

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any 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.

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery

Other names/site number: n/a

Name of related multiple property listing: Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

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## 2. Location

Street & number: 2756 Braintree Hill Road

City or town: Braintree State: VT County: Orange

Not For Publication:

Vicinity:

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## 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_ statewide      \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_ A      \_\_\_ B      \_\_\_ C      \_\_\_ D

<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	<b>Date</b>
<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____	_____
<b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	<b>Date</b>
_____	_____
<b>Title :</b>	<b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_ entered in the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register
- \_\_\_ removed from the National Register
- \_\_\_ other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

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**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	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register None (0)

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION: Church

GOVERNMENT: Town House

FUNERARY: Cemetery

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL: Civic

RECREATION AND CULTURE: Historical Museum

FUNERARY: Cemetery

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MID-19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY: Greek Revival

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Foundation: BRICK, STONE (granite); Walls: WOOD (weatherboard); Roof: STONE (slate), METAL (belltower); Other: BRICK (chimney).

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

This nomination documents two historically associated properties, the 1845 Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and the adjacent 1802 cemetery, which are located on an expansive rural promontory in Braintree, Orange County, Vermont. The meetinghouse and cemetery are situated at the intersection of two rural gravel roads, Braintree Hill Road and Hockman Hill Road, and are embedded within a pastoral setting defined by pasture, stone walls with mature hedgerows, and isolated rural residential and agricultural development. Low-slung hills and mountain ranges frame the Braintree Hill setting, with the Green Mountains rising to the west and presenting an expansive landscape context. The wood-frame meetinghouse building is spare in its Greek Revival form, with a slate-sheathed gable roof design surmounted by a three-stage bell tower; stone and brick foundation walls; and wood clapboard siding punctuated by expansive and regularly-placed windows. Characteristic of the Greek Revival-style, the building is austere in form, with a muscular and highly symmetrical body framed by understated pilasters; an unadorned entablature; and a closed pediment at the gable ends. The interior of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is highly reflective of its historic role as a religious meetinghouse and town house. At the first level, a vestibule leads to an expansive gathering room filled with box pews and framed by large windows, anchored by a pulpit at the front of the room and a choir loft above the rear of the room. At the basement level, accessed through a separate exterior door on the building's west side, a single open meeting room is indicative of historical town house functions, now adapted for use as a museum for the Braintree Historical Society. Like the exterior of the meetinghouse, the interior is characterized by an austere and practical aesthetic demeanor, with a lofty open form at the first level articulated by original wood box pews and a wood paneled pulpit with subtle dentils; and a spare open plan at the basement level that is accentuated by expansive light afforded by the exposed basement walls. With its lofty open

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form and expansive natural light, the meetinghouse presents an idealized form for religious and civic gathering, with a purity of light and acoustical tone embedded within the building's design. Immediately to the north of the meetinghouse, the associated 1.12-acre Braintree Hill Cemetery is framed by stacked fieldstone walls, with burials dating from 1802 to 2017 and a naturalistic rural landscape form that contributes to the historic associations of the property. As an 1840s rural religious meetinghouse and town house with a historically associated cemetery, the property retains exceedingly strong integrity, with the original design, materials, and programmatic organization readily evident and experienced from both the exterior of the property within its lofty rural landscape setting and the interior of the building through its clearly delineated programmatic spaces.

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## **Narrative Description**

### Braintree Hill Meetinghouse Exterior Description

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is located on an expansive rural lot located at the intersection of two gravel roads, Braintree Hill Road and Hockman Hill Road.<sup>1</sup> The building is oriented to the south, standing close to the rural road within an immediate framing setting characterized by an open grass expanse and framing stone wall overgrown with shrubs and mature hardwood. The associated Braintree Hill Cemetery extends immediately to the north of the meetinghouse, accessed through a wood and slate pier fence. Beyond the immediate framing grass expanse and cemetery, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse lot is characterized by open pasture and early successional forest. A smattering of rural residential and agricultural development extends beyond the meetinghouse lot, reflecting a rural context typical of Orange County's, and Vermont's, rural hinterland.

The meetinghouse is rectangular in form, with a 37-foot width and 48-foot length. The plan of the building is reflective of dual functional programs, with the first, elevated, level reflecting religious associations as a Congregational meetinghouse, and a lower level walk-in basement developed for civic use as a town house. The building is intimately embedded within the surrounding grass expanse, with the primary entrance (south side) accessed almost directly from a naturalistic grass grade framed by a stone retaining wall, and a full-depth basement featuring exposed brick sidewalls rising above a sunken grade extending to the north. The effect of this site placement is one of subtle naturalistic unity, with the building and the framing landscape presenting a unified and symbiotic form. Materials are limited and restrained, with stone and brick basement and foundation walls, wood clapboard and trim at the first level, and a slate roof punctuated by two brick chimneys.

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse has been little changed from its 1845 construction, with ongoing alterations limited to material repair to address structural solvency and modest interior alteration at the basement level to accommodate historical society functions in the mid-twentieth century, discussed in further detail later in this document. As such, the meetinghouse is highly

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<sup>1</sup> The entirety of the legal lot that the building is located on is 24.68 acres, with the cemetery lot a distinct parcel of 1.12 acres. The identified historic property only comprises 3.48 acres, which is reflective of the immediate and historically significant setting. See Boundary Description for further detailed information.

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reflective of the property's period of significance, which spans from the date of the first burials at Braintree Hill Cemetery in 1802 to 1969, when the last members of the Braintree Hill Congregational Society died and the building's local religious associations ceased.

### *South Elevation*

The south elevation of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is the stylistic and functional centerpiece of the building. The elevation is symmetrical in form, with framing pilasters, a banded entablature, and closed pediment providing a cohesive framing design and a strong foundation for the three-stage bell tower rising above. Two, four-panel wood doors overlain by two-panel wood transoms line the elevation, accessed by two sets of low wood steps flanked by wood rails. The simple wood steps replaced an earlier granite stoop that previously extended the length of the building and was removed circa 1960s. An expansive 20-over-20 wood window is centered between the doors, protected by two-part painted wood shutters. Wood framing around the doors and window is of a simple form, with wood board surrounds and a subtle peaked wood lintel detail. A small wood nameplate is affixed to the west side of the elevation, bearing the inscription Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and various dates of Congregational organization. The three-stage bell tower is muscular in form and well proportioned, with a stepped base of painted wood boards surmounted by a belfry framed by small pilasters and louvered panels on each face. The belfry is capped by a low-pitched gable roof, sheathed in metal, with no spire or design accentuation, as is characteristic of the mid-nineteenth century Greek Revival form. A 1902 bell is hung in the belfry, fabricated by Meneely Bell Foundry in West Troy, New York. The bell is a replacement to the original nineteenth century bell, which was reportedly cracked following an episode of overzealous ringing and sold to a Boston church to raise funds for the Congregation. The current 1902 bell was hung circa 1972 as the meetinghouse transitioned to use by the Braintree Historical Society. Of note, the belfry framing members bear numerous carved names and initials, with dates spanning from 1900 to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>2</sup>

### *East Elevation*

The east elevation of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is characterized by a rhythmic and orderly form, with the lower brick basement wall lined with three 10-over-10 wood windows and the upper first level clapboard walls lined with three vertically aligned 20-over-20 wood windows. Like the southerly elevation, the first level windows are protected by two-part louvered shutters and are framed in wood surrounds featuring a peaked lintel detail above the window. Pea gravel lines the base of the wall at the basement level, added as part of drainage improvements by the Braintree Historical Society circa 2000s. A small arched brick ventilation opening lines the brick basement wall at the building's southeast corner, since infilled with brick. The arched opening is original to the building's 1845 construction, likely serving ventilation and air exchange purposes for the basement level town house. Review of historic photographs indicates that the opening may have ventilated stove pipes over time (see **Figure 9**).

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<sup>2</sup> Katharine F. Duclos. *The History of Braintree: Volume II* (Montpelier, VT: Capital City Press, 1976), 104-106.

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### *North Elevation*

The north elevation of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse features two 10-over-10 wood windows at the exposed basement level, and two of the characteristic 20-over-20 wood windows at the first level. Because of the interior placement of the pulpit in the center of this elevation, the windows are widely spaced toward the building's corners, with the pulpit framed within. The gable end features a centered 12-over-12 window at the attic level, and two brick chimneys frame the apex of the gable roofline, venting two wood burning stoves within (currently non-operable). The north elevation faces the Braintree Hill Cemetery, separated by a wood and slate pier fence line and a small grass expanse.

### *West Elevation*

The west elevation of the meetinghouse fronts Braintree Hill Road, separated by a wood fence line and a small grass space. The elevation mirrors that of the building's east side, except for the placement of a single door at the exposed basement level, placed to access the town house room at the basement level. As such, the basement level is lined with two 10-over-10 wood windows and a single recessed two-panel paired door, located at the southwest corner of the building. The raised first level is lined with three 20-over-20 wood windows, protected by two-part shutters. Two of the same small arched ventilation openings line this side, both of which have been infilled with brick rubble and wood panel coverings.

### Braintree Hill Meetinghouse Interior Description

Interior access at the first level of the building is provided by two doors located on the meetinghouse's south elevation. The doors open to a small vestibule that accesses the main body of the church through two doors, evenly placed to access aisles between the wood pew boxes. The interior space is spare and restrained, with smooth whitewashed plaster walls and understated painted wood trim and pilaster detailing. A narrow, curved stairway extends up from the east side of the vestibule, accessing the choir loft above and a ladder to the belfry and attic. An arched brick opening lines the interior wall separating the vestibule from the main body of the church. The opening is brick with slate block keystones, with red paint applied to brick in the modern period. It is likely that the opening served a heating and ventilation purpose to circulate air between the primary heated space and small vestibule.

The main church room is lofty and open in form, with high plaster walls and ceilings punctuated by the regularly-placed expansive 20-over-20 windows. Densely placed wood box pews fill much of the space, accessed by two framing aisles. The raised pulpit is centered on the north wall of the room facing the pews, rising from a wide single step platform, with open stairs on either side. The pulpit is flanked by pairs of pews oriented toward the center of the room, accessed by hinged gates. The pulpit has a paneled wood form featuring a subtle dentillated detailing. A suspended brass light fixture hangs from the center of the room, featuring globe lights and acanthus detailing. Two nineteenth century wood burning stoves stand in the back of the main room, just past the vestibule, with long sections of stove pipe extending over the pews from the stoves to the chimney outlets on the north wall flanking the pulpit. The stoves are

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matching “General Dix No. 3” models, with the stove on the west side fabricated by “Kelley & Carter of Randolph, VT,” and the stove on the east side fabricated by “Shepardson & Mitchell of Springfield, VT.” Both stoves are currently non-operational. They provided the only heat to the building, which is currently not heated in the winter months. While the stoves date to early development of the meetinghouse, it is unknown whether they are original to construction or later placements in the nineteenth century period.

The choir loft is accessed through curved stairs extending from the vestibule, with the loft running above the vestibule. An understated yet elegant railing with turned newel post lines the top of the stair. The loft features a simple board floor and a low kneewall overlooking the main body of the church interior. The space is afforded natural light from a centered window on the building’s south face. A steep wood ladder accesses the attic and belfry from the loft. As previously discussed, the belfry is infilled with louvered panels on each face and holds a 1902 bell, replacement to the original bell which was initially hung in the first 1807 iteration of the meetinghouse. Of note, the unfinished attic provides excellent vantages of the building’s substantial timber framing elements, and indicates that timber framing elements of the building were reused from an earlier structure developed on the site in the early nineteenth century. As documented by Jan Lewandoski, expert in heavy timber and traditional building techniques, in a structural report developed for the property in 2009:

*While the new meetinghouse was a new construction and stylistically advanced, some large timbers from the earlier church, or some other older scribe ruled building, were reused, notably as the tower sleepers in the attic and some of the tower girts...The roof system of the Braintree Meetinghouse is framed with a series of low angled kingpost trusses with some unusual features. While the tie beams and rafters are very large for the span, typically 9” x 11” and 8” x 10”, the 10” x 10” kingposts are dramatically reduced to a 3” x 10” dimension between their dovied heads and their bottom joggles. The connection by which the kingposts support the midspan of the tie beams is that of captive bolts, access to which are covered by wooden plugs in the enlarged kingpost bottoms. Large, 9” x 10” purlins between the principal rafters support a deck of 2” x 6” common rafters that carry the roof boards. The tower is framed in telescoping fashion with the lower tower posts tenoning into longitudinal tower sleepers, 11” x 12” timbers that span from the front wall plate to the tie beam of the second interior truss. These tower posts are trussed by 6” x 6” timbers that rise from the sleepers in the form of kingpost bracing. The belfry framing rises from transverse sleepers that rest upon the aforementioned longitudinal sleepers, but emerge for an additional 10 ft. of height.<sup>3</sup>*

Review of Town of Braintree Records undertaken as part of this project corroborates the findings of Lewandoski’s structural analysis, with a Braintree Town Meeting held on November 12, 1844

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<sup>3</sup> Jan Lewandoski, “The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, Braintree, Vermont: A Preservation Trust of Vermont Technical Assistance Report”, 2009.



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considering and approving the following article related to the building's construction (see **Figure 21**):

*Article 2: To see if the said inhabitants will give their consent to have the timber and all the materials with which the old meetinghouse on the hill in said Braintree is composed, converted into a new meetinghouse, giving the town the privilege of finishing off the lower story for a town house.<sup>4</sup>*

The basement level of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is accessed through a single door on the west wall of the building. As designed and approved by Braintree town voters in 1844, the first level and basement level were distinct in function and program, with the first level housing the Congregational Society of Braintree Hill and the basement level developed as an independent town house for Braintree. The interior of the basement is afforded ample light from regularly-placed windows and consists of one open volume, punctuated only by evenly spaced wood structural posts. Walls and ceiling are plaster, with the south wall overlain by barn board in the modern period as part of historical society museum functions. A low built-in bench lines the walls on the east and west sides of the room, designed to hold Braintree's residents during annual town meetings. The floor is of wide wood planks, which were laid over the original brick floor in 1880. Other notable alterations to the original basement town house form include a colonial-style fireplace and hearth framed in pine on the room's north wall, added by the Braintree Historical Society circa 1961, "to add an early American spirit to the historical room." This feature is not original to construction and is associated with the building's conversion to use as a historical society museum (see **Figure 28**).<sup>5</sup>

#### Description of Braintree Hill Cemetery

The 1.12 acre Braintree Hill Cemetery is owned and managed by the Town of Braintree, Braintree Cemetery Commission. The cemetery was owned and developed by the Braintree Congregational Society through the period of significance, and was conveyed to the Town of Braintree in 1988 by the Braintree Historical Society after the historical society assumed ownership of the larger parcel in 1970.

The cemetery stands immediately north of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and is located on a flat expanse that is framed by the meetinghouse to the south, Braintree Hill and Hockman Hill Roads to the west, a wood fence line and mature hardwood treeline to the north, and a fieldstone wall with overgrown shrubs and mature hardwood growth to the east. A wood fence-line runs along the south, west, and north sides of the cemetery, interspersed with slate posts that carry the alignment. While the cemetery was always developed with a wood fence, this fence has been replaced in kind over time, and the slate stone posts that carry portions of the present fence

<sup>4</sup> Town of Braintree Town Records, Volume III, November 12, 1844, page 14.

<sup>5</sup> Collections of the Braintree Historical Society: Town Meeting Record, March 2, 1880; "Groups Join to Renovate Church on Braintree Hill," *The Times Argus*, September 21, 1961.

