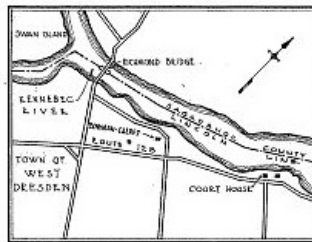


POWNALBOROUGH COURT HOUSE

CEDAR GROVE
LINCOLN COUNTY
MAINE



SKETCH MAP
SHOWING LOCATION

ERECTED 1761

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

MEASURED: JULY 7, 1936 - JULY 30, 1936
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MEASUREMENTS CHECKED: JOSIAH T. TUBBY



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POWNALBOROUGH COURT HOUSE

The 1936 Historic American

Buildings Survey

Aric Wilmunder

A Well-Regulated Press

Novato, California

2026

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Preface

Historic buildings connect us to the people who came before us. Their walls have witnessed public debates, quiet conversations, celebrations, hardships, and the ordinary routines of everyday life. Some of these stories survive in letters, diaries, newspapers, and photographs. Others remain written into the buildings themselves, waiting to be discovered in worn stair treads, hand-forged hinges, weathered timbers, and carefully crafted woodwork.

The Pownalborough Court House, completed in 1761, is one of Maine's oldest surviving public buildings. It served as the seat of government for Lincoln County before becoming the home of the Johnson and Prescott families in the nineteenth century. Today it is preserved as a museum, allowing visitors to experience more than two and a half centuries of Maine history under one roof.

By the 1930s, many of America's historic buildings had already been altered or lost. Recognizing the need to preserve an accurate record of the nation's architectural heritage, the federal government established the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) in 1933. Just three years later, a team of architects, draftsmen, and a photographer arrived at the Pownalborough Court House to create one of the earliest comprehensive records of the building.

Over the course of their survey, they measured rooms, fireplaces, stairways, windows, doors, and structural framing, recording details that might otherwise have been forgotten. Their work produced nineteen meticulously drafted sheets, a series of photographs, and a written historical record that together remain

among the most valuable resources for understanding the courthouse not just as it appeared in 1936, but also as it had evolved over time.

At first glance, these records may seem intended only for architects or historians. In reality, they tell a much broader story. The measured drawings reveal how the courthouse was constructed and altered. The photographs show the building as the surveyors encountered it in 1936, weathered, furnished, and still in use. The written record preserves their understanding of its materials, construction, alterations, and history. Together, they offer a fascinating glimpse into the methods and standards of one of America's earliest historic preservation programs.

This guide was created to help readers explore that survey. Rather than simply reproducing the original HABS materials, it examines what they document, why they were created, and what they reveal about the building. Whether you are visiting the courthouse for the first time, researching its history, studying early American architecture, or simply curious about how historic buildings are documented, these pages are intended to make one of the nation's finest historic building surveys accessible to everyone.

Chapter 1

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)

Preserving America's Architectural Heritage

Historic buildings are among our nation's most tangible connections to the past. They preserve the craftsmanship, materials, and architectural traditions of earlier generations while providing a physical setting for the events that shaped local communities and the nation as a whole. Every hand-hewn timber, worn floorboard, and precisely carved molding reflects the skills of the people who built them and the lives of those who later occupied them.

By the early twentieth century, however, many of America's oldest buildings were disappearing. Expanding cities, changing transportation networks, economic pressures, and modern construction practices led to the demolition or alteration of countless historic structures. While some buildings were preserved through local efforts, many others vanished without leaving behind an accurate record of their appearance or construction.

Architects, historians, and preservationists recognized that once a building was lost, so too was much of the knowledge it contained. If every room, doorway, staircase, fireplace, and structural detail could be measured and recorded, future generations would still be able to study these noteworthy buildings even if they no longer survived. Accurate measured drawings, accompanied by photographs

and written histories, offered a way to preserve America's architectural heritage for future generations.

This vision led to the creation of the Historic American Buildings Survey, a national program dedicated to documenting the country's most significant historic buildings with a level of precision and care never before attempted on such a scale.

The Great Depression and the Birth of HABS

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was established in 1933 during the depths of the Great Depression. At a time when unemployment affected nearly every profession, many architects found themselves without work as construction projects came to a halt across the country.

Recognizing both the need to employ skilled professionals and the importance of preserving America's historic architecture, the National Park Service partnered with the American Institute of Architects and the Library of Congress to create a nationwide documentation program. Rather than constructing new buildings, teams of architects, draftsmen, and photographers would record historic structures through painstakingly prepared measured drawings, large-format photography, and written historical documentation.

