

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM

NHDHR INVENTORY # SWA 0003

Address: 17 Maine Street, W. Swanzey NH Date taken: Oct. 2001 Negative stored at: Town Hall

Photo #2 description: Whitcomb Hall & Prospect Street, W. Swanzey, NH
Roll #: 2 Frame #: 8A Direction: ENE Tax Map: 57 Lot: 85

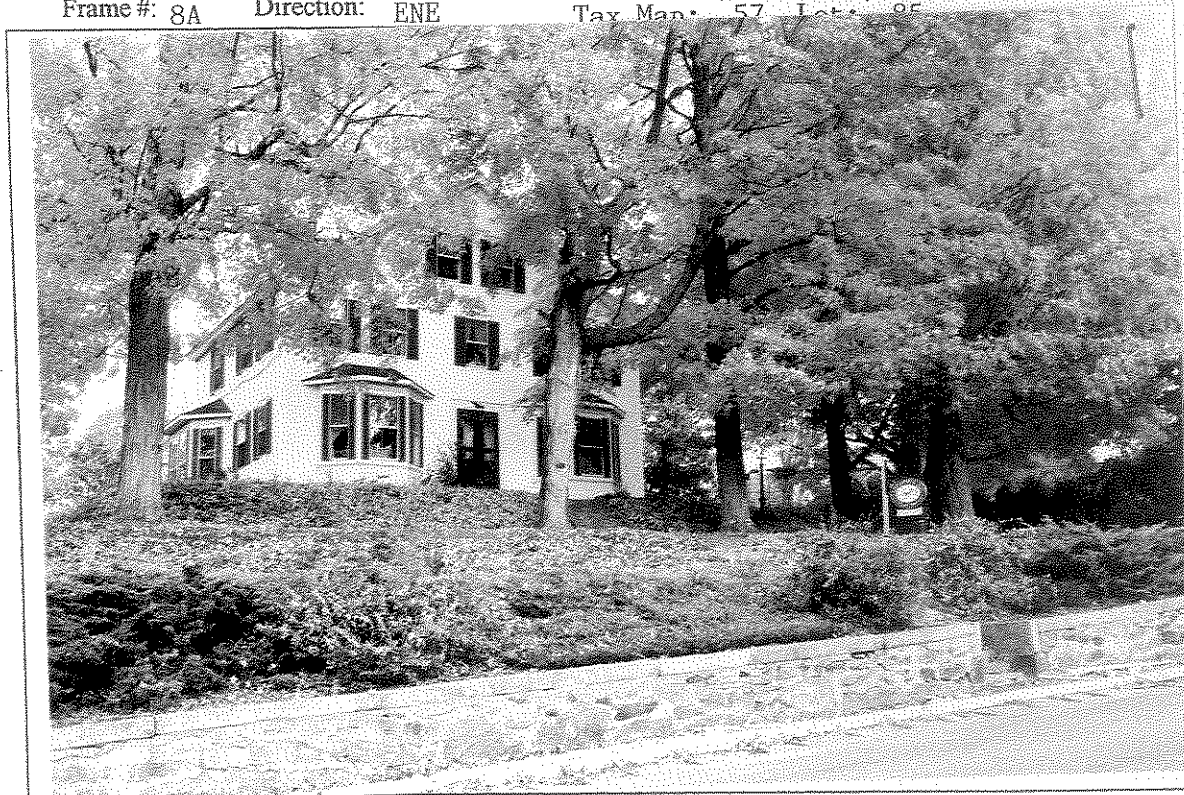


Photo #3 description: George Whitcomb House 27 Main Street, W. Swanzey, NH
Roll #: 2 Frame #: 9A Direction: N Tax Map: 57 Lot: 80

Date photos taken: 10/3/12



Photo # 1 Description: FRONT OF WHITCOMB HALL

Roll and Frame # OR Digital file name:

Direction: South



Photo # 2 Description: Right Side of Hall

Roll and Frame # OR Digital file name:

Direction: East

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM

NHDHR INVENTORY #

Date photos taken: 10/3/12

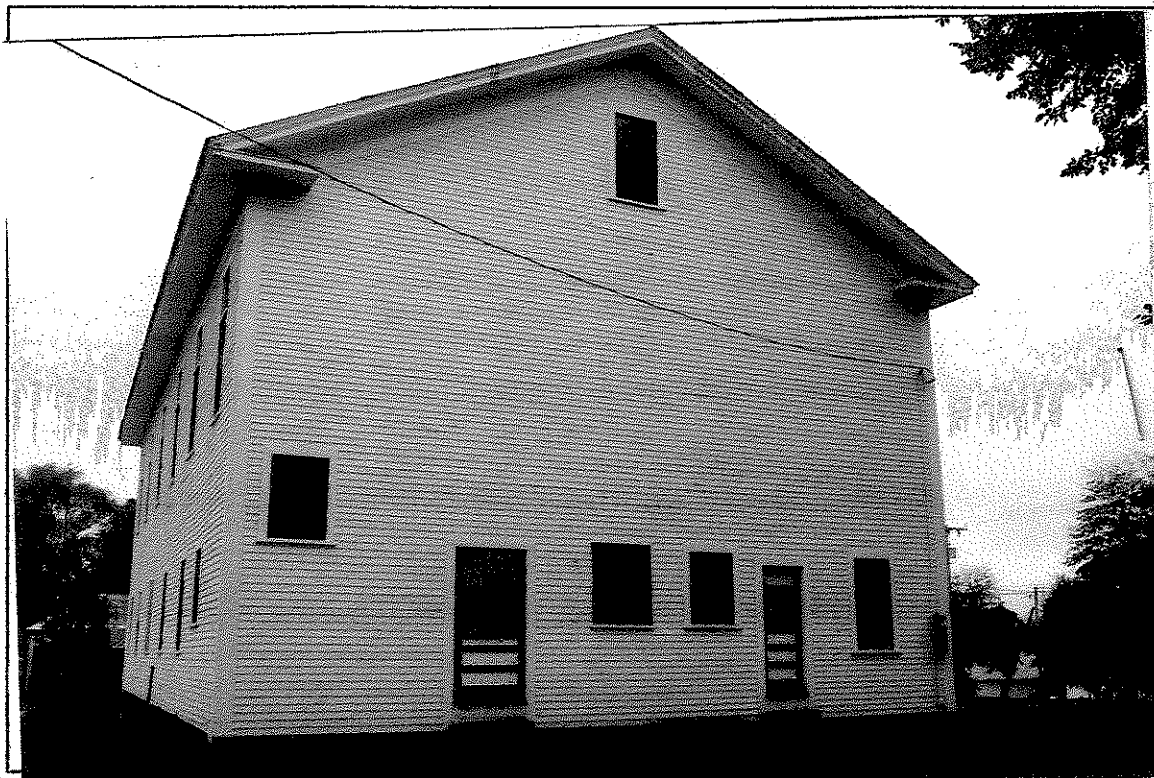


Photo # 3 Description: BACK OF HALL
Roll and Frame # OR Digital file name:

Direction: North



Photo # 4 Description: LEFT SIDE OF HALL
Roll and Frame # OR Digital file name:

Direction: West

INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM

NHDHR INVENTORY #

PHOTO LOG:

I, the undersigned, confirm that the photos in this inventory form have not been digitally manipulated and that they conform to the standards set forth in the NHDHR Photo Policy. These photos were printed at the following commercial printer OR were printed using the following printer, ink, and paper: _____
The negatives or digital files are housed at/with: John Bridger

SIGNED: Nancy L. Carlson

10/10/12
Whitcomb Hall has
been closed since 1988.
The building has
had no renovations
or updates. It is a
great building with
great potential that
we hope to restore
for use by the Town.

Ms Nancy Carlson

PO Box 327

West Swanzy, NH 03469-0327



(August 1994)

Determination of Eligibility (DOE)

Date received: November 15, 2001

Inventory #: SWA0003

Date of group review: November 28, 2001 Area:

(green sheet completed 11/28/01 - CEF)

DHR staff: Fonda

Town/City: Swanzey

Property name: Whitcomb Hall

County: Cheshire

Address: 17 Main Street

Reviewed for: ☐ JR&C ☐ PTI ☒ JNR ☐ JSR ☐ Survey

Individual Properties

NR

SR

☒]

☒ Eligible

☐]

☐ Eligible, also in district

☐]

☐ Eligible, only in district

☐]

☐ Not eligible

☐]

☐ More information needed

☐]

☐ Not evaluated for individual eligibility

Districts

NR

SR

☐]

☐ Eligible

☐]

☐ Not eligible

☐]

☐ More information needed

☒]

☒ Not evaluated @ district

Integrity:

☒ Location

☒ Design

☒ Setting

☒ Materials

☒ Workmanship

☒ Feeling

☒ Association

Criteria: ☒ A. Event

☐ B. Person

☐ C. Architecture

☐ D. Archaeology

☐ E. Exception

Level: ☒ Local

☐ State

☐ National

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

☐ If this property is reviewed in the future, additional documentation would be required.

Whitcomb Hall is eligible for the National Register under Criterion A, for significance in entertainment/recreation. The building was constructed in 1916 as a community hall for the West Swanzey area of town. It was the site of meetings, suppers, performances, and ceremonies of all kinds from its erection. Furthermore, the hall is in a very good state of preservation.

J ENTERED INTO DATABASE

ACREAGE: .61

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE 1916 - 1951

AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: Entertainment/Recreation

BOUNDARY: parcel

SURVEYOR: Scaramelli and Steinka

FOLLOW-UP: Notify surveyors. This building may also be part of a West Swanzey Historic District (details to be determined).