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reportedly date to a cemetery rehabilitation project undertaken by the Braintree Historical Society circa 1965.<sup>6</sup>

The cemetery is naturalistic in form, with a generally irregularly-placed expanse of approximately 432 stones dating from 1802 to 2017, with most burials spanning from the early nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth. While generally open with only modest vegetative growth, several mature hardwood trees stand in the cemetery, with mature hardwoods also lining the cemetery boundary lines fronting the gravel roadway and fence-lines. Headstones and monuments are modest in form and are generally in good to fair condition, reflective of repair and resetting over time, with a mixture of slate, marble, and granite headstones. Informal family plots fill much of the cemetery, including large plots relating to the Abbott, Bass, Flint, Harwood, and Nichols families, all of whom comprised much of the membership of the church's small congregation over time. Reflecting the evolving religious and artistic symbolism of the period of development, many of the cemetery's earliest stones are composed of slate and are detailed with evocative urn and willow imagery characteristic of the period in New England, reflecting a growing Neoclassical and Greek Revival context for funerary development during the early-to-mid nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

As detailed in Town of Braintree Cemetery Records, the cemetery, "underwent considerable renovation in the 1960s and 1970s: brush was cut, the cemetery levelled and seeded, and broken headstones repaired and reset." Of note, according to local historian Katherine F. Duclos, author of *History of Braintree Volume II: 1883-1975*, some early burials associated with the site may be outside of the current cemetery bounds (and not within this documented property):

*No one knows exactly which was the first cemetery in Braintree, but the Braintree Hill Cemetery is certainly one of the oldest. Its earliest gravestone is dated 1802. The first burials were across from the present location in the corner of the field beside the road that continues down to Peth. Several of the older residents remember when about 20 gravestones, mostly slate, were still there as late as 1900. A few of them were moved across the road to the new part, but most fell or were pulled up by people who wanted to farm the land.<sup>8</sup>*

The cemetery is a contributing element of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse property as it was developed in association with the meetinghouse and is reflective of the significant community themes of development of the rural property. Additionally, the rural cemetery is characteristic of the type, period, and method of meetinghouse development and design.

It is important to note that remnants of a small stone foundation associated with a former parsonage developed in association with the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse in the 1870s is located immediately north of the cemetery boundary. The stone foundation is overgrown with shrubs and trees and is filled with debris from a variety of periods. The area is further detailed in the

<sup>6</sup> Katherine F. Duclos. *History of Braintree Volume II: 1883-1975*, 123; Town of Braintree Land Records, Volume 34, Page 497-498.

<sup>7</sup> James Deetz and Edwin S. Dethlefsen. "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow," *Natural History*, Volume 76(3), 1967.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine F. Duclos. *History of Braintree Volume II: 1883-1975*, 122-23.

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historic context and is included in the boundary of the historic property; however, more research would be required to determine whether the site bears information potential. See **Section 8** and the Boundary Description of the property for further information.

### Integrity

The physical and associational integrity of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery is exceptionally high, and the property readily conveys its significant identity as a mid-nineteenth century rural meetinghouse. The building's lofty vantage on Braintree Hill, embedded within a rural context of pasture, forest, and scattered agricultural and residential development, is a central facet of this integrity, providing continuity from the period of development to the present. The spare and elegant Greek Revival design of the building expresses high physical and design integrity, with a restrained and clearly articulated exterior form that is embedded within its framing pastoral setting, and an interior form that readily conveys the dual occupational identities of church and town house. The pragmatic and restrained materials employed in the building are largely original to construction or of the historic period, including the building's locally quarried granite foundation stones; brick foundation and basement walls; wood timbering and clapboard cladding; and interior detailing and plasterwork. Workmanship is readily discerned through the building's physical form, with the design and materials of the meetinghouse reflecting a strong sense of craft and architectural skill. In particular, the substantial timbering of the building's framing system is a remarkable expression of not only the building's 1845 construction period, but that of earlier meetinghouse construction in 1807, with the timbers reused from earlier meetinghouse development. Through this overall material and design integrity, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse's sense of feeling and association as a rural meetinghouse retain key associations to the period of significance, and the building retains ample physical and contextual integrity to convey its significance under the criteria of the National Register. Similarly, the associated Braintree Hill Cemetery, standing immediately north, retains strong integrity of location, memorial design, materials, workmanship, setting, feeling, and association, presenting an evocative portrayal of Braintree's religious, community, and civic life through the period of significance.

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## 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.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

RELIGION

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

ARCHITECTURE

**Period of Significance**

1802-1969

**Significant Dates**

1845

1934

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery is locally significant under Criteria A and C of the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) for its role in the community and religious development of Braintree, Vermont, and its striking Greek Revival form, with an exterior and interior design and rural contextual location that is expressive of significant strands of mid-nineteenth century rural social and community development patterns in Vermont. Completed in 1845 on a lofty hilltop to replace an earlier Congregational Meetinghouse and Town Hall, constructed in 1807, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse served as a community anchor for residents of rural Braintree, housing both the Braintree Congregational Meetinghouse and Braintree Town House through the first decades of the twentieth century. By the mid-1930s, as community development patterns oriented to the lowering-lying valleys of Braintree and the surrounding region, the site's isolated hilltop location eroded the property's central community role, with Braintree's Town Meeting and Town Office moved from the property to a valley location in West Braintree in 1934. Similarly, through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the meetinghouse's small congregation declined, with a loss of regular religious service and erosion of membership leading to a 1969 cessation of religious association with the death of the last Braintree Hill Congregational Society members, Mary and Ralph Nichols. Despite this ongoing transition at the site, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery continues to be a defining community resource for residents of Braintree and the surrounding region, drawing hundreds to its annual August Old Home Day and serving as the home of the Braintree Historical Society. As a locally significant architectural and contextual strand linking Braintree's earliest social, community, and religious development to its current community identity, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery bears significance under the criteria of the NRHP. The period of significance for the property spans from 1802, with the first burial in the Braintree Hill Cemetery, to 1969, the year that the property's last Congregational Society member died, and the property's local religious association ceased. This period of significance encapsulates both the property's significant architectural design and its social significance as an evolving civic and religious resource within the rural community of Braintree. The property meets Criteria Consideration A, as the significance of the property is derived from its architectural value and its strong local community associations rather than from specific religious associations.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

*The inhabitants of said town of Braintree are hereby notified and warned to meet at the Town House to act on the following business...To see if the said inhabitants will give their consent to have the timber and all the materials with which the old meetinghouse on the hill in said Braintree is composed, converted into a new meetinghouse, giving the town the privilege of finishing of the lower story for a Town House...*

Town of Braintree, Town Records, Volume III, Page 14, 1844.

*Reverend Ammi Nichols has been unable to preach much of the past year. A Sabbath School has been kept up by a few praying and faithful souls. Those living on Braintree Hill are so far from any church where religious worship is regularly maintained that it seems to be their duty to keep up public worship.*

Minutes of the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society, 1865.

*There was plenty of time after Randolph Town Meeting Tuesday for those who "wanted to see the fun," in Braintree to ride up the hill, and quite a number did. They had a regular old-time ring wrestle, and, according to report—plenty of forensics (some of it quite pointed) in which the affairs of the town were thoroughly aired...The chief question up was that of changing the place of Town Meeting from the historic old hill church to some place more accessible in the hard going of early March, when, as it is this year, it is very difficult and costly to break an automobile road through to the top of the old hill. It was decided Tuesday, though not without opposition, to hold next year's meeting at West Braintree. The meeting lasted until after 5 o'clock, with everybody feeling they had got their money's worth for the long day put in.*

*Herald and News*, March 8, 1934.

*For more than 40 years after regular Sunday worship was discontinued, members and friends, determined that the Braintree Hill Meeting House should be open at least one Sunday a year, organized the annual Old Home Day. In 1969, with the death of the last remaining member, the church became the property of the Vermont Congregational Conference and its fate appeared uncertain. However, back in 1961, the Braintree Historical Society had been founded by a few interested persons. They had been given permission to use the Town House in the basement of the church for a place to meet, and also as a repository for some of the items relevant to the town's beginnings. Alarmed by the questionable future of the church, and by the possibility of losing their meeting place, immediate proceedings were started by members of the society to obtain title to the church property. On Old Home Sunday, August 2, 1970, in a special ceremony, the*

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*deeds to the church and cemetery were presented to the president of the Braintree Historical Society by the attorney for the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ. As far as is known, this is the first time in Vermont that a former church edifice has been committed to the care of an historical society. It is now called the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, the name by which it was known when the first structure was built.*

*Vermont Life, Summer 1976*

#### Early Settlement of Braintree:

##### Here the Feathery Tops of Green Hills Seem to Meet the Sky the Whole Circumference Around

The Town of Braintree was granted November 2, 1780, in a legislative session that also included the granting of neighboring Roxbury and Northfield. As opined by nineteenth century Braintree historian H. Royce Bass, the impetus for Braintree's charter petition was, "money-getting, with the fever of speculation prevailing then as now." By the early 1780s, the 65 original proprietors, largely from Braintree, Massachusetts, had laid out the town, with three divisions subdivided into lots of 100 acres each. By the mid-1780s, rudimentary roads were being cut, "laid out where it should be thought necessary for the benefit of the town." One of the earliest roads laid out in this initial settlement period was one leading over Braintree Hill, passing obliquely over Quaker Hill and following the elevated spine of hills running southeast through Braintree, dividing the more rugged western half of the town from its eastern expanse bordering neighboring Randolph.<sup>9</sup>

By 1788, town governance structures had solidified, with the first recorded Braintree Town Meeting held on March 29 of that year. Between 1791 and 1800 the town's population rose from 221 to 531, with many of the original proprietors selling lots to settlers from Southern New England locales. In this period of early development, the lofty expanse of Braintree Hill proved a focal point for settlement, admired for its agricultural soils and, "views of so many points of interest...The feathery tops of green hills meeting the sky the whole circumference around, the nearer being outlined against the more remote, the whole forming a picture which far exceeds many that have engaged the artist's pencil," (see **Figures 1 and 2**). By the late 1790s, Braintree Hill had emerged as the community's first center of business, with a small store operated by Bass & French, dealing in a trade that was reputedly chiefly based upon barter. The store also did a brisk business in real estate, selling original lots from the Braintree proprietorship. The community's first doctor was also located on Braintree Hill, with Dr. Ithamer Tilden practicing in a residence located at the present-day juncture of Braintree Hill and Hockman Hill Road. Rounding out the community assemblage, Dr. Samuel Thayer operated a small pill and elixir business, with a short-lived potato whiskey distillery down the road, along with a boot and shoe store, and cabinet shop.<sup>10</sup>

The origins of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse arose from this initial community development context, with establishment of a religious house of worship and integrated town house a key civic component of the early settlement anchored upon Braintree Hill. As early as the 1780s,

<sup>9</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle and Company State Printers, 1883), 5-16.

<sup>10</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree* 32-33.



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Congregational Minister Elijah Brainerd of Randolph had provided ministry house-to-house, with no formal church in Braintree. In 1794, the Braintree Congregational Church was constituted, with eight members recorded in the congregation's early ledgers as "answering to the divine command," (see **Figure 19**). By 1795, a Town Meeting was warned "to see if the town will appoint a committee to agree with some minister of the Gospel to preach in this town," and Town of Braintree residents had voted "to build a Meetinghouse on Lot 29 of the First Division of Braintree." The site proposed for the meetinghouse was squarely within the fledgling community center anchored upon Braintree Hill. The building, which was completed in 1807, fully integrated religious and civic functions, reflecting the porous nature between religious and civic identity in the early settlement period. Further illustrating this, the Braintree Congregation's first minister, Reverend Ammi Nichols, served as both Congregational Minister and Braintree Town Clerk for much of the period, acting as Congregational Minister on Braintree Hill for 41 years in tandem with his civic role. As described by local historian H. Royce Bass, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse became a defining physical landmark for the fledgling community, acting as both civic and religious center:

*The dimensions of the old meetinghouse are not known; we can only say they were large. It stood facing the west, the north side being nearly in line with the fence and horse sheds south side of the cemetery...The meetinghouse grounds were donated by Ebenezer White, to remain the property of the church and society as long as the house stands on it. The house had three entrances through the front, two directly into the side aisles of the edifice and the other into the base of the belfry, leading thence through a small entry to the middle aisle and also up a flight of stairs to the gallery. The belfry was a peculiar structure being about 8 to 10 feet square, forming a front projection to the building from the ground up. The bell that was hung in it was presented to the church by Samuel Bass of Randolph, Massachusetts, the father of Jonathan, who also gave liberally for building the house. It was one of the finest toned bells that ever called a congregation together. While being toned for a funeral some years afterwards it was cracked. It was then considered to be of little value and was sold, the proceeds being applied to a church debt...As already intimated there were three aisles, one middle and two side. Each had a row of pews on both sides. The pews were square...It was many years before a stove was used in the old meetinghouse. Blinded by the superstition that it was wrong to have a comfortable fire in the house of god, people shivered in winter over foot-stoves. Services were quite lengthy in those days, too. The windows were large, high, and without blinds. Both inside and outside the house was perfectly plain. Town meetings were held in it, 1807-1845, for 39 years.<sup>11</sup>*

The establishment of the Congregational Church on Braintree Hill was reflective of a wave of Congregational expansion in Vermont in the late eighteenth century, as settlers from established Congregational bastions including Connecticut and Massachusetts moved north into Vermont's hinterlands. As documented by Congregational historian John M. Comstock in his 1915

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<sup>11</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 31.

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*Congregational Churches of Vermont and their Ministry*, church development generally followed the paths of community settlement west and east of the Green Mountains, with the first churches settled in Bennington (1763), Newbury (1764), Westminster (1767), Windsor (1768), Guilford (1767-68), West Brattleboro (1770), and Norwich (1770). From the 1770s to the 1790s, as settlement gained momentum following the cessation of the Revolutionary War, more congregations formed, with a documented 94 Vermont Congregational Churches by 1800, including that of Braintree Hill. As remarked by Vermont historian Raymond H. Hall, the organizational tenor of the Congregational Church was particularly well-suited to Vermont's scattered and often isolated development, with "the genius of the Congregational Church perhaps best indicated by the fact that even today Congregationalists are more prone to think of themselves as churches rather than a Church." This autonomy proved well suited for expansion in the range of isolated and small villages that sprung up in Vermont in this period, with relatively independent congregations formed in communities across the state. Within this context, as Vermont's population grew, so too did the number of Congregational organizations, with 104 new or reorganized congregations established between 1800 and 1830.<sup>12</sup>

Even as Congregational development surged in the newly established state; however, the early decades of the nineteenth century saw periods of stagnation and transition in Vermont's Congregational communities, as detailed by John M. Comstock:

*In some cases the first organizations became extinct. Other denominations, notably Baptists, Methodists, and Free Baptists had come in...Many of the Congregational names added to our roles before 1830 have long since disappeared. Some were no doubt unwisely planted and unnecessary; many towns were over-churched from denominational zeal; some churches perished through internal dissensions...The shifting of population also began early to cause "abandoned farms" in the older towns. It is not difficult to account for the long list of dead churches in the state.<sup>13</sup>*

While the 1807 Braintree Hill Meetinghouse remained both a religious and civic fixture for Braintree through the first decades of the 1800s, the "shifting populations" referenced by Comstock in his assessment of the state's religious developments were evident early on Braintree Hill, with a steady erosion of the primacy of the property as a community focal point evident only decades after the property's establishment. Through the first decades of the nineteenth century, Braintree's other small settlements, most notably Peth, Snowsville, and West Braintree, grew in importance and economic diversity, with a series of mills and manufacturing facilities driven by the town's waterways pulling settlement and money toward the lower-lying areas. Cementing this downslope ebb, the arrival of the Central Vermont Railway in 1848 did much to rearrange the economic and community order of the town, with the river valleys and transportation corridors far from the raised prospects of Braintree Hill becoming dominant community drivers. As early as the 1810s, the Braintree Hill Bass & French Store had closed,

<sup>12</sup> John M. Comstock. *Vermont Congregational Churches 1762-1914* (St. Johnsbury, Vermont: The Caledonian Company, 1915,7-11; Raymond A. Hall. "Congregational Churches of Vermont," *Vermont History*, January 1956, Volume XXIV No. 1.

