Club.

B. Describe the setting of the property: setback, spacing, etc.:

The building is set back an average of 15 ft. from the northern line of School Street and an average of 50 ft. from the east line of the part of Main Street running north from Quimby Square.

C. Describe the character and use of the surrounding land (natural and man made features):

Exchange Hall faces Quimby Square (formerly called Exchange Square and South Acton Square) and, until the location of Main Street was altered in 1906, formed the architectural termination of the approach to the Square from the railroad to the south. It is surrounded by a mixture of 18th through 20th century residential and commercial buildings: to the east it is flanked by the house built for Varnum Tuttle, one of the partners of Tuttle, Jones and Wetherbee Co. (129 School Street, 1856); to the north, the Jones cider mill (127 Main St., originally c. 1750, altered to a house c. 1910) and the Abram H. Jones house (129 Main Street, c. 1865); to the west, across Main St., Jones Tavern (128 Main Street, 1732 et seq.) and the bracketted Central Hall, formerly the tailor shop of Tuttle, Jones and Wetherbee (124 Main St., c. 1856); to the south, across School Street, a small memorial
(cont.)

Continuation of Site Characteristics, C.

park, the former South Acton Fire House, built in 1926 in the old Main St. roadway, and the former grocery store of Tuttle, Jones and Wetherbee (5-7 School St., 1866, on site of an earlier grocery of 1850)

F. Decorative Features

Describe and locate important elements such as door and window surrounds, roof trim, porches, pavillions, etc.:

All decorative detail is a rich interpretation of the Bracketted-Italianate mode. The cornices at portico, piazza and roofs are composed of scrolled and panelled brackets, each with a turned drop. Corner pilasters, square piers and columns have recessed, arched-top Italianate panels let into the sides. Window surrounds are plain architraves with crown cornices, except beneath the front portico and west piazza, and in the gables and cupola, where, as around the doors, a simple moulded architrave is used. See section G for details.

G. Elevations

Describe each side of the building (north, south, east, west):

South - The front is a three bay composition. The balconied portico effect formed by the recessed plane of the basement, 1st and 2nd stories is crowned by a cornice at 3rd floor level and its four square piers are linked at 1st and 2nd story levels by turned balustrades. The wall and gable above are defined by panelled pilasters and bracketted cornice returns and barges. The wide central basement door is flanked by a large window at each side. At first story level, the main entrance, a two leaf door, has large display bay windows at either side and at the east corner, the entrance to the hall stairs. (Latter door is a recent replacement.) In the second story, the central door is flanked by 6 over 6 light windows. At the centre of the third story, a segmental-headed blank mock window is likewise flanked by 6 over 6 windows, taller than those below, and above it is a round-headed window in the gable. The two-stage cupola surmounting the peak of the gable has a louvered round-headed opening in each side of the second stage, which has corner pilasters and bracketted cornice.

The segmental cartouche above the third story windows formerly contained the words EXCHANGE HALL in gilded wooden letters. (Until c. 1867 a rectangular cartouche below the windows contained the original name of the company - JAMES TUTTLE AND CO.; (cont.)

Continuation of Section G

and the otherwise blank frieze between the piers at second story level formerly had gilded letters naming the goods sold within.)

Originally, access to the main entrance was by flights of steps projecting forward from either end of the portico, a straight flight at the east, while that at the west curved to the north-west following the line of the piazza.

East and West - The sides are both six bays of similar disposition, with the third story windows taller than those below, all having 6 over 6 lights, and framed within panelled pilasters and bracketted roof cornice. Extending the length of the west side is a one story piazza whose southern end curves in a quarter circle to join the portico.

North - The back is three bays wide, framed by panelled pilasters and bracketted cornice returns and gable barges. Loading doors are in the centre of first and second stories, and a round-headed window in the gable. All windows are 6 over 6.

