



Address Marcy St. 280 cor. Meetinghouse Hill & Manning Street

New tax map (1979) U3 lot 48 size 9900 sq. ft  
 Old tax map 7 lot 55 size

Owner CITY OF PORTSMOUTH  
 Address 126 Daniel St.

Location of legal description:  
Rockingham County Registry of Deeds  
Hampton Road; Exeter, New Hampshire  
03833

Representation in existing surveys:  
 HABS      NR      NHL       
 HAER      Other     

Date 1864-66  
 Source: Estimate      Other:       
Re-Use Feasibility Study

Historic name South Meetinghouse  
 Common name South Meetinghouse  
 Original owner City of Portsmouth  
 Architect/bldr. Wm. Tucker, arch, (probable  
Isaiah Wilson, builder

Functional type ward room  
 Present use, if different

Moved      Date       
 Altered      Date     

Effect: Focal x Contributing       
 non-contributing      Intrusion     

Photo roll 5 no. 35  
 Negative with: Portsmouth Advocates  
 Description looking SW, from corner of Marcy and Gardner Streets.  
 Date taken      by     

1. Style Italianate No. of stories 2 1/2 No. of bays 3 x 5
2. Overall plan: Rectangle, end to street.
3. Foundation: Brick      Stone cut x Poured concrete      Concrete block       
 Artificial stone      Other
4. Wall structure: Wood frame x Brick      Stone      Other       
 If wood: Post and beam      Balloon frame x
5. Wall covering: Clapboard x Wood shingle      Flushboard      Imitation ashlar       
 Brick      Stone      Stucco      Composition board      Aluminum      Vinyl       
 Sheet metal      Asphalt shingles      Other
6. Roof: Gable x Hip      Shed      Mansard      Flat      Gambrel      Other       
 slate
7. Specific features (location, no., appearance of porches, windows, doors, chimnies, dormers, ells/wings--see also description), decorative elements:

Chimney on ridge at rear wall. Added two story inclosed fire escape-clapboarded - center of rear: Concrete yard returning wall (20C ?).

8. Outbuildings:

 **PORTSMOUTH  
 ADVOCATES, INC.**

P.O. BOX 4066 · PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03801  
 603-431-2499

## Description:

A 2½ story gable roofed clapboarded meetinghouse situated end to the street. The three bay facade has a central inset double door with shouldered architrave surround, fronted by a one story porch with full entablature extending the full width of the facade and supported by four fluted Doric columns. Windows on both stories have shouldered architrave surrounds, but the upper windows (and the attic) have semicircular heads and 9/6 sash, vs. 6/6 sash below. This reflects the location of the main meeting room, which is on the second story while the first story is divided into several rooms. The building has extended eaves and cornice returns, with a frieze band below. On the front of the ridge is a cupola, square on the first (clock) story, which has panelled corners and a smaller, higher arcuated bell story above with ogival roof. Both cupola stories have extended eaves, the upper on paired brackets, the lower plain, but breaking over the raised corner panels.

The building is a fine example of an Italianate treatment of a standard New England building type. Although generally plain, the few details it has are well thought out. Its cupola, the most elaborate part of the building, is a prominent Portsmouth landmark, standing as it does on the highest point in the South End.

## Bibliography:

- Gurney, 140 and 141C: Building occupies the site of the Old South Meetinghouse (built 1731 demolished 18  
Howells's fig, 160.  
South Meeting House Re-Use Feasibility Study, Prepared for Portsmouth City Council by Portsmouth Advocates, Inc., and The Thoresen Group, March 1981. Historical research by R. Candee.  
The Thoresen Group, South Meeting House Re-Use Feasibility Study. Report to Portsmouth City Council, April 1981.

- 1864 - Isaiah Wilson, arch. plans for the Aldermen.  
1839 - City Directory - "joiner"  
1851-67 - "carpenter"  
1864 - shop on Green St. - Notice in paper as arch.  
1866 - accounts for building lists in 44 indiv. names of carpenters, joiners, cabinetmakers, masons, teamsters and laborers, and 33 building supply firms, and other companies - providing "...a virtual catalogue of the Portsmouth building trades employed on several capital projects in the Civil War era."