<sup>13</sup> John M. Comstock. *Vermont Congregational Churches 1762-1914*,10.

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with proprietor John French “going west” in 1817. The hill’s other small-scale businesses waned over the period, with Braintree Hill effectively an outlier to the town’s main pulse of development by the 1840s. Nevertheless, with its established meetinghouse and burying grounds and intimate association with Braintree’s earliest settlers and prominent citizens, Braintree Hill retained a lasting role in the community’s civic identity, even as the rapidly spinning wheels of progress moved elsewhere in the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup>

Construction of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse:  
Converting Old to New and a Continued Union between Congregation and Town

By 1844, the Congregational Society and Town of Braintree were contemplating construction of a new meetinghouse, with the original 1807 building deteriorating and reputedly too large for the small congregation. In Braintree’s Town Meeting of 1844, residents voted on a proposition to “see if the town will relinquish the claim to the old meetinghouse and to see if the town will build a town house.” Ultimately Braintree voters decided to expend “not more than 300 dollars in construction of a town house,” which would again be co-located within the Congregational Society Meetinghouse on Braintree Hill (see **Figure 21**). As detailed previously, Congregational Reverend Ammi Nichols played a key role in this construction campaign, both as longtime Reverend for the Congregational Society in Braintree and longtime Town Clerk for Braintree. It is lost to the historic record whether town deliberations included any debate regarding the relevancy of the Braintree Hill site for town and church affairs even as much of the pulse of development moved away from Braintree Hill. In any event, by the end of 1844 the Town of Braintree had refined the vote yet again, meeting again in November to vote on a proposition to determine:

*If the said inhabitants will give their consent to have the timber and all the materials with which the old meetinghouse on the hill in said Braintree is composed, converted into a new meetinghouse, giving the town the privilege of finishing off the lower story for a town house.<sup>15</sup>*

Building upon the Town of Braintree’s \$300 share for the town house portion of the building, the Congregational Society developed a committee of five to “fix on a place for a meetinghouse, to draw a plan of the same, and to agree with the Town Committee in regard to a town house.” To support the construction effort, the Braintree Congregation raised money from the sale of pews, the box pews which remain in the building today, with a total of \$1361.10 recorded in Society ledgers raised from the effort (see **Figure 22**). The majority of the pews were bid by extended family networks settled upon Braintree Hill, most notably members of the Nichols, Bass, Lyon, Flint, Kidder, and Partridge families, as well as a number of other longtime Braintree Hill residents.<sup>16</sup>

While the builder of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is unknown and was not identified through research in Town of Braintree or Braintree Congregational Society records, several key facts

<sup>14</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 32-37; Katherine F. Duclous. *History of Braintree Volume II*, 89-97.

<sup>15</sup> Braintree Town Records, Volume III, November 12, 1845.

<sup>16</sup> Congregational Society of Braintree Records, December 7<sup>th</sup> 1844. On file at the Town of Braintree Town Office.

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provide insight into the building's provenance and construction. As recorded in Town of Braintree Town Records, timbers and "all materials" were reused in the building's construction. This salvage and reuse is also supported by structural analysis of the building's framing, which indicates that the meetinghouses timbers and joinery style predates the 1845 construction period (see previous discussion in **Section 7**). While not confirmed by the historic record, it is also probable that the building was influenced by the adjacent construction of the nearby West Brookfield Congregational Church, which was constructed in 1839 three miles to the north. The two meetinghouses are remarkably similar, sharing a mirroring vernacular Greek Revival aesthetic and scale that is quite suggestive of local influence and interchange in development. Also supporting the likelihood of this relationship, one of the "Congregational Committee of Five" tasked with planning construction of the meetinghouse was Augustus Flint, whose cousin George Fenton Flint is the attributed builder of the West Brookfield Congregational Church. With an extensive kinship network spanning between Braintree, Brookfield, and Randolph, it appears probable that some element of shared design and construction discourse may unite the two buildings. Further research may serve to further clarify this potential relationship.<sup>17</sup>

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was completed in 1845, featuring a brick-walled lower level for the "town house" portion and wood-framed clapboard walls surmounted by an integrated bell tower rising above a gable roof. As recorded by historian H. Royce Bass, the building stood atop a stone foundation from a local granite ledge located "a mile north of Mud Pond at the foot of Oak Hill." Bass further documented the building as follows:

*The committee was empowered to expend no more than could be raised by sale of the pews, the avails of the old house, and the \$300 voted by the town. Work began on this basis; the new edifice being erected in 1845 and dedicated early in 1846. Since this time the town has nothing to do with religious matters. The spacious grounds or "common" belonging to the church have been the scene of many lively times on election and especially June training days. When the old house was dedicated, the roadside from Ebenezer White's (William H. Nichols) to the corner, and part of the south and east sides of the Common, were lined with stands of tents for selling eatables.<sup>18</sup>*

Development and construction of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse reflected larger architectural and cultural trends in mid-nineteenth century Vermont, existing on a continuum of meetinghouse design that provides insight into the changing face of religious design across the region and state. As summarized in the *Religious Buildings, Sites and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*:

*The common mid-to-late 18th century meetinghouse of northern New England was a rectangular, post and beam, clapboarded building with the main entrance in the middle of the long eaves front and Georgian style detailing. The Rockingham Meetinghouse, begun in 1787 and completed in 1799, is an excellent*

<sup>17</sup> Alice Webster Wakefield. *West Brookfield and Thereabouts* (West Brookfield, VT: Alice Wakefield, 1985), 35-37; H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 135-141.

<sup>18</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 32.

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*example. The pulpit, usually elevated and reached by steep steps, was on the long rear wall directly across from the main entry. Boxed pew seating was on the main level, often with more seating in a gallery running along sides and rear of the space. Stairs leading to the gallery were outside in enclosed extensions called porches on one or both gable ends or in a corner inside the building.*

*By the early 1800s the meetinghouse form gradually evolved into what is recognized as the common church form: a rectangular shape with a gable front entrance and tower integrated into the main body of the church. These towers and steeples were used in Massachusetts and Connecticut a number of years before they appeared in northern New England. The 1792 West Wardsboro Baptist Church in Wardsboro is a good example of the transitional period between the eaves front entrance form and the gable front with tower form. This church has its main entry in the middle of the eaves front wall, which is facing the road, but on the gable end is a tall, four story, projecting tower block topped by a belfry (probably a later addition). There is a secondary entry in the tower side wall facing the road.*

*The 1799 Strafford Town House shows the further transition to the gable front form. The Town House has a gable front orientation with a projecting tower block providing access to the main floor and gallery. Inside, the pews face the gable end where the pulpit is located. This form was utilized by Charles Bulfinch for churches in Massachusetts and popularized by Asher Benjamin in his "Designs for a Church" in his 1797 book, *Country Builder's Assistant*. Benjamin, from Greenfield, Massachusetts, is known to have lived for a time in Windsor, Vermont. Through Benjamin's publication and the work of other influential architects, the gable front rectangle became the common church form for churches in Vermont built around and after the turn of the 18th century.*

*Asher Benjamin, in his *Country Builder's Assistant* (1797) helped to bring about a third phase and major change which was strongly influenced by English ideas. Meetinghouses were now called churches and the pulpit and entrance were relocated at opposite ends of the long axis of the buildings. The entrance was located in a tower at the gable end, as in the Strafford Town House (1799) and later with the tower incorporated within the building mass as in the Old West Church in Calais VT (built 1832).<sup>19</sup>*

In contrast to the original 1807 Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, which featured a belfry characterized by historian H. Royce Bass as a "peculiar structure being about 8 to 10 feet square, forming a front projection to the building from the ground up," the new 1845 meetinghouse had turned the stylistic corner, integrating the belltower into the main body of the building and reflecting the now-near universal gable roof form. Thus, while certainly of a smaller and more minimalistic design order and scale than other larger churches of the period, the Braintree Hill

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<sup>19</sup> Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 2001, 1-4.

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Meetinghouse was reflective of similar strands of development and stylistic evolution. Importantly, too, the Meetinghouse conveyed a clear and well-executed grasp of the prevailing Greek Revival design mandates of the period, with a stark and well-proportioned physicality that incorporated key Greek Revival elements of the period, as further contextualized by the *Religious Buildings, Sites and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*:

*The Greek Revival style was wildly popular in Vermont from the 1830s to the 1870s. It spread into Vermont mainly through builder's handbooks that laid out construction and design guidelines and through the influence of important master builders. The pattern books helped rural builders who may have had little exposure to good standing examples in their remote locations. In particular, Asher Benjamin published many pattern books that embraced the Greek Revival style, providing designs for Greek Revival style churches in *The American Builder's Companion* in 1827 and *The Builder's Guide* in 1839.*

*Common characteristics of Greek Revival churches in Vermont are a rectangular shape with the main entrance in the center of the gable front (temple front) wall. The frames are commonly post-and-beam. Exterior walls may be clapboard, brick veneer or load-bearing brick, or stone. The temple fronts may have a two-story or monumental porticos and sometimes columns in antis. Columns or posts are wood or brick covered with stucco. The gable pediment may be closed or open with cornice returns. The main entrance is usually framed with a classical entablature and pilasters. Other stylistic details include pilasters at building corners, on the walls, and around doors; and classically detailed entablatures. Windows, with trabeated lintels, range from six-over-six double hung sashes to thirty-over thirty sashes. Some windows are even triple-hung with multiple glazing units. Belfries, located on the roof ridge near the front of the building, are usually four-sided with louvered panel inserts that protect the bell and interior while also allowing the bell to be heard when rung. Some are domed, with detailed columns on the corners, while others have flat or shallow hipped roofs and detailed with pilasters. Steeples are rarely found in this style.*

*Architectural pattern books also provided details on church interiors. Most have plaster ceilings and walls, perhaps with board wainscoting to chair rail or window sill level. Some walls may also have wall and corner pilasters. Ceilings may have elaborate plaster medallions or classical plaster or wood cornices. Many churches have choir lofts or balconies across the back of the sanctuary (over the one story front hall); if so, the balcony wall may be treated with a full entablature. Windows and doors have wooden surrounds, perhaps eared or with straight or peaked lintels. Pews often are simply paneled with scrolled tops at the ends.<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>20</sup> Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 2001, 7.

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With its spare gable-roofed rectangular form; carefully composed southern-facing entry defined by a temple-like rhythm and proportionality featuring a closed pediment and framing pilasters; squat bell tower with four-sided louvered faces; and interior plastering with pilaster details underlying a choir loft, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was an unassuming, yet highly confident, reflection of important 1840s design aspirations, with the programmatic functions of the building—devoted to both religious and civic use—framed in a clear and current architectural language. As designed, and as physically composed to the present, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is a cogent rural reflection of Greek Revival design precepts dominant in the period, as intoned by Asher Benjamin in his 1844 *The Architect: Or Practical House Carpenter*, written the year before construction on Braintree Hill of idealized spaces for public worship:

*General remarks on houses erected for public worship: Their character should harmonize particularly with the purpose for which they are designed; for the same proportions which would be beautiful in a room of a light or gay description, would be a defect in one of a solemn or devotional character. A building erected for public worship should therefore be so contrived as to produce in the beholder serious and devotional feelings. This effect is obtained by composing the building, generally, of large, bold, angular outlines, by continuing the entablatures and cornices unbroken over the columns and pilasters, and giving all the decorations, either of mouldings or sculpture, a large and grave appearance; excluding all ornaments composed of slender, curved, or winding outlines, which are expressive of lightness and gayety. The windows should be large, and so constructed as to admit the air to circulate freely throughout the house, without producing a glare of light; for a glare of light, and light and gay colors, are opposed to solemnity in a house of worship...The pulpit ought to partake of the character of the building in which it is erected...It has been a common practice to make two staircases to a pulpit, a practice which cannot be justified by the rule of proportioning the means to the end, or any other, except that of uniformity. There does seem to be a great impropriety in erecting two staircases, where only one person is to ascend, and who cannot, of course, use but one at the same time; but it is difficult to preserve the necessary uniformity without two staircases, and it will therefore be advisable to construct two, yet in such a manner as to make the least possible show.<sup>21</sup>*

From the Braintree Meetinghouse's bold angular design and muscular rectilinear massing to its stately pulpit framed by symmetrical stairs presenting balanced proportions, the architectural framework of mid-nineteenth century religious and public design is evident, writ on a rural and naturalistic Vermont landscape (see **Figures 23** and **24**).

#### A Dwindling Congregation: Braintree Hill in the Late Nineteenth Century

Even as the new Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was dedicated for service in 1846, cementing a continued religious and civic identity for the lofty site, archival records of the Braintree

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<sup>21</sup> Asher Benjamin. *The Architect: Or Practical House Carpenter* (Boston: L. Coffin Publishers, 1844), 95-97.

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Congregational Society depict an increasingly stagnant congregational population through the second half of the nineteenth century (see **Figure 25**). In 1844, the year new construction was initially contemplated, the Braintree Hill Congregation was composed of 32 males and 55 females, 24 of whom were documented as “non-residents,” comprised of family networks who had moved elsewhere as part of large-scale emigration from Vermont’s hillsides during the period. By 1855, the Braintree Hill Congregation had fallen to 11 males and 19 females, 20 of whom were recorded as non-resident. Through 1864, the small Congregation remained steady, though low, with 16 males and 19 females, 13 of whom were documented by this time as “absent.” In 1872, numbers had inched somewhat higher, with 17 males and 27 females; however, the number had fallen again by 1885, with 10 males and 21 females, 14 of whom were non-resident. By 1909, the situation had become far more dire, with 7 males and 10 females recorded as members of the Braintree Hill Congregation. By 1915, this small number had been further winnowed, with a recorded 4 males and 8 females.<sup>22</sup>

The steady atrophy of the Braintree Hill Congregational Society reflected an array of contemporaneous factors. Importantly, there was a substantive decline in Braintree’s population over the period, with a high-water mark of 1,232 residents in 1840 ebbing to only 776 by 1900. Exacerbating this diminished demographic context, the cultural and economic center of gravity within the town had also shifted, as previously discussed, with population concentrations in lower-lying areas of town, particularly following the Central Vermont Railroad’s alignment through West Braintree. At a base level, as mused by local historian H. Royce Bass in 1883, the geographic aspect of Braintree was never one of propulsive growth potential, with “The position of Braintree not favorable to the growth of large villages within it, though the railroad might contribute thereto.” Additionally, as important as the town’s ebbing population, the growth of other religious institutions also changed the cultural landscape of Braintree and its environs during the period, with the Braintree Baptist Church erected in 1815 and a “Christian Church” established in Peth in 1817. This Peth Church was subsequently moved to Snowsville in 1844 and adapted for use as the East Braintree Congregational Church, adding another Congregational body to the small town.<sup>23</sup>

These incremental changes appear to have continuously eroded the foundations of the Braintree Hill Congregational Society, with the small congregation in many senses an increasingly tenuous island framed within an evolving community context both in Braintree and regionally. By 1866, the Congregation had entered the ranks of Vermont’s “Aided” Congregational Churches, requiring support from the broader Vermont Congregational Convention to pay for continued ministerial services. These pressures grew more marked following the 1865 retirement of longtime minister Reverend Ammi Nichols. Having served as minister for Braintree Hill from 1807 to 1865, with only a small hiatus from 1846-1853, Ammi Nichols was in a true sense the veritable bedrock of the Congregation, renowned as the most senior Congregational Minister in the State of Vermont and an untiring and passionate defender of continued religious service on

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<sup>22</sup> Records of the Braintree Congregational Society, archival manuscript on file at the Braintree Town Office, records of the Braintree Historical Society.