The program served two important purposes. It provided meaningful employment for trained architects while creating a permanent archive of America's architectural heritage. Every measured drawing was prepared to professional drafting standards, ensuring that future architects, historians, preservationists, and researchers could rely upon the accuracy of the record.

More than nine decades later, the Historic American Buildings Survey remains one of the nation's most important preservation programs. Thousands of buildings have been documented, creating an extraordinary collection preserved by the Library of Congress and available to researchers throughout the world.

HABS in Maine

Maine participated in the Historic American Buildings Survey during the program's early years, creating a permanent architectural record of significant buildings throughout the state. The work undertaken by HABS architects and draftsmen documented structures ranging from early colonial buildings to examples of nineteenth-century architecture, preserving their plans, elevations, construction details, and architectural features.

The scope of this work was brought together in 1974 when the Maine State Museum published Denys Peter Myers's *Historic Architecture of Maine: The Maine Catalog-HABS*. Myers placed the state's HABS records within the broader development of Maine architecture and cataloged the buildings that had been recorded by the program up to that time. His work drew upon the research of many of Maine's architectural historians and preservationists, including Earle G. Shettleworth Jr., whose studies of Maine buildings and architects appear among the sources used in the volume.

Among the buildings recorded during the program's early years was the Pownalborough Court House. In July 1936, a HABS team measured the building in detail. Their fieldwork was subsequently developed into nineteen finished sheets documenting the courthouse from its foundation and floor plans to its elevations, structural framing, architectural details, and original hardware.

The Survey of the Pownalborough Court House

Among the many buildings selected for documentation was the Pownalborough Court House in Dresden, Maine. Completed in 1761, it is one of Maine's oldest surviving public buildings and an exceptional example of colonial civic architecture.

By 1936, the courthouse had already experienced nearly two centuries of continuous use and adaptation. Although many original architectural features remained intact, the building had also undergone alterations reflecting its long history. Recognizing both its historical importance and its remarkable state of preservation, the Historic American Buildings Survey selected the courthouse for comprehensive documentation.

The survey team produced nineteen measured drawings that recorded the building from foundation to roof. Floor plans documented the arrangement of each level, while exterior elevations captured every side of the structure. Additional sheets focused on entrances, fireplaces, windows, doors, hardware, framing, and other architectural details that distinguished the courthouse and preserved evidence of its eighteenth-century construction.

Today these drawings remain among the most complete architectural records ever created for the Pownalborough Court House. They provide an invaluable reference for historians, architects, museum professionals, preservationists, and anyone seeking to understand how the building was constructed and how it evolved over time.

The Survey Team

The measured drawings contained in this survey were the result of countless hours of methodical observation, precise measurement, and meticulous drafting. Every line represents information gathered directly from the building by trained architects and draftsmen who understood that accuracy was essential.

Unlike artistic renderings intended to capture the appearance of a building, measured drawings are technical documents created to exact scale. Dimensions, construction methods, architectural details, and structural relationships are recorded with precision so that the building can be studied long after the survey is complete.

The Pownalborough Court House survey was completed as part of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), one of the earliest New Deal preservation programs established in 1933. HABS brought together architects, draftsmen, photographers, and historians to create permanent records of America's significant historic structures before time, neglect, or development could erase them.

The Maine HABS program was supervised by Josiah T. Tubby, a Portland architect who served as the state's HABS District Officer during the 1930s. In that role, Tubby coordinated surveys throughout Maine and helped establish the standards that made HABS documentation one of the most respected architectural records in the country.

Working with Tubby on the Pownalborough Court House were Joseph P. DePeter, Frank D. Sampson, and Carl R. Stearns, architects and draftsmen responsible for carrying out the field measurements and preparing the measured

drawings reproduced in this guide. Although relatively little has been published about these men individually, their work exemplifies the extraordinary level of care that characterized the early HABS program. Nine decades later, the drawings they produced remain among the most important documentary records of the courthouse. They continue to guide historians, preservationists, architects, and museum interpreters.

How to Read Architectural Drawings

For many readers, architectural drawings may appear unfamiliar at first. Fortunately, they follow a consistent visual language that becomes easy to understand with a little practice.

A floor plan presents a building as though it were sliced horizontally several feet above the floor, allowing the arrangement of rooms, walls, doors, windows, stairways, and fireplaces to be viewed from above. An elevation shows the exterior of one side of the building, revealing its proportions, windows, doors, rooflines, and architectural details. A section cuts vertically through the structure to expose its interior construction, framing, floor levels, and relationships between spaces.