Final DOE approved by:

EJL Muzzey 12/3/01

ly it could be done. The above sum merely represented the sum which those present were ready to give, at the same securing Mr. Whitcomb's offer. The raising of funds will be continued by a committee as more money may be needed for furnishings and equipment for the new hall. The individual subscriptions ranged from \$1 to \$200. There has been a strong desire for a community hall in West Swanzy for a long time past, and a few years ago when the town hall was burned it was hoped the new hall would be erected in West Swanzy, which is the largest village of the town. The feeling became quite bitter, but by a narrow margin it was voted to rebuild on the old site at Swanzy Center.

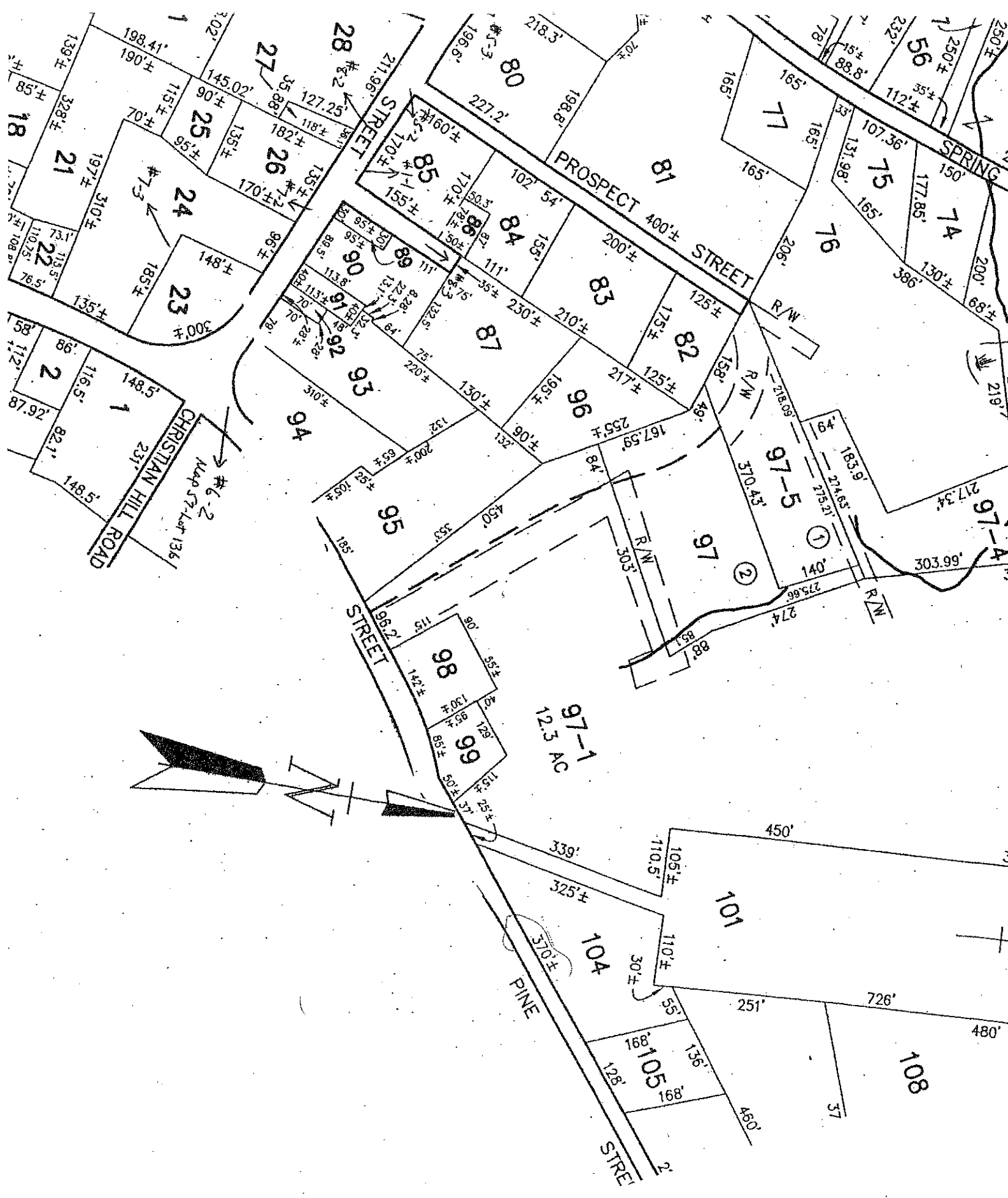
MAY. 15, 1916

Wichita Paper

MAY 15, 1916
Wichita Paper

Public Hall to be Erected in West Swanzy.