<sup>23</sup> Vermont Historical Society, Vermont History Explorer: Vermont Census Records, Braintree. Accessed May 23, 2024 at [Census Records — Vermont History Explorer](#); Katherine F. Duclos. *History of Braintree Volume II: 1883-1975*, 108-117; H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 6.



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Braintree Hill. As documented in the 1865 *Proceedings of the Vermont Congregational Convention*, Nichols was widely considered the “Patriarch of Vermont Ministers,” with an unwavering “strong affection for the little church on Braintree Hill.” With the retirement of Ammi Nichols, the small congregation was plunged into an extended period of institutional decline, with a rapidly cycling amalgam of itinerant and student ministers and a steady loss of continuity in religious services.<sup>24</sup>

Responding to this institutional threat, in the years immediately following Ammi Nichols retirement, the Congregational Society of Braintree Hill pursued a focused effort to construct a new parsonage at the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse site, theorizing that a well-equipped parsonage with sufficient land to support a minister would bolster the Congregation’s prospects in attracting and retaining a minister. This aim was amplified by Vermont’s Congregational Convention, who surmised in the *General Convention of Vermont’s Annual Report* that, “Braintree has a comfortable church and several acres of land. If they could raise enough to build a parsonage, there seems to be no reason why they should not have a pastor and preaching permanently.”<sup>25</sup>

In Braintree Congregational Society’s Annual Meeting of 1868, a measure was discussed to see if, “the said society will accept any measures to raise money to repair their parsonage building or rebuild it, and if so to choose a committee to superintend the same.” Bolstering this aim, the Reverend Ammi Nichols, by then 87 years old and no longer regularly preaching, partook in something of a publicity fundraising stunt, posing with his five sons in a widely circulated photograph that was sold to support parsonage development (see **Figure 26**). As recorded in *The Vermont Journal* in March 1868:

*A meeting of the five sons of Ammi Nichols took place recently in their native town of Braintree, at the home of their venerable father. The occasion was one of deep interest, for such a meeting had not occurred before for 33 years; and it was brought about by the statement which went the rounds of the papers some weeks ago, that Father Nichols is the Patriarch of Vermont ministers. A copy of the statement strayed into the hands of one of the sons resident in Illinois, who, feeling that he must see that patriarch before he died, sent to his brothers in Wisconsin and Minnesota, and all came together in the old home of Vermont...A photograph of the group was taken, and while conversing together on the need for a parsonage on Braintree Hill and the improbability of the feeble church and society being able to build one alone, it was proposed that in as much as the family’s circle of friends is large, the picture be advertised for sale—each copy*

<sup>24</sup> “The Patriarch and His Sons,” *The Vermont Journal*, March 7, 1868; Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. *Minutes of the General Convention of Vermont and the Annual Report of the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society, 1865* (Windsor, VT: Vermont Chronicle Book and Job Office, 1865).

<sup>25</sup> Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting of the General Convention of Vermont* (Montpelier, VT: Freeman Steam Printing House and Bindery, 1870), 71.

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*being sold for \$2, at a profit of a dollar and a half that will go toward the parsonage fund at Braintree.*<sup>26</sup>

The publicity stunt seems to have had good effect, and by 1872 Braintree Hill resident Warren E. White had deeded land to the Congregational Church and Society of Braintree:

*To be used as a parsonage and land for a minister employed and settled by the church and when not so used the rents and profits thereof to be applied to pay for preaching under the direction of said church and society and their assigns forever.*<sup>27</sup>

The parsonage site was located directly north of the cemetery, with the additional agricultural lands deeded by White to the Congregation extending north and east of the established meetinghouse site. The Congregational Convention of Vermont noted the development approvingly in their *Minutes of the Convention of 1872*, noting the Braintree Congregation had “taken a step forward in disposing of an old and uninhabitable parsonage, and secured a house with several acres of good land.” On a more tempered note, though, the Convention also noted that the small congregation had taken on “something of a debt, which they will need the help of kind friends in removing... Though they continue to hold religious meetings through most of the year, and faithful ones are looking forward with hope to the time when they may again have preaching through the year.”<sup>28</sup>

Despite an updated parsonage, in large the Braintree Congregation failed in its aims of securing stable year-round religious services. From the 1860s onward, service was irregular, with preaching in summer months and on isolated occasions, characterized by long periods of dormancy. The Congregation’s Annual Meeting minutes from the period speak of a bare-bones institutional minimalism, with the small body gathering each year to determine how to secure preaching for the following year, how to rent out the parsonage, and how to monetize the lands and surrounding wood lot. The Congregation’s records indicate that at least 11 itinerant and student ministers preached on Braintree Hill during the late nineteenth century period, with very little by way of sustained institutional continuity. By 1900 services on Braintree Hill had tapered to 13 a year, with even this irregular service a challenge for the small organization to sustain.<sup>29</sup>

By 1924, the Braintree Hill Congregational Society had ceased in its efforts to sustain regular services, instead sponsoring an annual "Old Home Day," at the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Arising in New Hampshire at the close of the nineteenth century, the Old Home Day ethos was a broad reflection of a New England cultural and physical landscape in transition, with the scattered and lost children of New England encouraged to pay homage to the foundational landscape of their youth. Within the span of several decades, Old Home Days became a common summer occurrence in Vermont, with annual celebrations across the state demonstrating

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<sup>26</sup> “The Patriarch and His Sons,” *The Vermont Journal*, March 7, 1868; Records of the Braintree Congregational Society.

<sup>27</sup> Braintree Land Records, Book 13, Page 82.

<sup>28</sup> Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. *Minutes of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Meeting of the General Convention of Vermont, 1872* (Montpelier, VT: J & J.M. Poland’s Steam Printing Establishment, 1872), 69.

<sup>29</sup> Alice Webster Wakefield. *Braintree Voices* (Braintree, VT: Alice Webster Wakefield, 2015), 9.

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both a powerful sense of place and community cohesion and a complex sense of nostalgia and loss over a steadily changing social and physical landscape. Within this larger cultural context, Braintree Hill's Old Home Day was a powerful and lasting local reflection of steady evolution and demographic decline as well as the powerful and continuous tug of local community identity. As described in a 1929 notice for Braintree's Old Home Day in Randolph's *Herald and News*, showcasing the event in its fifth year of existence:

*The annual Old Home Day service of the church on Braintree Hill will be held next Sunday at 1 p.m. Reverend F. Wilson Day, pastor of Bethany Church, will have charge of the service, assisted by ministers in the surrounding communities. The community song service will be under the direction of John L. Hutchinson. The male quartet will furnish special numbers. The speaker of the day will be Reverend J. Harrison Thompson of Portland, Maine. Plans are being made for the biggest service ever held on Braintree Hill. Everyone invited.*<sup>30</sup>

In an interesting reflection of the community's cohesion around the importance of Braintree Hill's Old Home Day celebration, the *Herald and News* announcement was accompanied by other local church notes across a range of denominations, which relayed that no other local congregations were holding services "owing to the annual gathering on Braintree Hill," with all denominations exhorting members to attend the event on the hill. Braintree's Old Home Day has continued to be the defining annual event for the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, with its 100<sup>th</sup> Old Home Day planned for August of this year, 2024.<sup>31</sup>

Within this general trajectory of dormancy and demographic decline, physical changes to the Braintree Meetinghouse over time were few. In 1918, the meetinghouse was "papered and painted," with the building's original pulpit also returned to its place at the head of the church after being removed several decades prior. In 1930, a motion was made by Congregation Clerk Mary Nichols at the Society's Annual Meeting to "instruct the business committee to fix up the grave of Ammi Nichols." In 1936, a new fence was built to separate the meetinghouse from the cemetery to the north, "to fill the gap opened by the removal of the old horse sheds." It is unknown when the parsonage building was removed from the site immediately north of the cemetery. As early as the mid-1910s, all references to the parsonage cease in the Congregation's annual meetings and it is likely that the building was removed or burned early in the twentieth century, with the former parsonage site at present a cellar hole filled with stone foundation remnants, isolated charred timbers, and miscellaneous debris enshrouded in vines and shrubs. The former parsonage site is included in the Boundary of the historic property, see Boundary Description and accompanying property mapping.<sup>32</sup>

While the story of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was generally one framed within demographic decline through virtually the entirety of the property's period of religious and community use, the broader narrative conveys an overarching and continuous attachment to

<sup>30</sup> "Church Notes," *Herald and News*, August 15, 1929.

<sup>31</sup> "Church Notes," *Herald and News*, August 15, 1929.

<sup>32</sup> Records of the Braintree Congregational Society, archival manuscript on file at the Braintree Town Office, records of the Braintree Historical Society.

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place. As the Braintree Hill Congregation dwindled from its early-to-mid-nineteenth century peak to only a scattering of members, the “strong affection” maintained for the building and surrounding site is testament to an evolving and vital role in the community identity of Braintree—both as a religious site and as a site of town governance and community gathering. Additionally, without a fixed mooring and dogmatic institutional framework, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse reflected a dynamism unique to the property—with a varied range of guest ministers, speakers, and community events documented through the historic period as the small congregation sought solvency and purpose for the site. As a notable testament to this spirit, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was the site of an impromptu and impassioned lecture by famed, and in many period-quarters reviled, abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison in 1862, at a pivotal escalation point in the United States’ Civil War. As documented by historian H. Royce Bass:

*About the middle of October 1862, William Lloyd Garrison and his friend Oliver Johnson, who was then editor of the Anti-Slavery Standard, visited Braintree, remaining several days as the guest of Mr. and Mrs. James Hutchinson, Jr. Mr. Garrison was requested by some of the people to speak the next Sunday and he readily complied. Efforts were first made to secure for him the use of the one of the church edifices at West Randolph, but neither of the religious societies there would consent to such request. Application was then made to Reverend Ammi Nichols for the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. He consented, and the Society acquiescing, Mr. Garrison was invited to speak there the following Sunday. It proved to be one of those charming autumn days, when nature, at her prettiest, wore her most bewitching smile, and could not fail to address the heart as well as the eye. Mr. Garrison reached the school house at the top of the hill, and catching a view of the surrounding hills, he turned to his companions and said, “Now let us stop and worship.” Upon Quaker Hill, that day, gathered people from this town and many from surrounding towns. Some came twenty miles to hear the great abolitionist, who was doing more than any other man in the nation to arouse it to a sense of the danger, the disgrace, the iniquity of slavery. Scarcely ever before had a larger audience gathered at that meetinghouse; never since has so large an assembly met on the old hill until the centennial celebration. Mr. Garrison’s appeal for the slave was earnest and effective. He expressed his deep admiration of the beautiful panorama of hills and mountain around him, saying that such a country could be peopled only by those who love liberty and since they insist on freedom for themselves they should insist on freedom for all others as well.<sup>33</sup>*

For his part, writing several weeks later in his nationally distributed antislavery publication *The Liberator*, Garrison extolled his Vermont visit and his opportunity for robust public discourse at Braintree Hill:

*The editor of The Liberator has returned from his comparatively brief, yet somewhat extended and altogether delightful visit to Vermont, in company with*

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<sup>33</sup> H. Royce Bass. *History of Braintree*, 47.

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*his early and tried friend, the editor of the Anti-Slavery Standard, and will resume his labors with the next number. He went to obtain a little recreation, and has come back to the city in excellent condition, feeling all the better for his tour in mind and body. To his much esteemed friends, Leonard Johnson of Peacham and James L. Hutchinson of Braintree, with their families...He tenders his grateful acknowledgement for their generous hospitality and unwearied personal attentions...The loyal spirit of Vermont is of the most unquestionable kind—so all pervading, indeed, that the “satanic democracy,” which is but Southern treason under a thin veil of dissimulation, gets neither root nor nourishment within its borders. She is full of natural beauty, romance, grandeur, with her glorious array of mountains; and her industrious, intelligent, independent farming population constitute a bulwark against the brutality and demoralization of the commercial cities along the seaboard...At the urgent solicitation of friends, the Editor so far departed from his purpose not to lecture during his tour as to give two addresses on Slavery and the War in the Congregational Meetinghouse in Peacham and one in Braintree. In each case the audience was unusually large and of the most solid character; and the sentiments advanced were listened to with the closest attention, and elicited the warmest approval.<sup>34</sup>*

Thus, while perched atop Braintree Hill seemingly far from the tenor of modernizing life, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse stood witness to events both broad and localized, reflecting a rural community as it navigated an evolving American life.

#### The Braintree Hill Town House: A Civic Story Closes on Braintree Hill

Even as the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse’s religious context declined through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the building retained its central community identity as Braintree’s Town House, with the basement level occupied each year with the deliberations of Town Meeting and other functional operations of local governance. As previously discussed, Town Meeting had been held on Braintree Hill from 1807 on, with the first Congregational Meetinghouse of 1807, and the second meetinghouse of 1845 serving to unify religious and civic functions at the site.

The flavor of Braintree Hill’s Town Meeting in the early twentieth century is well depicted in Katharine F. DuClos’ *The History of Braintree Volume II*, with her evocative portrayal of the meeting’s civic and social role as a fixture of small-town annual life:

*Town Meeting was the big event of the year. Not even a blizzard could deter Braintree citizens from making their way to the Town House in the basement of the old Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. The roads were at first rolled, and later, after the town purchased a snow plow, were plowed in preparation for the coming event. Nature often had a way of piling snow in huge drifts overnight on the top of the “Lake” on Braintree Hill, making travel difficult. Sometimes horses would*

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<sup>34</sup> “Returned,” *The Liberator*, October 24, 1862.

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*flounder in drifts so deep they couldn't get through. Then men would help each other shovel a way out.*

*By 10 o'clock when the moderator called the meeting to order, the room would be packed. Many arguments ensued as the business of the day proceeded. By noon the place would be "blue" with tobacco smoke and it was a relief to have the door open, as people went in and out letting in a little fresh air.*

*The ladies' organizations that served the bounteous hot dinner at noon, also brought a huge sack of peanuts in the shell which were put into paper bags and dispensed for a small sum. The boys delighted in throwing them, occasionally, a bald head being an especially attractive target. So, after several years the selling of peanuts was stopped.*

*By one o'clock people had settled down to the serious business of resolving the weighty issues of the day. This sometimes lasted until nearly dark due to so much bickering. Braintree has always had a reputation for much dissension at Town Meeting.<sup>35</sup>*

Of note, while standard in their prosaic and cyclical accounting of road maintenance costs, fenceline delineations, and local tax collection needs; through much of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Braintree's Town Meetings were regionally noted as an unrivalled bastion of "Collar and Elbow Wrestling," with wrestling matches an annual component of the community's Town Meeting, generally held at noon prior to the community lunch. Wrestling was not uncommon during the period in Vermont's town meetings and during other rural social events, as detailed by nineteenth century sports writer E.L. Persons:

*Wrestling is and for long years has been the popular sport of Vermont's sturdy yeomanry; town meetings, fairs, cattle shows, house raisings, etc. being incomplete and void of special interest without a wrestling tournament to wind up with.<sup>36</sup>*

However, within this general context, Braintree had a special affinity with the sport during this period, with Braintree resident George Washington Flagg nationally renowned as one of the famed wrestlers of the period. As detailed by local historian Katharine DuClos:

*One of the big events of early town meetings was the annual town championship wrestling match which was held at noon. The event was usually presided over by George Flagg, Braintree's famed wrestler.<sup>37</sup>*

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<sup>35</sup> Katharine F. Duclos. *The History of Braintree: Volume II*, 124-125.

