

# FORM B – BUILDING

Assessor's Number USGS Quad Area(s) Form Number

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES BUILDING  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD  
BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

50-0-222, 223	Lowell		DRA.43, 58
---------------	--------	--	---------------

**Town/City:** Dracut

**Place:** (*neighborhood or village*): Dracut Center

## Photograph (view from S)



**Address:** 10 and 22 Arlington Street

**Historic Name:** Yellow Meetinghouse and Parsonage

**Uses:** Present: church and single family residential

Original: church and single family residential

**Date of Construction:** 1794, 1955

**Source:** Coburn, Paquet, Roberge

**Style/Form:** Colonial Revival

**Architect/Builder:** unknown; later work see reverse

**Exterior Material:**

Foundation: brick

Wall/Trim: vinyl/ wood

Roof: asphalt

**Outbuildings/Secondary Structures:**

Parsonage 1955

Garage ca. 1955

**Major Alterations** (*with dates*):

Meetinghouse remodeled 1897, addition 1988.

Vinyl recent decades.

**Condition:** fair

**Moved:** no  yes  **Date:**

**Acreage:** 1½ acres

**Setting:** Within the institutional and residential center of Dracut

## Locus Map (north is up)



**Recorded by:** Claire W. Dempsey

**Organization:** Dracut Historical Commission

**Date** (*month / year*): May 2017

# INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------

Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

*If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

## ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION:

The Yellow Meetinghouse (10 Arlington Street, DRA.43) was built in 1794, significantly remodeled in 1897, and expanded in 1988. It shares a lot with two other church-owned buildings, the Parsonage (22 Arlington Street, DRA.58), built in 1955 and a garage and shed, probably built at about the same time. The Meetinghouse and the Parsonage face generally south onto Arlington Street, on the lot at the corner of Bridge Street. Between them and behind the Parsonage is the garage, set perpendicular to the other buildings. The parcel includes a large parking lot to the rear and wide drives across the front of the Meetinghouse and between the two buildings, covered in asphalt. There is a small grass lawn on either side of the Meetinghouse and between the drive and the road as well as providing a traditional lawn for the Parsonage.

Today the appearance of the Yellow Meetinghouse is primarily the result of its 1897 remodeling. The main block of the building is a two-story rectangle, with its long side along Arlington Street, its orientation since it was constructed; it is about 80 feet across and 46 feet deep. Although originally gabled, the building is now topped by a high hipped roof kicked at the eaves, and it sits on a basement exposed in the rear where the lot slopes down. The building is dominated by the elaborate tower and vestibule that now embellish its long Arlington Street side. The gabled vestibule projects about eight feet from the main block and is topped by an open gabled roof with matching kicked eaves. Projecting from the vestibule is a high entry tower topped by a three-part belfry and lanterns and flanked by open porches. Two entries are located here, a wide, center entry into the tower and a more modest one into the east side of the vestibule. This section of the building sits on a brick foundation that projects as a front porch before the tower, screened by an iron railing and reached by two sets of stairs. The building is now covered in vinyl siding that maintains its long-standing yellow color.

The Meetinghouse is richly embellished with an array of classical ornament consistent with the turn-of-the-century Colonial Revival style. The design encircles its volumes with deep, bracketed eaves and makes frequent use of round- and elliptically-headed door and window openings edged in thick moldings. Entry is made through a paneled double-leafed door with three-quarter sidelights flanked by pilaster strips that support a deeply plastic entablature. Set onto the entablature is a railing of turned balusters with battered and capped pedestals at each end, resembling a balcony. Above, the wide arched window is trimmed with a deeply molded casing with a curvaceous keystone. At the top of the tower is a round window with four keystones. The open, hip-roofed porches are supported by Tuscan columns at the outer corners and pilasters on the walls. The tower is topped by a three-part ensemble. The belfry is square, with three Tuscan columns at each corner supporting the entablature. Each wall is treated to resemble a Palladian window, with a blind central arch and the lower window section enclosing wide louvers. The lower lantern has canted corners, single columns, and simpler louver surrounds. The upper lantern is octagonal, with oval windows with keystones, and rises to a bell-cast roof with a bracketed cornice and weather vane. The west side of the main block is lit by pairs of long round-headed windows under an open gabled hood, supported by brackets with a wreath in the tympanum. The east side of the main block features wide three-part windows under elliptical arches on the lower story and narrower round-headed windows above.