The project which for some time has been under consideration to provide a new public hall for the village of West Swanzy has become an assured success. At a public meeting Wednesday evening plans were completed for financing the scheme and a generous offer made by George E. Whitcomb, a prominent citizen and successful lumber man, was accepted. Mr. Whitcomb's proposition was that if the community would raise \$1500 he would furnish the balance and it is understood the building will cost about \$10,000. The building will be 70x40 feet in size and two stories high. The main hall will be upstairs and will be fitted with a good sized stage. Downstairs will be a banquet hall, kitchen, dressing room, toilets, etc. The building lot, which has already been secured, is an attractive one on the north side of Main street. At the meeting Wednesday evening Mr. Whitcomb's proposal was received with enthusiasm. When it came to the matter of raising money, the response was rapid and in 35 minutes \$1508 had been pledged, although no effort was made to see how quick-



41. Historical Background: Whitcomb Hall was built in 1916 as a community hall for the village of West Swanzey by native son George Edwin Whitcomb. West Swanzey was the largest of the five villages in Swanzey, anchored economically by the textile and wooden ware mills one block west on the Ashuelot River. George E. Whitcomb, descended from Swanzey's first manufacturing family (Joseph Whitcomb, enterprising builder of saw and grist mills at the falls of the Ashuelot in 1760), prospered in both wooden-ware and textile manufacturing at the same sites a century and a quarter later. By George Whitcomb's era (1841-1926), water-driven and steam mills flourished in West Swanzey, turning out boxes, pails, buckets, lumber, as well as textiles (beaver cloth and flannels). Whitcomb had interests in several, most successfully in partnership with C.L. Russell. Other notable local enterprisers included Obadiah Sprague, George Stratton, and Ansel Dickinson. For more than a century (1860-1970+), the mills of West Swanzey sustained an expanding community around them. On the plateau west of the river stood the largest mill buildings, as well as many residential structures of both single and multiple-unit design. On the east side of the river, up a gentle rise of some 150 feet elevation, there developed a cohesive village of larger single-family homes, lining Main Street, wrapping around Homestead Avenue and leapfrogging along Ashuelot Street and Prospect Streets. A compact common with Congregational and (now-removed) Universalist Churches anchored one sector of the plateau; the comfortable but modest residences of the mill proprietors and managers lined the streets. One block south on Homestead stood the expansive Queen Anne homestead of Swanzey's most famous son, Denman Thompson, the lately successful author-actor of "The Old Homestead." At the crest of the hill stand two cultural institutions built and donated to public use by philanthropic local businessmen: the Stratton Library, an 1885 gift to the village by merchant and musician George W. Stratton; and Whitcomb Hall, the 1916 community building commissioned by manufacturer George E. Whitcomb. While avuncular, if high-minded, motives underlay each donation (enlightenment, literacy, community spirit, democratic practices, etc.), it is noteworthy that both gift buildings stood nearly contiguous to the respective donor's homestead. These were industrialists who welcomed the laboring operatives into their midst. They could, after all, have placed their uplifting institutions a "safe" distance away (across the river), to keep undisturbed their own cultured lifestyles. Whitcomb Hall, the newest of the historical buildings in the village, was wisely designed in the Classical Revival style, rendering it compatible with the neighboring domestic and institutional architecture built in gable-ended, predominantly Greek-revival, style.

42. Applicable NHDHR Historic Contexts

- 15. Locally capitalized textile mills in NH, 1720-1880
- 20. Wood products mills and shops in New Hampshire
- 107. Philanthropy, 1880-present
- 110. Social organizations in New Hampshire

43. Architectural Description and Comparative Evaluation

Whitcomb Hall is a dedicated community building, in unaltered and excellent physical condition, surviving in a village whose economic and social underpinnings were knocked out by the closure of the last of the textile and woodenware mills some 25 years ago. With West Swanzey homesteads now occupied by families commuting to worksites in Keene and other towns, and with a regional school district consolidating many school functions in Swanzey Center, Whitcomb Hall has lost, through no intrinsic fault or inadequacy, much of its role and *raison d'être*. It is a sad irony that, while other bustling communities aspire to a multi-purpose place of assembly, West Swanzey has a superb one, at the precise historical moment when it experiences primarily centrifugal forces.

The building is a two and one-half story pitch-roof structure, situated atop a gentle prominence above the Ashuelot River, with Homestead Mill dam and Thompson covered bridge downhill from it, and flanked by nineteenth-century revival homesteads along Main Street. It stands diagonally between the houses of the two principal benefactors of the village, George E. Whitcomb and George W. Stratton, and diagonally opposite the village common, where one of two original community churches still stands. Its unpretentious classical revival style "speaks" quietly to the several gable-fronted houses which surround it. Built in 1915-16, it features a strong triangular pediment facing Main Street, pierced by a spare Palladian window in the gable, with a complementary pedimented porch at the main entry. Unadorned pilasters line the corners. There is a clock tower and belfry eight feet square, 52 feet above grade, with balustrades at the belfry, as well as on the porch three stories below. The forty-foot front facade has three bays, with large paired windows on two floors, and matching half windows beneath the eave-line, separated by a sign (original) reading "Whitcomb Hall 1916." The building's sidewalls are 70 feet deep, with five bays. The roof is of slate shingles, and the exterior siding is of white painted clapboard. Apart from minor breaches in the granite sills to admit upgraded utilities (water, heating oil), the exterior is unchanged from its moment of dedication.