<sup>36</sup> "History Space: Early Days of Vermont Wrestling," *The Burlington Free Press*, February 24, 2018; Katharine F. DuClos. *The History of Braintree: Volume II*, 124.

<sup>37</sup> Katharine F. DuClos. *The History of Braintree: Volume II*, 124.

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Born in Braintree in 1839, Flagg was a famed nineteenth century wrestler whose exploits spanned much of the country. As reported of Flagg in *The Boston Globe* in 1900:

*George W. Flagg of Braintree, Vt, has been for 30 years a champion collar and elbow wrestler of the United States. He has wrestled in almost every town in the New England and all the northern states east of the Mississippi....He served four years in the Civil War and was the acknowledged champion of the Army of the Potomac. After the war he settled down to a farmer's life, but did not fail to accept all challenges by athletes from all parts of the country...In every part of the country he defeated champions who had never met defeat before.*<sup>38</sup>

While Flagg died in 1919, the established tradition of wrestling on Town Meeting day continued, with matches held through the 1930s at the community's town meetings at Braintree Hill.

By the mid-1930s, as automobiles eclipsed earlier modes of transport and state highways steadily became hardened ribbons through the state's valleys, the premise of Braintree Hill as a locale for Braintree's town center increasingly came into question. As documented by Katharine DuClos in her *History of Braintree Volume II*:

*By 1934, people began to realize that a larger and more conveniently located building was needed. In winter the roads over Braintree Hill were hard to travel, especially with a car, which had taken the place of old "Dobbin." It was voted in March 1934 to hold future meetings in West Braintree Town Hall, much to the disgust of some of the older citizens who still had a nostalgic feeling for the old Town House. The first Town Meeting held at West Braintree was in March 1935, and they have continued there since.*<sup>39</sup>

Braintree Town Records indicate that the decision to move town meeting was fraught. As detailed in the records, the main article of the day, Article 7, was warned, "to see if the town will vote to hold town meeting at some other place." As recorded in the minutes of the meeting:

*Meeting was called to order at 10 and warning read by Frank Howard, Moderator...The town voted to take up the Town Report page-by-page, much discussion followed, mostly between Town Officers. A motion was made and carried to cut out the quarreling and proceed with business. More debating followed, and another vote was carried that the debate cease...*<sup>40</sup>

Along with voting that the Braintree schools assume the school debt, that the town pay the Randolph Fire Company for their services on the Merrian fire, and that the clerk print the names of delinquent tax payers in the Town Report; at the 1934 meeting, Braintree residents voted to "Hold Town Meeting next year at West Braintree," summarily ending 127 years of town meetings at the Braintree Hill site. As detailed in Randolph's *Herald and News*, in a fitting note

<sup>38</sup> "Thirty Years a Champion," *The Boston Globe*, October 13, 1900.

<sup>39</sup> Katharine F. DuClos. *The History of Braintree: Volume II*, 125.

<sup>40</sup> Braintree Town Records, Volume 7, Page 384.

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the annual wrestling match accompanied this historic last meeting, finale to a strong local tradition at the site:

*There was plenty of time after Randolph Town Meeting Tuesday for those who "wanted to see the fun," in Braintree to ride up there, and quite a number did. They had a regular old-time ring wrestle, and, according to report—plenty of forensics (some of it quite pointed) in which the affairs of the town were thoroughly aired...The chief question up was that of changing the place of Town Meeting from the historic old hill church to some place more accessible in the hard going of early March, when, as it is this year, it is very difficult and costly to break an automobile road through to the top of the old hill. It was decided Tuesday, though not without opposition, to hold next year's meeting at West Braintree. The meeting lasted until after 5 o'clock, with everybody feeling they had got their money's worth for the long day put in.<sup>41</sup>*

#### The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse Legacy

While the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse was no longer the center of town governance and was owned by an increasingly small congregation by the close of the 1930s, the local importance of the building as a witness of time and symbol of community remained as a strong waymarker in the community of Braintree through the twentieth century. By the early 1960s, the newly-established Braintree Historical Society had established a presence at the site, occupying a portion of the building as a meeting place and venue for preservation of community artifacts. With the death of the Braintree Hill Congregational Church Society's last members, Mary E. Nichols in 1968 and husband Ralph Nichols in 1969, the building reached a flexion point yet again. Following the Nichols' deaths, the property reverted to the Vermont Congregational Conference, effectively ending local ownership of the storied community resource. Within this unsure context, the fledgling Braintree Historical Society developed a campaign for local ownership, petitioning the Conference to assume control of the building as a site for the historical society to collect and interpret the community's history. The building was deeded to the society on August 1, 1970, with the Congregational Conference deeding, "The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse property, being the land and premises on which the said meetinghouse is situated, together with surrounding land and cemetery grounds estimated to contain 24 and 4/10s acres, more or less." As documented in *Vermont Life* in 1976, the acquisition underlay a resurgence of interest in the building:

*Since the historical society assumed responsibility for the care of the building, the meetinghouse has acquired a bronze bell for the belfry and a 40-foot flagpole for the front lawn. It has had a new coat of white paint, steps have been built for both front entrances, and the slate roof and the chimneys have been repaired. Also, new blinds have been installed in the belfry as well as on all the windows, and the faded red paint has been sandblasted from the foundation, to reveal the mellow old bricks. The cemetery, next to the church, has had all of its gravestones*

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<sup>41</sup> "Randolph," *Herald and News*, March 8, 1934; Braintree Town Records, Volume 7, Page 384.



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*cleaned, and 235 of the fallen or leaning ones reset in cement. In addition to Old Home Day observances, there have been several other Sunday afternoon worship services in the church, and in the past five years, seven brides and grooms have pledged their marriage vows there. Thus, with the events taking place in the meetinghouse and those in the Braintree Historical Society Museum (where as many as 435 visitors have signed the guest book during a single summer), Braintree Hill has become a place of renewed activity reminiscent of fondly remembered days long gone.<sup>42</sup>*

The Braintree Historical Society's successful campaign was a local stand of a larger preservation movement in the state of Vermont during the period, with the mid-century period and its rapid pace of social, demographic, economic, and environmental change ushering in an awareness of the physical dimensions, and fragility, of Vermont's historic buildings and landscapes. As relayed in *The Times Argus* in 1966:

*Tremendous Changes—physical, economic, and social—the likes of which Vermont has never known before, make the functions of the Vermont Historical Society, and local historical societies, more important than ever, Charles Morrissey told a meeting sponsored by the Braintree Historical Society. The meeting, held in the lamp-lighted room of the Braintree Hill Historical Society in the old Braintree Hill Church, was also attended by members of the Randolph and Brookfield Historical Societies. Many old landmarks are coming down in the path of progress, and numerous institutions such as railway passenger trains are disappearing as the state enters a new and changing era...Changes in schooling, social life, and the state's longstanding agricultural business, were among other things feeling the effect of a fast-changing modern world. To preserve some tangible remnants of the good things of the past is the duty of the state historical society and local groups...<sup>43</sup>*

The Braintree Historical Society has continued to further this preservation mission to the present, uniting over 200 years of community evolution at the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse site through their stewardship of the 1840s building and its complex strands of local community development.

### Comparative Analysis: Vermont's Meetinghouses

As detailed in the historic context, the meetinghouse is a defining and widely distributed community resource in the state of Vermont, reflecting broad strands of the state's early settlement period. The property type is also one of duality, reflecting both religious and civic strands of community life. As summarized in the *Religious Buildings, Sites and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*:

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<sup>42</sup> Braintree Town Records, Volume 28, page 185. "Old Home Day on Braintree Hill, *Vermont Life*, Volume 30, Issue 4, page 77; "Ralph Nichols," *The Times Argus*, August 9, 1969.

<sup>43</sup> "Historical Societies Have Monumental Task," *The Times Argus*, September 21, 1966.

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*Church buildings, found in almost every Vermont town, are the physical evidence of the history and patterns of religious and architectural practices in the state, New England, and the nation from the time of first permanent Euro-American settlement in the late 18th century to the present day. Some also tell of Vermont's civic life, having been built to house governmental and educational uses. They are among the most prominent buildings in each town, constructed on small lots facing village greens, in village centers, as centerpieces of residential neighborhoods, anchoring commercial districts, or located on rural parcels to serve more remote congregations.<sup>44</sup>*

Within this larger statewide context of development, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is a locally significant representative of a meetinghouse devoted to dual religious and town functions within a rural context, reflecting the co-evolution of spiritual and community life in Vermont's early settlement period. As an evolving community center and a well-executed Greek Revival rural exemplar of the mid-nineteenth century meetinghouse building type, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse meets the registration requirements for individual recognition in the NRHP within this previously identified statewide context. Within its local context, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse also broadens the documented landscape of identified National Register-listed properties with religious and early civic associations in Orange County, which includes over 20 distinct religious properties listed either individually or as part of districts; ranging from the prominent 1799 Stafford Meetinghouse with its Federal form and prominent lofty front-extending belltower, to the First Baptist Church in Randolph's Depot Square Historic District, developed in 1877 in a High Gothic style infused with Queen Anne overtones.<sup>45</sup>

Within this broadly populated and highly visible property type context in Vermont, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is a significant representative of a locally important rural strand of development, with the building's isolated hilltop locale; minimalistic yet refined Greek Revival scale; and longtime multipurpose function indicative of foundational strands of community and social development in Braintree. Of Braintree's extant nineteenth century religious and community properties, including the First Baptist Church, constructed to replace an earlier burned structure in 1898; and the East Braintree Congregational Church, moved to site in 1844-45 from Peth and serving as both religious and community center, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse is the first to be recognized for listing in the National Register, representing

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<sup>44</sup> Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 2001, 1.

<sup>45</sup> For comprehensive documentation relating to religious/civic properties listed in the NRHP in Orange County see: Congregational Church of Chelsea NRHP Nomination (NRIS 76000140); Bradford Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 75000142); Brookfield Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 74000237); Depot Square Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 75000143); Goshen Church NRHP Nomination (NRIS 76000141); Newbury Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 83003214); Post Mills Meetinghouse NRHP Nomination (NRIS 92001489); Randolph Center Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 74000245); South Tunbridge Methodist Episcopal Church NRHP Nomination (NRIS 01000215); Stafford Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 74000246); Thetford Center Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 98000220); Thetford Hill Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 88002134); Tunbridge Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 94000635); Wells River Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 83003217); West Fairlee Center Church NRHP Nomination (NRIS 02000662); West Newbury Village Historic District NRHP Nomination (NRIS 83003218).

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important recognition of a key strand in the religious, social, and physical development of Braintree.

Application of the National Register of Historic Places Criteria

*Criterion A: Religion, Social History, Politics/Government, Community Planning and Development*

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery is significant under Criterion A at the local level of significance for its strong associations with the early community and social development of Braintree, Vermont, with a period of significance extending from 1802, with the first burials in the cemetery, to 1969, when the property's local religious association closed. The property meets the registration requirements established by the *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form* as a representative of a rural meetinghouse serving a religious, social, and civic purpose, acting as both spiritual center and center of local governance through its period of significance. As a Congregational meetinghouse and burying ground, the property served as a social and community focal point for Braintree Hill, even as Vermont's physical and demographic growth shifted from the hilltop locale during the mid-nineteenth century. As the center of town life and host of Town Meeting through 1934, and home of the Braintree Hill Congregational Society through 1969, the meetinghouse played a key role in the ongoing community governance and social and religious affairs of Braintree, serving as a symbol for both the community's earliest roots and ongoing community evolution. As host to Braintree's Historical Society, the building continues to convey this long strand of local community development to the present.

*Criterion C: Architecture*

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery is significant under NRHP Criterion C at the local level of significance for its confident and well-proportioned Greek Revival design, meeting the registration requirements established by the *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*. Constructed in 1845 in a manner expressive of the prevailing popularity of Greek Revival design during the period, the meetinghouse is a rural representative of changing norms in religious and civic design. With its simple, gable-roof temple-like form, integrated belltower, and minimalistic massing defined by extensive light and openness, the building is a rural representative of important discourse in architecture during the period, with the architectural patterns developed by Asher Benjamin and others providing a template that was readily interpreted across a range of locales. With an exterior form that is defined by a simplicity of core materials: stone, brick, wood, and slate, and a restrained system of Greek Revival allusions; and an interior form that is characterized by restrained functional use for clearly delineated religious and civic purposes, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse readily conveys its architectural significance as a mid-nineteenth century meetinghouse. In addition, the building retains a strong contextual relationship within its surroundings, embedded within a rural landscape context that includes the Braintree Hill Cemetery to the north, open pasture and mature treelines, and the

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framing hills of surrounding Orange County. As such, the property retains exceedingly high integrity to convey architectural significance under the criteria of the NRHP.

#### *Criterion D: Information Potential*

The property is not being nominated under Criterion D at this time. It is important to note, however, that the cellar hole of the former parsonage remains intact immediately north of the cemetery. This site has not been investigated and more information is needed to evaluate its historic significance. The cellar hole site is within the boundary of the NRHP property and is designated as VT-OR-0128 in the Vermont Archaeological Inventory.

#### Character Defining Features

The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery retains a number of key physical characteristics that allow the property to convey its essential form as a mid-nineteenth century meetinghouse. These features are considered character defining and allow the property to convey significance within its historic context for development and period of significance.

- *Placement and Orientation on Braintree Hill:* Located on the high expanse of Braintree Hill, the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery was developed as the center of a rural hilltop expanse, framed by agricultural properties, forest, and scattered development. This rural contextual location is a key element of the property's contextual significance, with the framing rural roads, pasture, fenceline, and associated burial ground key elements of the property's significant physical form.
- *Greek Revival Design and Material Form:* The Greek Revival design of the property is character defining, including the building's simple gable massing, plan, materials, fenestration, restrained exterior and interior architectural allusions that include framing pilasters, a closed pediment, integrated belltower, and ample fenestration for natural light. Within this stylistic context, all original materials are character defining in both the exterior and interior of the property, as all contribute to the significant architectural form and composition of the property.
- *Interior Layout and Plan Devoted to Dual Functions:* As designed, the building served key dual purposes, with the first level devoted to religious functions and the lower level to civic town house functions. These distinct spaces are readily identified by their material and spatial form, with the religious meetinghouse accessed by lofty entry doors and the town through lowered brick walls. This dualistic relationship, characterized by both integration and clear demarcation, is a character defining element of the property.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

### Books

Bass, H. Royce. *History of Braintree*. Rutland, VT: Tuttle and Company State Printers, 1883.

Benjamin, Asher. *The Architect: Or Practical House Carpenter*. Boston: L. Coffin Publishers, 1844.

Comstock, John M. *Vermont Congregational Churches 1762-1914*. St. Johnsbury, Vermont: The Caledonian Company, 1915.

DuClos, Katharine F. *The History of Braintree: Volume II*. Montpelier, VT: Capital City Press, 1976.

Wakefield, Alice Webster. *West Brookfield and Thereabouts*. West Brookfield, VT: Alice Wakefield, 1985.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Braintree Voices*. Braintree, VT: Alice Webster Wakefield, 2015.

Vermont Domestic Missionary Society. *Minutes of the General Convention of Vermont and the Annual Report of the Vermont Domestic Missionary Society, 1865*. Windsor, VT: Vermont Chronicle Book and Job Office, 1865.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Minutes of the Seventy-Fifth Annual Meeting of the General Convention of Vermont*. Montpelier, VT: Freeman Steam Printing House and Bindery, 1870.