Built for a ward hall - (replaced the Old South Church - 1731 - demolished 1863). (pp. 8ff.) - "The South Meeting House is significant as a well-documented example of the procedures involved in an ordinary municipal building project of the mid-19C. Whether or not by intent, a large part of the local building community was involved in its construction, producing a building which was simple, yet dignified and well constructed. Its most elaborate feature, the Italianate cupola and clock tower, forms the dominant landmark of the historic South End of Portsmouth." (p.12).



# SOUTH MEETING HOUSE

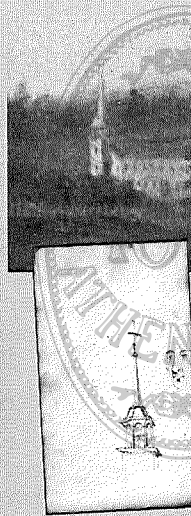
WHEN THE FIRST PARISH VOTED IN 1711 to build a new meetinghouse near present-day Market Square, nearly half of the Parish objected to the location and remained behind as a new South Parish. They continued to use the old meeting house at the South Mill Dam until 1738, when they constructed the South Meeting House. This new structure was 46 feet by 55 feet at the crest of this hill on Pickering's Neck. The main entrance originally faced south in the midst of the long wall. The pulpit stood directly opposite the door, lit by an arched window from above. The tower and steeple rose up from the west end and box pews for individual families sat on the main floor and in the gallery above.



**PORTRAIT OF  
THE REV. SAMUEL HAVEN  
(1727 – 1806)  
MINISTER, SOUTH CHURCH**

A graduate of Harvard College, Samuel Haven was called to the South Parish pulpit in 1752 where he served for the rest of his life. He was a philanthropist and liberal Unitarian thinker and was given an honorary degree from Edinburgh in 1770 and another from Dartmouth in 1773. A patriot during the American Revolution, his familiarity with the chemistry of homespun medicine stimulated experiments with dyes that he showed to George Washington. This led Haven to produce saltpeter for gunpowder for the American troops during the Revolution.

*Portrait of the Reverend Samuel Haven. Courtesy Strawberry Banks Museum.*

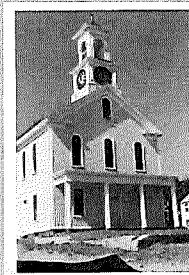


## LOCATED ON A HILLTOP

Benjamin Franklin remarked that the South Meeting House would be especially vulnerable to lightning because it was located on a hilltop between two bodies of water. It was hit several times, including in 1759 and 1822. In 1767, the building was cut in two and the eastern half was pulled away from the rest, extending the building by 24 feet. The pulpit and door were then moved to the new center of the enlarged building, and an entrance vestibule was constructed. In 1800 a number of interior improvements were made, including an arched ceiling.

*Above left: Detail of South Meeting House from Portrait of Reverend Samuel Haven. Courtesy Strawberry Banks Museum.*

*Left: Detail of cupola from J.S. Blunt Sketchbook. Courtesy of Portsmouth Athenaeum.*



## MODERN-DAY SOUTH MEETING HOUSE

In 1863 the old South Meeting House was condemned and torn down. A new building, designed by carpenter-architect Isaiah Wilson as a meeting place, school, and ward room or voting place, was finally erected in 1866. The belfry holds an 800-pound bell cast in 1860 by George Handel Holbrook of East Medway, Massachusetts. The tower clock, made by the E. Howard Clock Company of Boston, has heavy, hand-wound iron weights which descend in shafts into the cellar.

*South Meeting House, 1970. Photographer John L. Davis, Thomas C. Wilson Photograph Collection. Courtesy Portsmouth Athenaeum.*



## HALES' MAP OF 1813

The lot of land on which it was built was granted to the South Parish by Captain John Pickering, who controlled all the land between Puddle Dock and the South Mill Pond. The 1731 decision to place the South Meeting House here made it a focal point for new domestic construction on Pickering's Neck and several new homes soon faced the new public building. To the west is one of the early public wells of Portsmouth, now capped over but marked by a horse trough cut from a block of solid granite.

*Map of the Compact Part of the Town of Portsmouth in the State of New Hampshire, 1813. J. G. Hales, cartographer. Courtesy Portsmouth Athenaeum.*

Funding for this historic marker was provided by the City of Portsmouth, 2015.

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