Whitcomb Hall was designed and built by M. Orland Spaulding, local contractor of St. James, and later Railroad, Street, Keene. Sub-contractors included L.M. Willard (electricity) and Pearson Brothers (heating & plumbing), both of Keene. At ground level, the entry opens onto an assembly and banqueting room, 34' x 39', served by kitchen at the rear, dressing rooms for the stage above, and toilet facilities. Beside the entry hall stand a pair of rooms, 12' x 14', for committee-meeting or alternative purposes. Of particular interest is the fact that a custom-built china closet, with lath roll-top, still stands outside the kitchen, stocked with commissioned "Whitcomb Hall" china made by Syracuse China Co. There also remain seven custom-made banquet tables, each three by ten feet, in the hall. The other notable furnishing is a massive mirror in the dressing room, 5 x 8 feet, framed in fine turned wood, removed from the nearby Denman Thompson homestead. (All other matching pieces of this extraordinary "Thompson" room are in storage pending an expansion of the Swanzey Historical Museum to accommodate them.) The banqueting room has tongue-and-groove hard pine wainscoting, plaster walls, and pressed tin ceiling. Four boxed columns and two bearing walls carry the 40- foot span.

Whitcomb Hall was inspected for structural integrity by consulting engineers in late 1996, in connection with proposals to convert the building to public-safety uses. The findings were remarkably favorable:

In general we found the building to be in excellent structural condition, which is remarkable given its age and the fact that it has been unoccupied since 1988. The external walls are plumb and true-to-line. The ridge is straight and level and the slate shingles appear to be stable and intact.

(-Clough, Harbour & Associates , report to Town of Swanze, December 30, 1996; CHA File No. 6118)

While glazing and grouting require attention, Whitcomb Hall is sound and viable, ready to resume a community role befitting its highest purposes and historical nature.

44. Significance

Whitcomb Hall has significance for Swanze for its association with the Whitcomb family, and for its role in the life of the mill village of West Swanze during its industrial era (National Register criteria A and B).

A. The Whitcomb family is notable in southwestern New Hampshire for its multi-generational contributions to the civil, military and economic history of the state and region. Pioneering settler Col. Joseph Whitcomb established saw and grist mills on four acres granted to him on the Ashuelot, once resettlement began after the Indian "troubles" of mid-eighteenth century. During the Revolutionary War, three of his five sons gained high commands -- Elisha and Jonathan serving as Colonels, and Philemon rising to General. Many of the Whitcombs moved on to Vermont following Independence, but several subsequently returned to Swanze in a generation or two, joining relatives in various milling and manufacturing enterprises. Of particular interest to this nomination is the line of Colonel Jonathan Whitcomb. He fought at both Lexington and Bunker Hill, returned to Swanze, and begat a family who in the third and fourth generation made extraordinary gifts to their home town. George E. Whitcomb is of the third generation. He bought and sold interests in various manufacturing businesses in Swanze, particularly in partnership with Charles L. Russell. The town history records that as of 1885, the Russell firm employed 40 hands and consumed 2,000 cords of pine in the manufacture of buckets and pails (Read, p.225). Whitcomb's need for timber inevitably impelled his business into real estate. By 1910, the town physician identified him as the "wealthiest man in town" (Hopkins, p.164). It was Whitcomb who, realizing that the only assembly places in West Swanze were the much-neglected Universalist Church on one hand, and a "firetrap" hotel on the other, challenged the Lincoln Grange to raise an initial \$1,500 which he would then multiply several-fold, in order for Swanze to get a meeting hall "you won't be ashamed of" (Hopkins, *loc. cit.*). Thus was Whitcomb Hall born (*vide* newspaper account in Museum file #N072). George E. Whitcomb, not surprisingly, served his town in public capacities, including terms as selectman, moderator and treasurer, as well as two terms in the legislature . . . He is coincidentally responsible for another significant building, known as the "Russell Block," on Central Square, Keene. Built in partnership with C.L. Russell in 1895, this fine three-story building housed the U.S. Post Office (1896-1911), two banks through the 1980s, and for the most recent two decades, retail and

commercial uses. In erecting this showcase structure, Whitcomb and Russell joined the company of other Swanzey "provincials" who planted signature edifices along the Main Street of the county seat, viz., E.F. Lane and William P. Chamberlain.