\_\_\_\_\_ *Minutes of the Seventy-Seventh Annual Meeting of the General Convention of Vermont*. Montpelier, VT: J & J.M. Poland's Steam Printing Establishment, 1872.

### Newspapers, Journals, Periodicals

Deetz, James and Edwin S. Dethlefsen. "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow," *Natural History*, Volume 76(3), 1967.

Hall, Raymond A. "Congregational Churches of Vermont," *Vermont History*, January 1956, Volume XXIV No. 1.

*Herald and News*

*The Boston Globe*

*The Burlington Free Press*

*The Liberator*

*The Times Argus*

*The Vermont Journal*

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*Vermont Life*

### **Unpublished Materials / Collections**

Collections of the Braintree Historical Society

Congregational Society of Braintree Records. On file at the Braintree Historical Society, Braintree Town Office.

Lewandoski, Jan. "The Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, Braintree, Vermont: A Preservation Trust of Vermont Technical Assistance Report", 2009. On file with Braintree Historical Society.

National Register of Historic Places listings in the National Archives Records Administration (NARA) (digital resource)

Town of Braintree Land Records

Town of Braintree Town Records

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation Online Resource Center (digital resource)

Vermont Division for Historic Preservation. *Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form*, 2001.

Vermont Historical Society: Vermont History Explorer Online Population Database (digital resource)

### **Maps**

F.W. Beers and Company. *Map of Orange County, Vermont*. New York: F.W. Beers and Company, 1877.

Walling, Henry Francis. *Map of Orange County, Vermont*. New York: Baker & Tilden Publishers, 1858.

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### **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 Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

### **Primary location of additional data:**

State Historic Preservation Office

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- Other State agency  
 Federal agency  
 Local government  
 University  
 Other

Name of repository: Braintree Town Office/Braintree Historical Society

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** HSSS #0902-27. VAI #VT-OR-0128 for Parsonage Cellar Hole.

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreage of Property** 3.48 acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 43.96926 ° Longitude: -72.68813 °

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The NRHP Resource Boundary includes the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery and its immediate framing contextual setting. The boundary is defined by a stone wall to the south and east of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. To the west, the boundary is defined by Braintree Hill and Hockman Hill Road. The north edge of the boundary is defined by the site of the former parsonage cellar hole, immediately north of the Braintree Hill Cemetery. This boundary encompasses the meetinghouse, cemetery, and its immediate framing environment during the period of significance. The entirety of the resource boundary is located on SPANs 075-023-10090 and 075-023-10790 (cemetery SPAN). The Boundary and geographic information are included in accompanying mapping.

### Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Boundary includes the significant resources related to the property as well as its historically associated surrounding site to interpret the architectural and community associations that qualify the property for listing in the NRHP. The boundary also includes

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the area that was historically developed with a parsonage (no longer extant) that was associated with the property and may bear information with further research and analysis.

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### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Polly Seddon Allen  
organization: Consulting Architectural Historian  
street & number: PO Box 215  
city or town: Craftsbury Common state: VT zip code: 05827  
e-mail polly.s.allen@gmail.com  
telephone: 916.201.1855  
date: 6/9/2024

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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)



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## Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

## Photo Log

Name of Property: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery

City or Vicinity: Braintree

County: Orange State: Vermont

Photographer: Polly Seddon Allen

Date Photographed: April 25, 2024 and May 6, 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 37: Overview of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing northeast from Braintree Hill Road.
- 2 of 37: Overview of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and Cemetery, facing south from Hockman Hill Road.
- 3 of 37: Entrance and Primary Façade of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing northeast.
- 4 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse with Cemetery in background, facing northwest.
- 5 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse with Cemetery in background, facing northwest on grey May day with shutters open.
- 6 of 37: East side of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing west.
- 7 of 37: North side of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing southeast. Windows frame pulpit within.
- 8 of 37: West side of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing east. Note demarcation of brick "Town House" walls and the sign for Braintree Historical Society which currently occupies the space.
- 9 of 37: Detail of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse Town House entrance, facing northeast.
- 10 of 37: Facing north to Braintree Hill Cemetery from Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.

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- 11 of 37: Looking southwest through Braintree Hill Cemetery to Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.
- 12 of 37: Detail of Braintree Hill Cemetery fenceline, facing southeast.
- 13 of 37: Rows of headstones in Braintree Hill Cemetery, facing south.
- 14 of 37: Detail of headstones and stone wall boundary at Braintree Hill Cemetery.
- 15 of 37: Detail of headstone typologies, "Perpetual Care," facing northwest.
- 16 of 37: Detail of eastern stone wall boundary of Braintree Hill Cemetery, facing south.
- 17 of 37: Looking south through Braintree Hill Cemetery toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, just south of cellar hole site of Parsonage location.
- 18 of 37: View of overgrown Parsonage cellar hole, with hole to right (south) of mature maple embedded in shrubs and vines. Fenceline of Cemetery visible through undergrowth.
- 19 of 37: Entry vestibule of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing southwest toward Green Mountains.
- 20 of 37: Entry vestibule of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, note arched brick opening connecting vestibule and main body of the meetinghouse.
- 21 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, looking toward pulpit over box pews. Note wood stove heating pipes running above on either side.
- 22 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing northeast across pews.
- 23 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, detail of boxed pew walls down the western aisle.
- 24 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, Congregant view of pulpit from pew.
- 25 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, detail of wood paneling and dentils on pulpit.
- 26 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, looking southwest toward vestibule with choir running above.
- 27 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, detail of scrolled woodwork on pew arm.
- 28 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, detail of arched brick opening, organ, and wood stove in background, facing east.
- 29 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, view of pulpit from the elevated choir.
- 30 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, attic and belfry access from choir above vestibule.
- 31 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, detail of curved stair with newel post detail accessing choir.
- 32 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse timber framing in attic, repurposed from earlier 1807 construction as documented in the historic record and by structural analysis
- 33 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing southwest across belfry, note carved names in wall boards.

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- 34 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing northeast across Town House room, now used by Braintree Historical Society.
- 35 of 37: Detail of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse Town House, facing east, note generous window, bench seating, and plaster ceiling and walls.
- 36 of 37: Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, facing southeast across Town House, wood floors added over brick in 1880, barn board walls at south end added in the 1960s as part of historical society occupation.
- 37 of 37: Looking southeast over the grave of Reverend Ammi Nichols, "Patriarch of Vermont Ministers," and untiring champion of the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.

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ADDITIONAL ITEMS



Figure 1: Henry Francis Walling, *Map of Orange County, Vermont, 1858*. Depicting Braintree Hill site of Braintree Hill Church and Cemetery.

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Figure 2: F.W. Beers and Company, *Map of Orange County, Vermont*, 1877. Depicting Braintree Hill site of Braintree Hill Church and Cemetery. Note depiction of Town House in the Church as well as Parsonage.



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**Figure 3:** Undated stereoscope looking toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 4:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking north toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Note shed rooflines and parsonage in far background. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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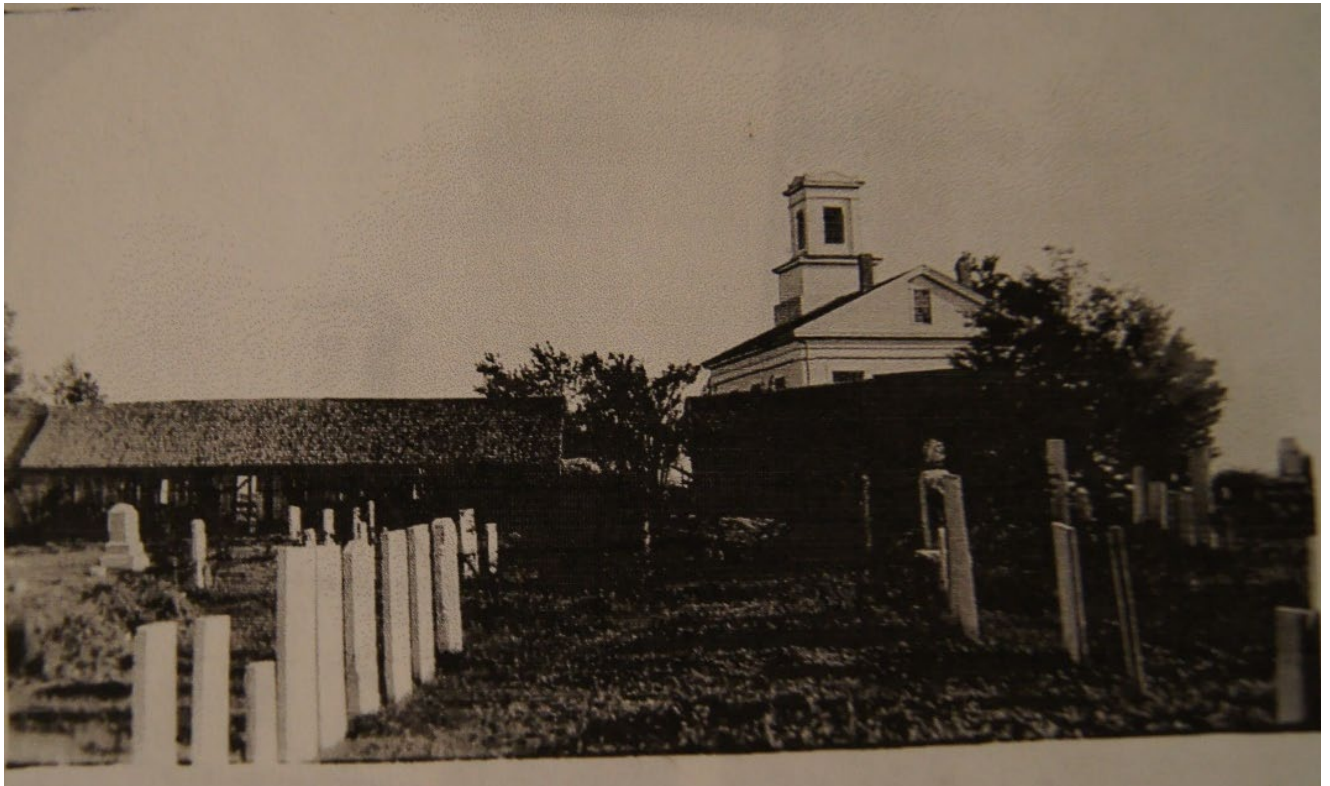


**Figure 5:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking through Braintree Hill Cemetery to sheds at Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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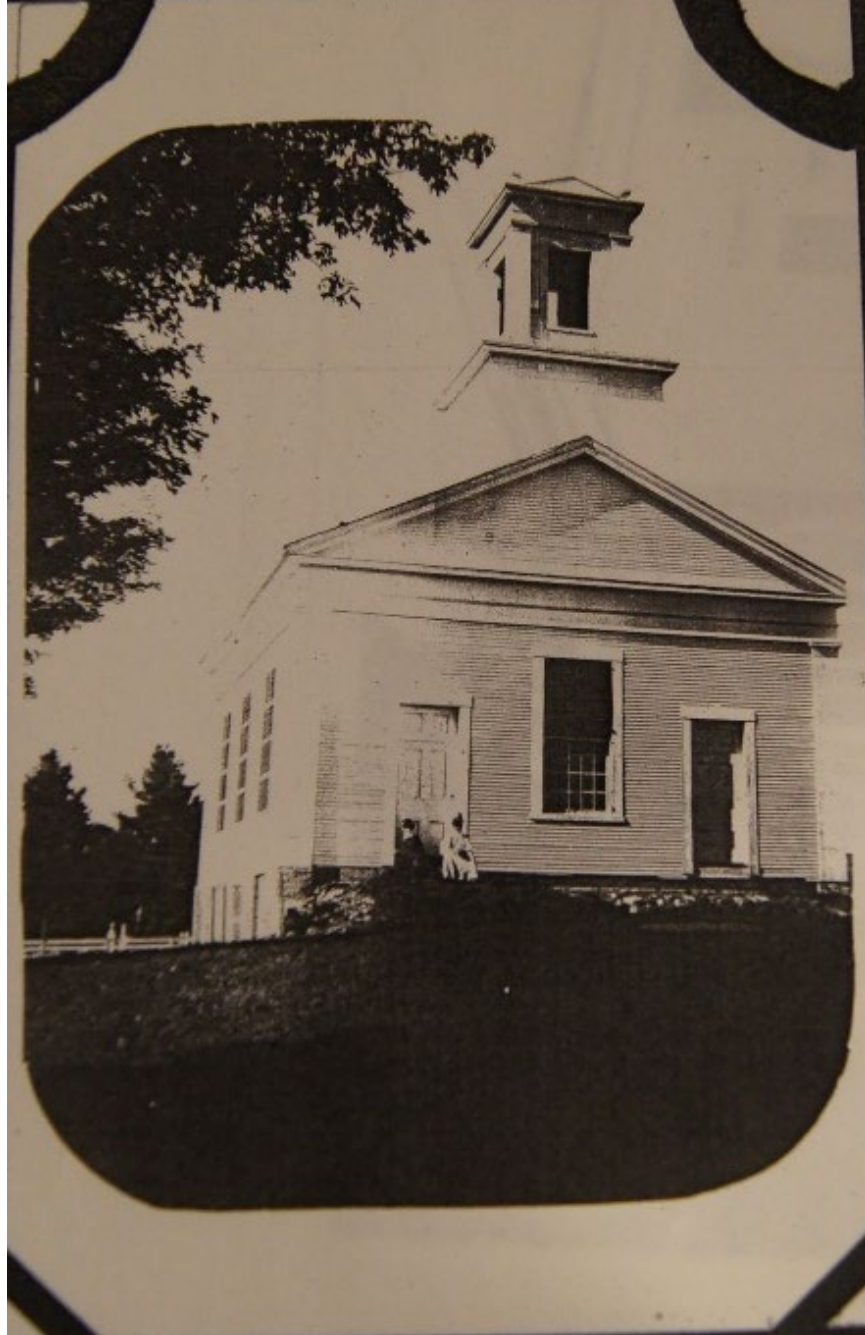
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**Figure 6:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking through Braintree Hill Cemetery to Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 7:** Undated photograph looking north to Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 8:** 1918 Rededication at Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 9:** Undated photograph looking northwest toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Note long granite steps across front, no blinds in belfry. On east basemen wall it appears that a stove pipe may be extending from basement ventilation arch. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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**Figure 10:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking north to Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 11:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking through Nichols Lot in Cemetery south to Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 12:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking north toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, women identified in photograph. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 13:** Undated photograph looking southeast toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse, shoveling road on Braintree Hill. When Town Meeting was moved in 1934, one of the driving reasons was the difficulty of winter roads for travel. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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**Figure 14:** Undated photograph (pre-1930s) looking north toward Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 15:** Perkins Battles in his “Doughnut Roller” outside of former Town House, lower level of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 16:** Circa 1970s Old Home Day at Braintree Hill Meetinghouse.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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**Figure 17:** 1975 Old Home Day at Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Note open windows, as idealized by Asher Benjamin in his notes for a proper meetinghouse, large windows with ventilation for the congregation.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 18:** Undated photograph depicting Old Home Day.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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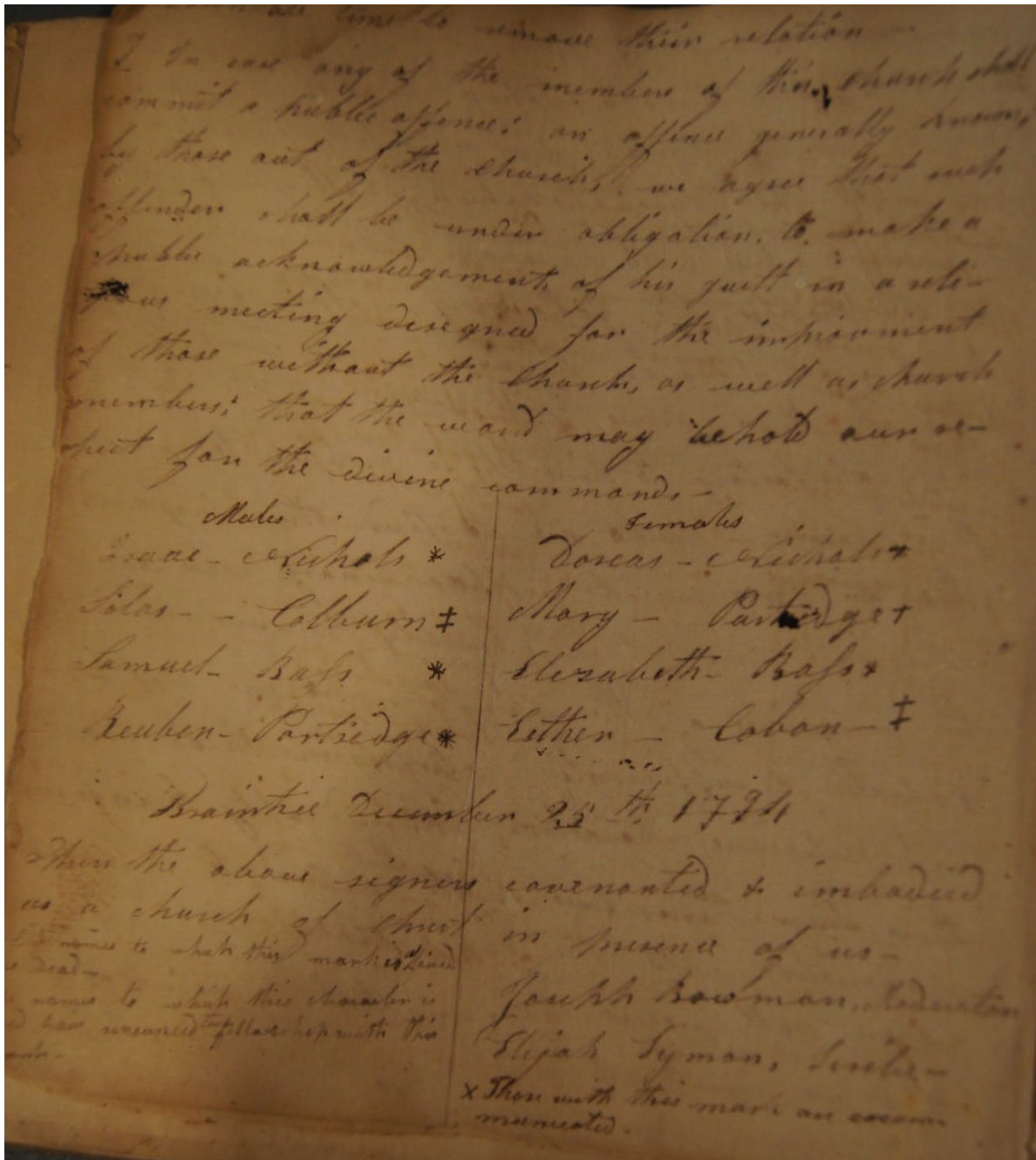