In 1988, a large addition was made to the rear or north side of the building, designed to harmonize with the Meetinghouse as it was remodeled in 1897. Set in from the west or Bridge Street elevation of the main block but aligned with the side wall of the main block on the east side, it measures about 63 feet across and about 46 feet deep. Its roof appears to be hipped like the main block, but the sloped sides actually form a high three-sided "wall" or parapet, around the addition's flat roof, screening the HVAC apparatus stored there. The addition is two stories set on a raised basement, and the elevations are regularly fenestrated with windows stacked and paired across the walls. The basement windows are the smallest, with double-hung sash in the first and second floor, and a round-headed transom in the upper story. The street-side west elevation includes an important centered entrance treatment, flanked by a large cross. The entry is at grade, with a rectangular transom and sidelights. Immediately above the door is a composition that appears to mimic a balcony

# INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------

with a molded platform and turned elements in its balustrade and a small hood above. At the apex of the design is a large wide window topped by a round head with curved and angled faux muntins. A narrow round-headed window is also located high in the wall adjacent to the main block. On the east side of the Meetinghouse is another grade level entry, adjacent to the main block. Its hipped roof extends beyond the enclosed vestibule creating a porch supported by Tuscan columns. The glazed door of the vestibule is flanked by sidelights and there are windows on each side wall. The kick on the roof and the bracketed eaves link the addition to the Meetinghouse design.

The **Parsonage** at 22 Arlington Street is an example of a 'garrison colonial,' a traditional house type popular in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Houses like this one with a center entry bear a close relationship to the houses known popularly as 'colonial' or Dutch colonial, in their two story height and the use of a plan which commonly includes a living room to one side and the dining room and kitchen on the opposite side of a central entry. Their distinguishing feature is their overhanging second story, which links them to seventeenth-century houses of early New England while providing additional upper story space. This example employs a distinctive low second-floor height and also takes a saltbox form, with an asymmetrical roof line visible on the left side elevation, but with a shed-roofed dormer that significantly expands the rear of the second story. The house measures 36 feet across and 24 feet deep, sits on a concrete foundation, and is covered by vinyl siding and an asphalt roof. Simply and symmetrically designed, the house uses three-part windows to signal the location of the living and dining rooms, consisting of wide picture windows flanked by narrow ones. The chimney rising along the left side wall indicates the location of the living room. The majority of the windows are smaller double-hung sash, with smaller and higher ones indicating the kitchen and bathroom locations. All of the windows appear to be vinyl replacements with faux muntin grids. The simple entry, with a modern glazed door, is reached from low brick steps and an iron railing from a concrete path.

The **garage** is a small single-bay gabled block; its vehicle door is modern and a single small window lights the street-side elevation with a closed door on the opposite wall. Behind and attached to the garage is a low shed-roofed section with a door and window on its street-side elevation. Sitting on a concrete foundation, the building is covered in wood clapboards and an asphalt roof.

## HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

The Yellow Meetinghouse is the third building of Dracut's First Church, constructed in 1794, significantly remodeled in 1897, and subjected to more modest alterations over its long life; an addition was made to the rear in 1988. Dracut was incorporated as a separate town in 1701, and built its first meetinghouse between 1716 and 1718 and its second between 1748 and 1754. Like some other towns, the location of the meetinghouse was a source of discord in the town, and that remained the case at the time of the construction of the third building in 1794. The center point of the town was surveyed, and just to the north of that point, a suitable building lot was selected, where the building stands today. But those who preferred a more western location remained in opposition, eventually becoming the West Congregational Society of Dracut and constructing their own building. Located in Pawtucketville, the group and its 1898 building survive in Lowell.

In the center, the town purchased an acre of land from Obadiah Richardson, later adding 10 square rods to it. There they constructed a building in the prevailing 'meetinghouse' form of the period. Rectangular in shape and two stories in height under a gable roof, the building had its main entry on the broad south side. The interior would likely have included its pulpit against the north wall and a gallery around the other three walls. Coburn claims that the building had external stair towers, which would likely have been on each gable end of the building, but these were removed in about 1850. At about that time, the building was divided into two stories by closing in the open space at the gallery level, creating an "audience room" above and a "vestry" below; new larger windows were installed and a new pulpit added. In 1862 stoves were added, in 1869 a cupola, and in 1884 an 800 lb. bell purchased. An image of the building in 1894 shows the building just prior to its remodeling, with what may be the original entablature and pilaster treatment at the south entry, a new Italianate hood at the west entry below the cupola, and a small chimney (see figure 1). The building's window arrangement is distinctive, with more windows on the ground floor than the upper story, but it is not known whether this was an original configuration or a later alteration.