The fourth-generation Whitcomb who made a lasting mark with a testamentary bequest to Swanzey is Mrs. Lucy J. (Whitcomb) Carpenter. Daughter of Col. Carter Whitcomb, and great-granddaughter of Col. Jonathan Whitcomb. Mrs. Lucy Carpenter left to the town of Swanzey, among other benefactions, her home farm, "Valley View," for the exclusive purpose of caring for the elderly. This farmstead on a shoulder of Mount Caesar, situated on the very ledge where stood the first meetinghouse, has served Swanzey as an "assisted-living" center for decades. It will continue to do so into the foreseeable future, endowed by Lucy Carpenter's estate, and bolstered by Town appropriations as needed. Known as the Carpenter Home, it gives the elderly and ailing of Swanzey a dedicated, family-style setting for domestic care (and an alternative to the for-profit and/or county-run alternatives). By their respective gifts, George Whitcomb enabled community life to flourish in safe and congenial settings; Lucy Whitcomb Carpenter fostered a later life of dignity and compassionate support for those townsmen and women whose self-sufficiency had begun to wane.

B. Whitcomb Hall should be considered for Register listing for its role in enriching community life for most of the twentieth century. It was built to fill a manifest need, as described above. Once completed in 1916, the hall entered service, and generated "social capital" in the predictable ways. For one, it became the home of the Lincoln Grange (the organization whose dissatisfaction with renting the Universalist Church building precipitated the building campaign). Grange life entailed regular Saturday evening suppers, and Whitcomb Hall provided an ideal venue. A large, well-designed kitchen, full service of commissioned crockery, and eight ten-foot tables seating 75 to 100 subscribers, made for recurrent face-to-face contact in ways which Americans now look to academic studies to describe (Putnam, *passim*). Whist parties were routine. Saturday afternoons brought wedding and anniversary receptions at the Hall, not least of which was the silver anniversary of the donors, George and Fostina (Ramsdell) Whitcomb. Because the building had a stage, it hosted a variety of performances, from traveling minstrel shows, to school plays, to community talent shows, to Christmas and other seasonal plays. A lecture series brought speakers of interest and importance to the town. The local Boy Scout troop called it home, as did the Nathan Blake chapter of the West Swanzey Pioneers. So too did the West Swanzey Athletic Association. The local elementary school used it for most public events, from graduations to Memorial Day, Decoration Day, and Thanksgiving exercises. Adults of West Swanzey learned to dance at Whitcomb. One local lad who lived directly across the street, remembers the Hall for the basketball games which took place in the auditorium, and touch football games on the grounds. Millworkers used it as a union meeting hall, safely distant from management. Veterans used it as a site for convening and commemorating for decades. Whitcomb even came within five votes of becoming Town Hall for all of Swanzey in a fiercely-contested referendum, following the loss by fire of the extant Hall in Swanzey Center. Nonetheless, it served as Swanzey Police Station for at least three decades into the 1980s, and as polling place for five decades. Its clock, and bell, have marked time in West Swanzey for 85 years, even as the mills have closed, the trains have ended, and everyman has a watch on his wrist, a radio in his vehicle, and slicker entertainment to occupy his Saturday evenings. It is safe

to say that, along with Homestead Mills, the last surviving manufactory, Whitcomb Hall provided the venue for community life and focus for community character for most of the twentieth century. (- Interviews with Calkins, Earle, Hanna; Hopkins)

45. Period of Significance.

1915-1951.