Figure 19: Braintree Congregational Society Formation, December 25, 1794.  
Congregational Society Ledger.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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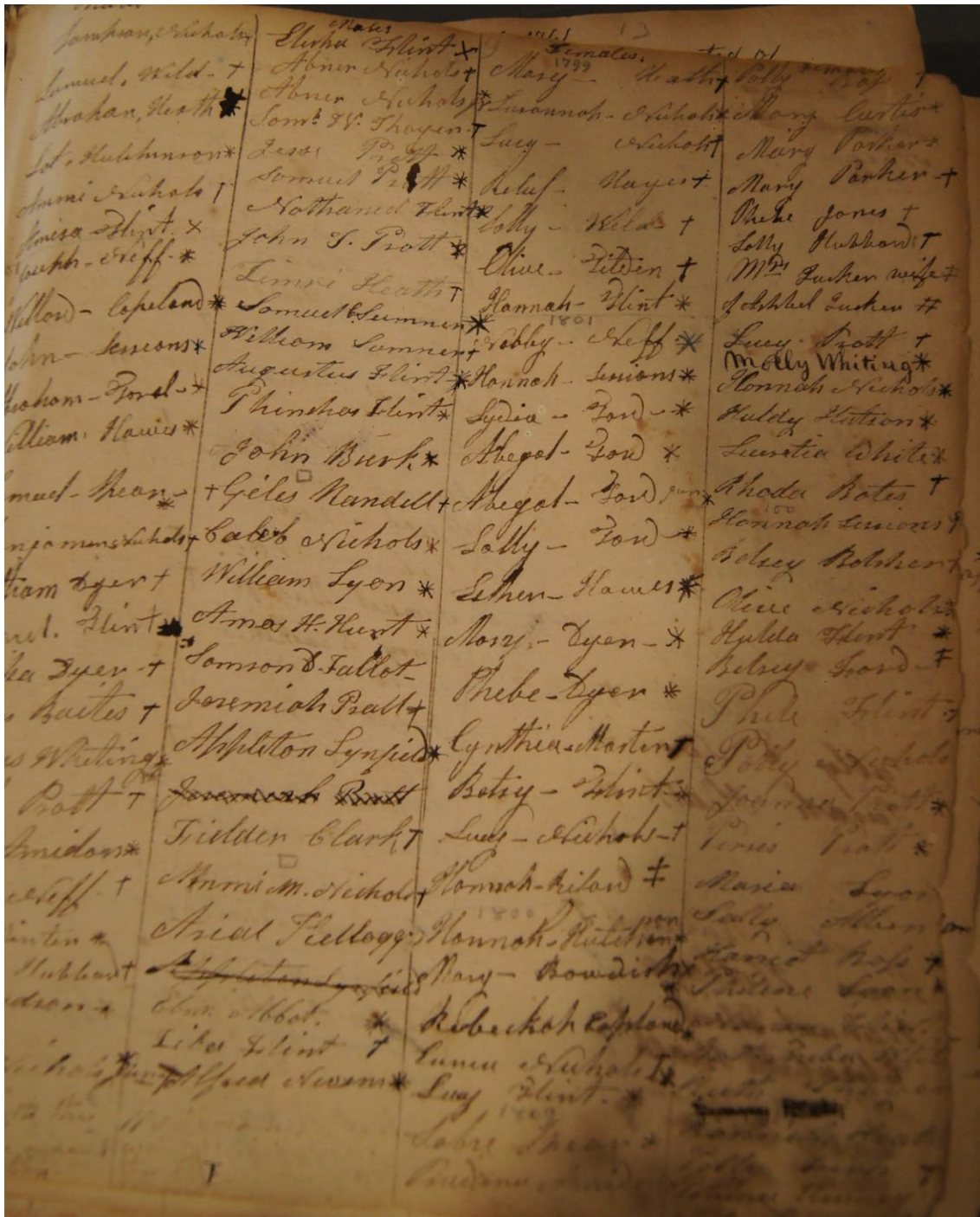


Figure 20: Braintree Congregational Society Membership, circa 1810s-1840s.  
Congregational Society Ledger.  
Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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1844 Ammi Nichols Town Clerk  
By a petition in writing from thirteen of the legal voters in  
Braintree the inhabitants of said Town are hereby notified and  
warned to meet at the town house in said town house in said  
town on Tuesday the 12<sup>th</sup> day of November next at 2 O'clock P.M.  
to act on the following business -  
1. To choose a moderator to govern said meeting  
2. To see if the said inhabitants will give their consent to have  
the timber and all the materials <sup>with which</sup> of the old meeting house on  
the hill in said Braintree is composed, converted into a new  
meeting house, giving the town the privilege of finishing off  
the lower story for a town house -  
To act on any other business thought proper when met -

**Figure 21:** Braintree Town Records Describing the funding of a new Town House in 1844, co-located in the Braintree Hill Meetinghouse and utilizing timbers from salvaged building.  
Braintree Town Records.



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The following is the list of the pews in the new meeting house  
 laid off, the amount assessed the whole amount

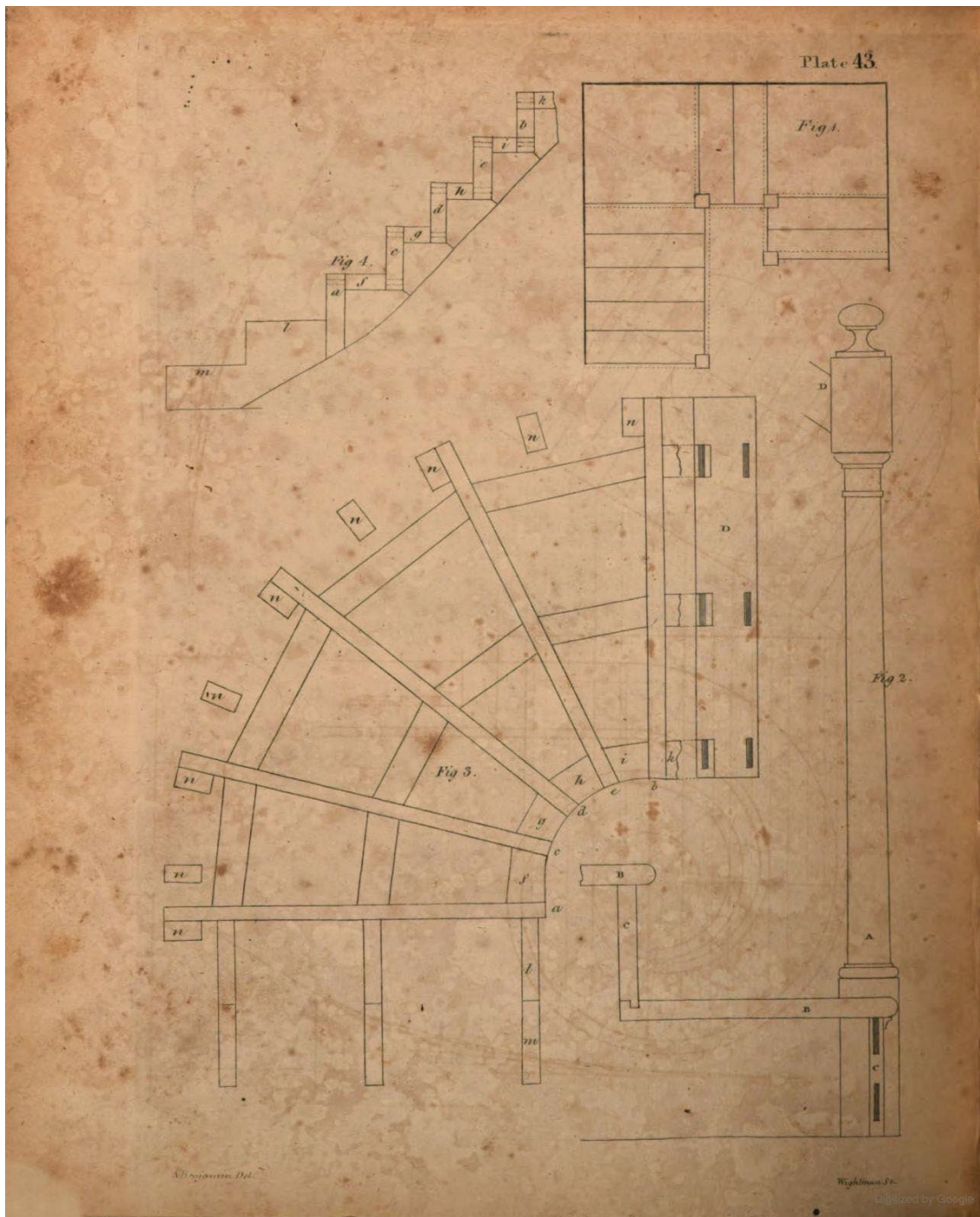
1	Wm. Nichols	35	5.33	5.33
2	William Nichols	40	6.50	6.50
3	Isaac Nichols	40	6.50	6.50
4	Elihu Bap	47	7.77	7.77
5	Samuel Bap	45	7.65	7.65
6	Samuel Bap	45	7.65	7.65
7	Jonathan Bap	45	7.65	7.65
8	Robert Lyon	45	7.65	7.65
9	Wm Bap	45	7.65	7.65
10	Elizavere Elliot	45	7.65	7.65
11				
12				
13				
14	Robert Lyon	30	5.10	35.10
15				
16	Maria Smith 3 Bap	40	6.80	46.80
17	Wm. Nichols	49	8.33	57.33
18	Wm B Bass	46	7.82	53.82
19	Samuel Bap	53	9.01	62.01
20	Robert Lyon	46	7.82	53.82
21	Elijah Flint	39	6.63	45.63
22	Isa Kidder	36	6.12	42.12
23	Augustus Flint	37	6.63	45.63
24	Samuel Bartley	36	6.12	42.12
25	R. S. Curtis	40	6.80	46.80
26	Calvin Randall	40	6.80	46.80
27	Wm Nichols	43	7.31	50.31
28	Isaac Nichols	36	6.12	42.12
29	Samuel Bap	38	6.46	44.46
30	Isaac Morris	36	6.12	44.46
31	Isaac Nichols	40	6.80	42.12
32	Henry Bap	29	4.93	46.80
33	Nathan Hoarwood	31	5.27	33.93
34	Samuel S. Sumner	26	4.42	36.27
				30.42

Figure 22: Braintree Congregational Society sale of pews to fund construction of new building in 1845.

Congregational Society Ledger.  
 Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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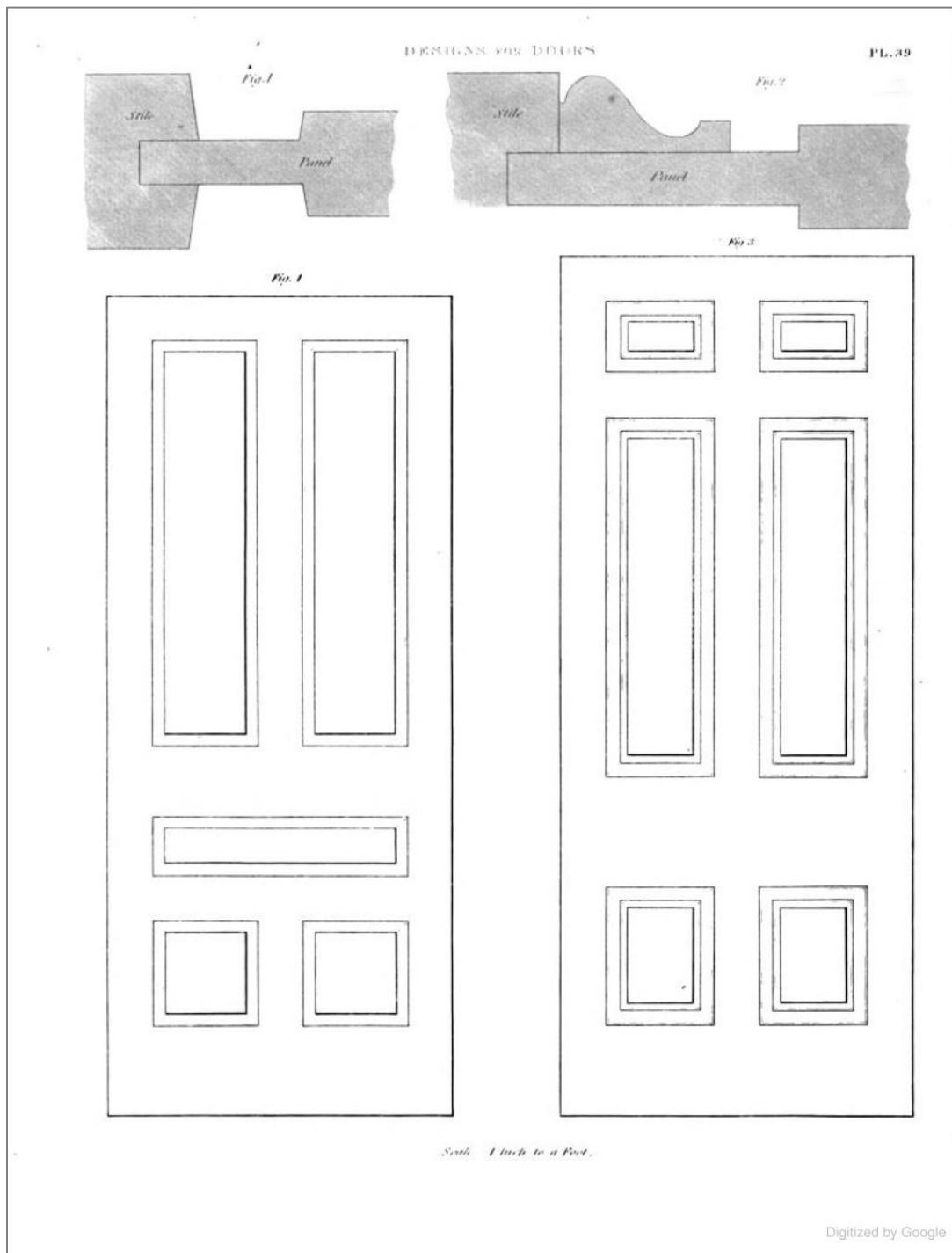
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**Figure 23:** Typical Asher Benjamin Design Plate, Plate 43, *American Builder's Companion*. Detail similar to that of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse interior curved stair with rounded newel post.