PART II: TECHNICAL INFORMATION -- SIGNIFICANCE

The statement of significance is an evaluation of the property in relation to the community, state or nation. This section must detail the outstanding qualities which distinguish the property and clearly convey which of the criteria for evaluation of National Register nominations are met. The period(s) of greatest significance should of course be emphasized, but a brief summary of the property's lifetime should also be presented. Historical and cultural associations as well as architectural quality are all part of the statement of significance.

1. CRITERIA

- A. Explain how the property meets at least one of the criteria for evaluation of National Register nominations (refer to the attached list of criteria):

Exchange Hall is part of a complex of buildings that illustrates 19th century changes in commerce from small local businesses to larger, departmentalised centres. Architecturally, it possesses integrity of location, setting and materials as well as exceptional qualities of design and workmanship, thus meeting criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places.

2. HISTORICAL STATEMENT

- A. Explain how the property relates to events of local, state or national history:

Exchange Hall was built in 1860 at a cost of \$10,000 for James Tuttle and Co. (later Tuttles, Jones, and Wetherbee Co.), which was the direct successor to the Jones Tavern store (established in 1750). In the prosperity following the construction of the Fitchburg Railroad, the partners James and Varnum Tuttle and Elnathan Jones, Jr., greatly expanded the existing business, erecting store buildings to accommodate different branches of it. Their resulting establishment, a forerunner of the department store idea, was, from c. 1850 to c. 1900, the most extensive of its kind in Middlesex County, west of Waltham. Exchange Hall was built to provide a focal point for their group of stores, as well as retail and storage space for their dry goods and clothing, and furniture and home furnishings departments

(cont.)

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(cont.)

Continuation of Section A

of which Jones was in charge. The third-story hall was intended for the community use of South Acton village, serving a number of functions. It was the meeting house for the South Acton Universalist Church from 1860 to 1878, and from the beginning into the 20th century it was used for dances, concerts, lectures, campaign meetings, caucuses, conventions, local theatrical productions, travelling shows, etc. It is still occasionally used for dances.

B. Discuss how the property reflects the lifestyle of its inhabitants and/or the culture which produced it (this may refer to original or subsequent periods):

The rich and exuberant architectural detail of Exchange Hall reflects the prosperity and optimism of the Railroad Era which was a leading factor behind the success of the company that built it; and in providing a meeting house for South Acton's first religious society and a central community meeting place, it reflects 19th century trends of interest in social improvement.

C. Explain how the property relates to important persons; explain how its occupants, particularly artists, may have been influenced by their physical surroundings:

The property relates to the locally prominent members of the firm that built it: James Tuttle (1818-1898) who opened a store in South Acton in 1839 and in 1845 assumed the Jones Tavern business from his father-in-law, Elnathan Jones; his brother, Varnum Tuttle (1823-1904); Elnathan Jones, Jr. (1829-1904) who worked in his father's store until 1845, making fancy goods his specialty, and then for James Tuttle and Co., of which he was made a partner in 1852. Jonathan K. W. Wetherbee, admitted a partner in 1867, was

(cont.)

D. Discuss the likelihood of obtaining information through archeological research:

As noted, a cooperage occupied the location in the 18th century; it is not known how severely the ground was disturbed in building the present structure.

E. Explain areas of historical importance not covered by the above categories:

In 1899, when the Tuttles, Jones, and Wetherbee Co. was dissolved and its property divided in severalty, Elnathan Jones, Jr., took title to Exchange Hall, which then descended to his daughter, Mrs. Carrie Evelyn Kimball, who sold it to the Tolman family in the 1950's.

Mr. Jones continued the dry goods and furniture business until his death, after which, until 1933, it was operated by the firm of Finney and Hoit. From 1933 to 1950, when

(cont.)

Continuation of Section C

Acton's town treasurer 31 years and postmaster 15 years.
Two noted lecturers who used the hall were Henry D. Thoreau
in the 1860's and Henry Ward Beecher in the 1870's.

Continuation of Section E

the business was finally closed, it was carried on under
the name of South Acton Department Store by Mrs. Kimball's
son-in-law, Otis J. Reed. The South Acton branch of the
Acton Memorial Library was located in the building for part
of the latter period. It is currently occupied by a number
of small businesses.