The congregation that occupied the building was part of the established church in 1794, but after the turn of the nineteenth century at least, multiple religious communities worshiped there, including Congregational Trinitarians, Unitarians, Methodists, and Baptists, and Roberge believes the congregation included significant numbers of Unitarians. Eventually dissatisfied with this arrangement, the Congregational minister withdrew, the Congregationalists joined other churches, and eventually they withdrew to form another church in 1834. The Evangelical Congregational Society built a church in 1835 on Pleasant Street known as the Hillside Church. The First Church remained open to multiple denominations but struggled some. In 1847, it voted to return to Congregationalism and became the Centre Orthodox Congregational Church. It appears to have thrived as the town grew.

In 1897, the meetinghouse was expanded and remodeled in a project said to have cost \$15,000. Like many congregations, this one sought to expand its meeting place by adding domestic spaces, kitchens, parlors and the like, to provide space for meetings and social activities beyond worship. It is believed that at this time the building received a full basement where a kitchen and a dining area were added and an addition to the east, extending the building to its current length and enclosing a chapel and a ladies parlor. An organ and a marble baptismal font were donated at this time. Stained glass windows were added, as was electricity and plumbing. The new interior was described as dark and Victorian.

The 1897 remodeling of the building constitutes a significant reconfiguration and may represent an early example of embracing an elaborate Colonial Revival mode in church buildings, at least in New England. Further research would be necessary to establish the chronology of this work, but it appears that there were comparatively few cases where Protestant congregations undertook expansion programs like this, where elaborate new elements were added to existing early buildings. In addition, while new Colonial Revival churches became increasingly popular over the twentieth century, the decade of the 1890s was early for ecclesiastical examples. Like other revival buildings of the period, this one employs more ambitious ornament than might typically be found on buildings of the period and region. Here we see rich trim and features that recall English Wren and Gibbs church designs, some of which had been employed in ambitious Anglican churches of the eighteenth century and which became popular on the more richly decorated New England churches of the early nineteenth century. The tower and lanterns, for example, employ components of steeples illustrated in James Gibbs' *Book of Architecture* (first published in 1728), a popular source for early and revival designers. The designers of this addition also made several distinctive choices for the building, chief among these returning the primary entry to the south elevation and enriching it with a wide vestibule and a high tower. More commonly, these features appeared on the narrow end of the building, and indeed, that configuration marked what has been called the shift from square "meetinghouse" to long "church" in the early nineteenth century. But this arrangement was not entirely novel, as at least one period church made this choice, the 1799 First Church of Exeter, NH, which included not just a vestibule and tower on the long side of the building, but a hipped roof as well (see figure 2). This building is by no means a replica of that one, but it includes these features of form as well as an array of details that might have been inspired by that design. Another building where a similar and unusual addition was made to an early building can be found in Burlington, MA, where the 1732 Woburn Second Parish Meetinghouse had a vestibule and tower added to its long wall in 1888. The flanking porches added here may also relate to those added to the Congregational Church of Washington, CT, in 1885.

The architects of this work, Eldredge & West, are not well known and do not appear in the AIA Historical Directory or in Withey's Biographical Dictionary; this is the only building credited to them in MACRIS. The two young men were residents in Haverhill when they designed this building, both describing themselves as architects, Eldredge at 73 Merrimac in that city, West employed "at Salem." Both had earlier described themselves as draughtsmen. Frederick West was born in Haverhill in 1870 but it is not clear where he was educated; by 1900 he had married and moved to Ridgefield NJ and later lived in Leonia NJ. George W. Eldredge was born in 1871 in New Jersey, and lived in Easton before moving to Haverhill; he attended Haverhill High School on a partial course with the class of 1889. He too moved soon after this commission and later lived in Denver, Salt Lake, LA, and Provo.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ancestry.com: Albert L. Bartlett, *The Haverhill Academy ... and the Haverhill High School... A Historical Sketch...* (Haverhill: Chase Brothers, Printers, 1890; US Census, 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, 1940; US City Directories, Haverhill, 1889-1901. Peter Stott reports West's place of birth and that Eldredge was born in New Jersey and died in Texas in 1934.

**INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET**

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

**MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------

The congregation seems to have had a parsonage at various times in the past, but the details are not covered in the church histories. In 1953, the parsonage located near the present building burned, and the new one was dedicated in 1955. In 1960 more repairs were undertaken at the Meetinghouse, including a new kitchen, tower repair, and replacement of wooden stairs, perhaps with the brick porch and stairs in place today. In 1969, the Centre and the Evangelical Church (Hillside) merged to form Christ Church United. They used both buildings until 1973 when the Hillside Church burned. The large rear addition to the church was designed by Jeffrey J. Cook in 1988. Cook (ca. 1956-2015) was educated at the Boston Architecture Center and practiced in Lowell, where he worked in rehabilitations of Cherry & Webb and the School Department, as well as designing North Common Village for the Housing Authority.<sup>2</sup> In about 2001 additional repairs were made to the tower under the direction of John Pearson, architect of Andover. He has been active in the Andover Community Trust and currently works at Margulies Peruzzi Architects in Boston.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES**

Ancestry.com: see footnotes.

Buggeln, Gretchen Townsend. *Temples of Grace: The Material Transformation of Connecticut's Churches, 1790-1840*. Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003.

Coburn, Silas Roger. *History of Dracut, Massachusetts* (Lowell, MA: Press of the Courier-Citizen Co., 1922).

Dracut Historical Society Collections, vertical files, churches.

Kilde, Jeanne Halgren. *When Church Became Theater: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Paquet, Dinat H. *The Photographic History of Dracut Massachusetts*. Dracut: Dracut Historical Society, 1982.

Roberge, Joni, "The Old Yellow Meetinghouse, Dracut MA: Early History and the 'Unitarian Crisis,' 1833-1834," typescript at the Dracut Historical Society.

Sinnott, Edmund W. *Meetinghouse & Church in Early New England*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1963.

Stott, Peter, personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> Legacy.com, Obituary of 17 October 2015; *Lowell Sun*, "NH Authorities....," 11 November 2011.

**INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET**

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------

**PHOTOGRAPHS**



View from S.

**INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET**

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------



View from NW.



View of parsonage from SW.

**INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET**

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------



View of garage from SW.

**FIGURES**



Figure 1. Yellow Meetinghouse before remodeling, 1894. Dracut Historical Society.



**INVENTORY FORM A CONTINUATION SHEET**

DRACUT

10 and 22 ARLINGTON STREET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
220 MORRISSEY BOULEVARD, BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS 02125

Area Letter Form Nos.

	43, 58
--	--------



Figure 2. First Parish, Exeter, NH, 1799.

	43, 58
--	--------

**National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form**

Check all that apply:

- Individually eligible       Eligible **only** in a historic district
- Contributing to a potential historic district       Potential historic district

Criteria:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**

Criteria Considerations:     **A**     **B**     **C**     **D**     **E**     **F**     **G**

Statement of Significance by Claire W. Dempsey  
*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The Yellow Meetinghouse is the third church of Dracut's First Church, established to serve the spiritual, social, and educational needs of Dracut, as required by Massachusetts law until 1833, and continuing to serve as a community meeting place today. The congregation has an unusual history of ecumenism during the years of the Trinitarian-Unitarian split, and its later history reflects the evolution of the Congregational denomination's needs for worship and social spaces. The core of the meetinghouse retains much of its original form and massing, but its character today was established by its 1897 remodeling, which changed its appearance to reflect two critical themes in church design. The expansion provided for more meeting and food preparation spaces that were characteristic of the "domesticating" of churches in this period. This remodeling also appears to be an early example of Colonial Revival embellishment and an unusual treatment for an historic church building. The addition is focused on the rear of the building and echoes many of its decorative themes; the siding does not impact the primary decoration of the building. The parsonage added in 1955 takes related Colonial Revival form and ornament. The buildings are well-preserved examples of these types and their character is emblematic of the periods of their construction and their later alteration, employing historic revival forms at an early date and again in the postwar period. They retain integrity of workmanship, design, materials, association, location, setting, and feeling.

The Yellow Meeting House would also contribute to a potential Dracut Center National Register District that would include several important institutional and residential buildings, including Greenmont Avenue School (ca. 1928, DRA.44); Centre School (1898 DRA.35); the Grange Hall (1903, DRA.34); Moses Greeley Parker Library (1922, DRA.46); and the Archibald Golar House (ca. 1900, DRA.107).

Although a religious property, the Yellow Meetinghouse is eligible because of its architectural value reflected in its changing form and ornament as well as its association with the history of the town of Dracut.