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**Figure 24:** Typical Asher Benjamin Design Plate, Plate 39, *American Builder's Companion*. Detail similar to that of Braintree Hill Meetinghouse paneled doors.



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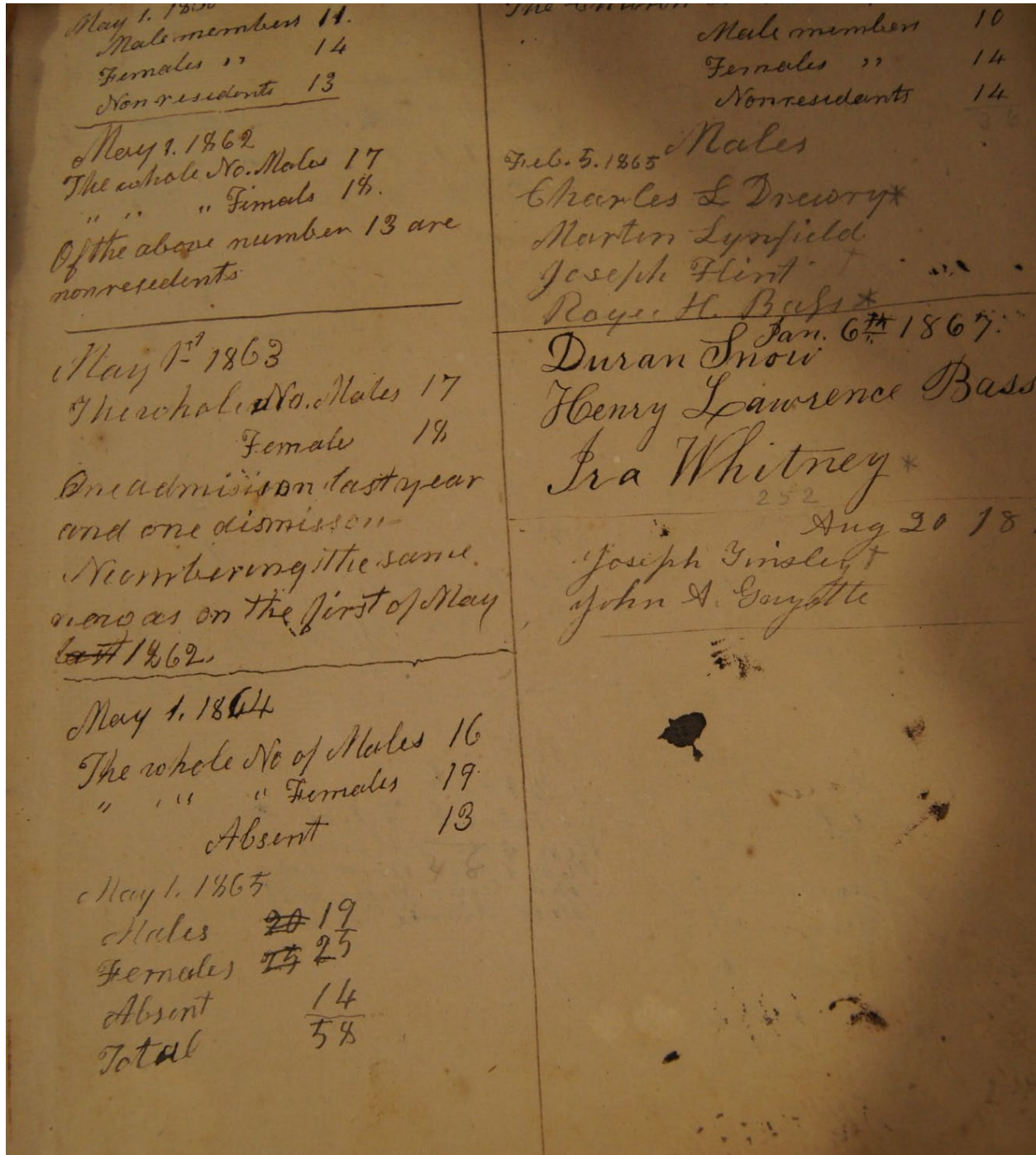


Figure 25: Braintree Congregational Society Membership Tallies, 1860s.  
 Congregational Society Ledger.  
 Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.

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**Figure 26:** The Reverend Ammi Nichols and His Five Sons. Commemorative photograph sold to raise money for a Braintree Hill Parsonage in the early 1870s. (Collection of the Braintree Historical Society)

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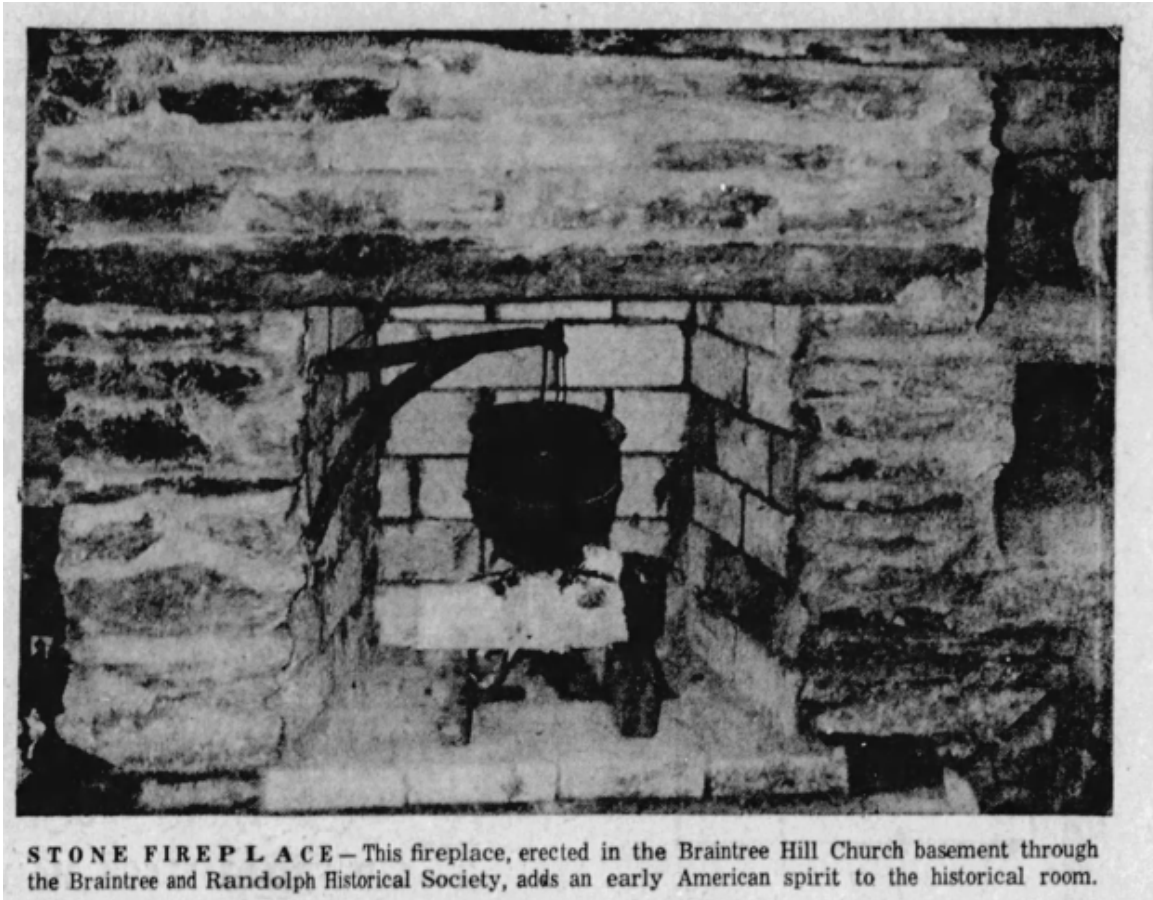


**Figure 27:** Flyer commemorating the Braintree Bicentennial at Braintree Hill Meetinghouse. Collections of the Braintree Historical Society.



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**Figure 28:** “Colonial” stone fireplace added to Braintree Hill Town House, 1961. Added to accentuate historical associations by the newly-formed Braintree Historical Society. Non-contributing to building.

(*The Times Argus*, September 21, 1961).

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Vermont Life, Mr. and Mrs. Thresher,



**Figure 29:** Above: Mr. and Mrs. Thresher outside Braintree Historical Society Room, former Town House. Below: Four generations of Braintree residents at Old Home Day at Braintree Hill, 1976.

(*Vermont Life*, Summer, 1976).



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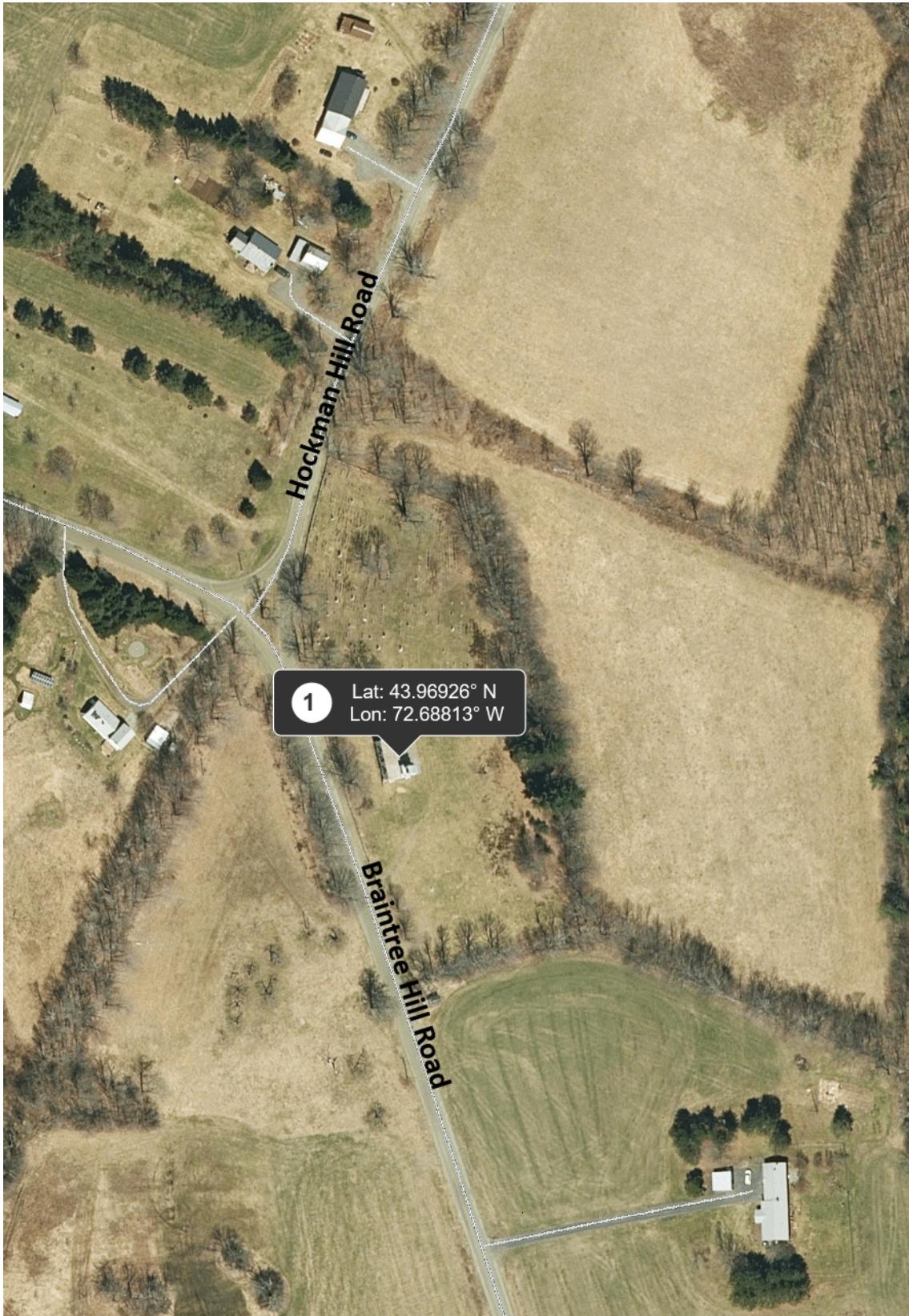
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**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.



### LEGEND


-  Airports
-  Rail Lines
-  Town Boundaries
-  County Boundaries
-  Buildings
-  Village Boundaries

### NOTES

This map was created with the VT Interactive Map Viewer.

0.07 0 0.04 0.07 Miles

WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere 1" = 190 Ft. 1cm = 23 Meters  
 THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

1:2,284  
 May 29, 2024 


DISCLAIMER: This map is for general reference only. Data layers that appear on this map may or may not be accurate, current, or otherwise reliable. VCGI and the State of Vermont make no representations of any kind, including but not limited to, the warranties of merchantability, or fitness for a particular use, nor are any such warranties to be implied with respect to the data on this map. © Vermont Center For Geographic Information





### LEGEND

-  Airports
-  Rail Lines
-  Town Boundaries
-  County Boundaries
-  Buildings
-  Village Boundaries

 **Historic Property Boundary**  
 3.48 acres inclusive of significant resource and contextual setting, portion of SPAN 075-023-10090 and entirety of SPAN 075-023-10790


### NOTES

This map was created with the VT Interactive Map Viewer.

0.07 0 0.04 0.07 Miles

WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere 1" = 190 Ft. 1cm = 23 Meters  
 THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

1:2,284  
 May 29, 2024









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## LEGEND

-  Airports
-  Rail Lines
-  Town Boundaries
-  County Boundaries
-  Buildings
-  Village Boundaries

## NOTES

This map was created with the VT Interactive Map Viewer.

0.29 0 0.14 0.29 Miles

WGS\_1984\_Web\_Mercator\_Auxiliary\_Sphere 1" = 761 Ft. 1cm = 91 Meters

THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION

1:9,137

May 29, 2024



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