46. Statement of Integrity.

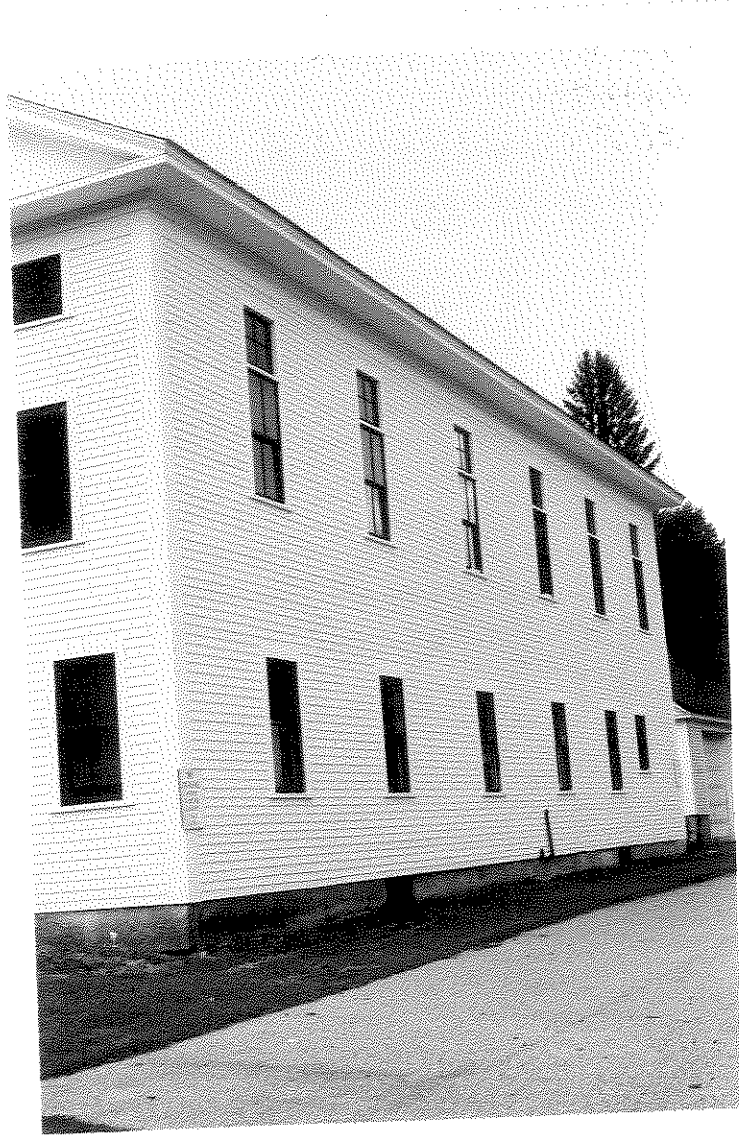
Whitcomb Hall was a hub of West Swanzy community life for most of the twentieth century. An unpretentious but solidly built structure, nicely adapted in style and scale to its place on a street of predominantly residential structures, the Hall served as center for civic, social, and institutional life of a thriving mill village. Through no fault of its own, the economic sands shifted beneath it, leaving it bereft of constituents. Little has changed on Main Street since World War Two, so Whitcomb Hall and Stratton Library still stand amidst the selfsame homesteads where Strattons, and Whitcombs, and Charles Russell, and Dr. Hopkins resided. One block away survives the home of Denman Thompson, and in another direction, the subdivided hulk of Homestead Woolen Mills. Thompson covered bridge, notable for its covered pedestrian passage, still connects Main Street with the village on the west side of the river. The Universalist Church, where Lincoln Grange once convened, has been removed off-site. The diminutive store/post-office building opposite Whitcomb has reverted to residential use. George Whitcomb's homestead passed out of the family long ago, and has operated as a bed-and-breakfast establishment for a decade. Apart from a functional three-engine firehouse added near the Thompson bridge, most structures remain unchanged in appearance from the turn of the twentieth century. The architectural and historical integrity of this section of West Swanzy is striking, and merits consideration as a historic district.

47. Historic Boundary.

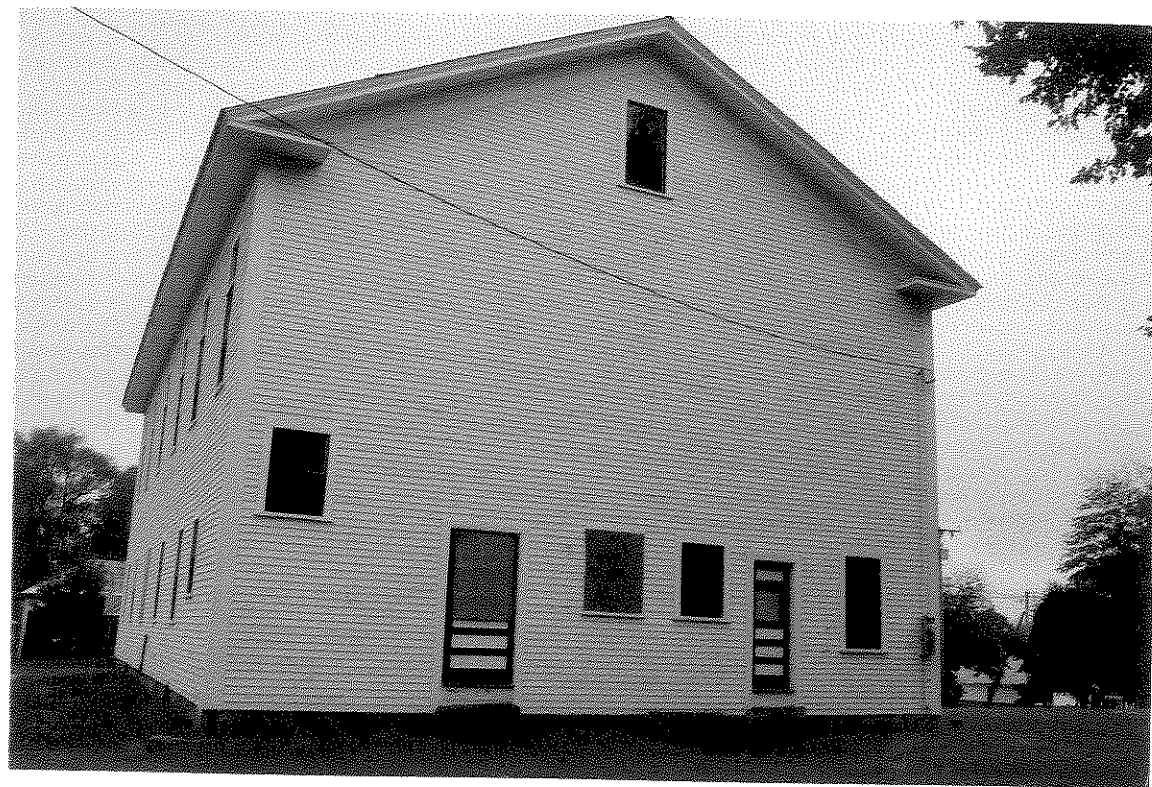
The boundary of Whitcomb Hall is as represented in the deed, and as depicted on the tax map. It has remained in Town ownership since conveyance by George Whitcomb in the year of construction. The building which formerly occupied this lot, incidentally, known as the "Beehive" (for its numerous occupants -- Hopkins, p. 165), was removed to a rear lot, and still stands as a multi-family apartment building.

48. References

- Calkins, Walter. Interview, Oct. 27, 2001.
- Clough, Harbour & Associates. "Report to Town of Swanzey re: Structural Inspection of Whitcomb Hall, West Swanzey." CHA File No. 6118. December 30, 1996.
- Day, A.J. "Swanzey - Past and Present" in *The Granite Monthly*, XXXI, 2 (Aug. 1901), 74-77.
- Earle, Stanley. Interview, Oct. 19, 2001.
- Hanna, George, Esq. Interview, Oct. 19, 2001.
- Hopkins, Arthur W., M.D. *Pep, Pills and Politics: an Odyssey of Two States*. Brattleboro: Vermont Printing Co. 1944.
- Hurd, Hamilton. *Cheshire County Gazetteer*.
- New Hampshire Women: A Collection of Portraits and Biographical Sketches of Residents of the Granite State, Who are Worthy Representatives of their Sex.* . . Concord: New Hampshire Pub. Co. 1895.
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: Collapse and Revival of American Community*.
 . . *Making Democracy Work*.
- Read, Benjamin. *History of Swanzey, New Hampshire, 1734-1890*. Salem, Mass.: Salem Press & Printing Co., 1892.
- Scaramelli, Richard A., ed. *Early Maps of Swanzey, N.H.* West Chesterfield: Old Maps. 1983.
- _____ *et al.* "Shire Town by Foot: A Walking Tour of Keene NH." Keene: Historical Society of Cheshire County, 1996.
- Warranty Deed, George E. Whitcomb to Town of Swanzey, 1916.
- Whitcomb Hall File #N072, Swanzey Historical Museum (contains unidentified newspaper clippings re: plans and dedication of Hall, Whitcomb anniversary celebration, obituaries, Hall clock maintenance receipts, etc.).







INDIVIDUAL INVENTORY FORM

NHDHR INVENTORY # SWA 0003

Name, Location, Ownership

1. Historic name Whitcomb Hall
2. District or area Village of West Swanzey
3. Street and number 17 Main Street
4. City or town Swanzey
5. County Cheshire
6. Current owner Town of Swanzey, NH

Function or Use

7. Current use(s) Vacant
8. Historic use(s) Meeting Hall, Dances, Sports Facility, Minstrel Shows

Architectural Information

9. Style Classical Revival
10. Architect/builder M. O. Spaulding
11. Source Whitcomb Hall File #N-072, Swanzey Historical Museum
12. Construction date May 15, 1916
13. Source Whitcomb Hall File #N-072, Swanzey Historical Museum
14. Alterations, with dates UPGRADE Mechanical System 1960
15. Moved? no ☒ yes ☐ date: _____

Exterior Features

16. Foundation Granite
17. Cladding Clapboard
18. Roof material Slate
19. Chimney material Brick
20. Type of roof Front Gable
21. Chimney location One End, Single Interior
22. Number of stories Two
23. Entry location Facade Center, Paired
24. Windows Main Floor-Double Hung 2/2
Second Floor Mixed
- Replacement? no ☒ yes ☐ date: _____

Site Features

25. Setting Village Center
26. Outbuildings None



35. Photo # 1
36. Date Aug. 2001
37. Roll # 2 Frame # 7A Direction: North West
38. Negative stored at: Swanzey Town Hall

27. Landscape features Other Lawn & Trees
28. Acreage Lot 85 - .61 Acres
29. Tax map/parcel # Tax Map 57 Lot 85
30. UTM reference _____
31. USGS quadrangle and scale Winchester 1-25,000
- Form prepared by
31. Name Richard Scaramelli & Frederick Steinka
32. Organization Volunteer
33. Date of survey August 2001