Many sheets also include detail drawings, which enlarge specific architectural features such as entrances, fireplaces, moldings, doors, windows, or hardware. These enlarged views record craftsmanship that would be impossible to show clearly at the scale of the overall building.

Throughout the survey, scales, dimension lines, labels, and notes provide additional information about construction and materials. Together, these measured drawings form a comprehensive architectural record that allows

readers to examine the courthouse from its overall design down to the smallest details.

The chapters that follow explore each of the nineteen sheets in sequence, explaining what the surveyors documented, why each drawing was important, and what it reveals about one of Maine's most exceptional historic buildings.

Finding Historic American Buildings Survey Records

The records of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) are preserved by the Library of Congress and are freely available to anyone through its website. Established in 1933, HABS has documented thousands of historic structures across the United States, creating one of the largest and most valuable architectural archives in the world. Today, nearly all of these surveys have been digitized, allowing researchers to examine original drawings, photographs, and historical documentation from anywhere.

The easiest place to begin is the Library of Congress homepage:

Library of Congress: <https://www.loc.gov>

HABS records are accessed through the Library of Congress **Prints & Photographs Online Catalog (PPOC)**:

Prints & Photographs Online Catalog: <https://www.loc.gov/pictures>

From the search box, simply enter the name of a building, city or town, county, state, or HABS survey number. Searching for "**Pownalborough Court House**", for example, immediately locates the complete survey discussed in this guide.

Each HABS collection is unique, but most include three principal components: measured drawings prepared to architectural standards, large-format black-and-white photographs, and written historical reports describing the structure's history, architecture, ownership, and significance. Some surveys consist of only a few pages, while others contain dozens—or even hundreds—of drawings, photographs, and supporting documents.

The Library of Congress allows these materials to be viewed directly in a web browser or downloaded in high resolution at no cost. Architectural drawings can often be enlarged sufficiently to study individual construction details, while photographs reveal features that may no longer survive. Many surveys also include downloadable PDF versions of the historical reports, making the complete documentation readily available to researchers, homeowners, educators, preservationists, and students.

Although HABS is best known for documenting nationally significant landmarks, the collection extends far beyond famous buildings. Farmhouses, courthouses, mills, schools, churches, railroad stations, industrial buildings, covered bridges, lighthouses, and countless other historic structures have all been carefully documented. Because the surveys span more than nine decades, they also provide a fascinating record of how buildings have changed over time and how the practice of historic preservation has evolved.

Whether you are researching a family home, studying local history, restoring a historic structure, or simply exploring America's architectural heritage, the Historic American Buildings Survey offers an extraordinary opportunity to examine these places through the original records created by the architects, photographers, and historians who documented them. The Pownalborough

Court House survey examined in this guide is just one example of the remarkable depth and quality of information preserved within this national collection.

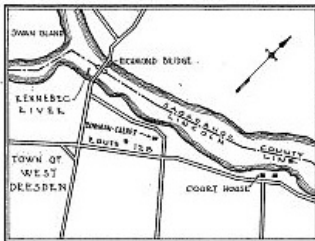
Tip: If your first search does not produce the desired building, try searching by the town or county instead. Many HABS records are cataloged using historic place names or official building names rather than the names commonly used today.

PART I

THE MEASURED DRAWINGS

POWNALBOROUGH COURT HOUSE

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CARL R. STEARNS

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19 SHEETS

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Chapter 2

The Original Survey

The first sheet of every Historic American Buildings Survey serves as the official title page for the measured drawings that follow. Although simple in appearance, it establishes the identity of the building, records its location, identifies the government agencies responsible for the survey, and recognizes the architects, draftsmen, and reviewers whose work created this permanent record.

At the center of the page is a small sketch map locating the Pownalborough Court House along the eastern bank of the Kennebec River in what was then Cedar Grove, Lincoln County, Maine. Although the community is now known as Dresden, the survey preserves the place names in use when the drawings were prepared in 1936.

The title block along the bottom of the sheet provides valuable historical information. It records that the courthouse was erected in 1761, identifies the Historic American Buildings Survey as a project of the U.S. Department of the Interior and the National Park Service, and notes both the dates the building was measured and when the finished drawings were completed. It also preserves the names of the architects, draftsmen, and reviewers whose careful work continues to benefit researchers nearly a century later.

Perhaps most importantly, this page reminds us that the drawings which follow are neither modern reconstructions nor artistic interpretations. They are measured drawings prepared directly from the building itself. Every floor plan,

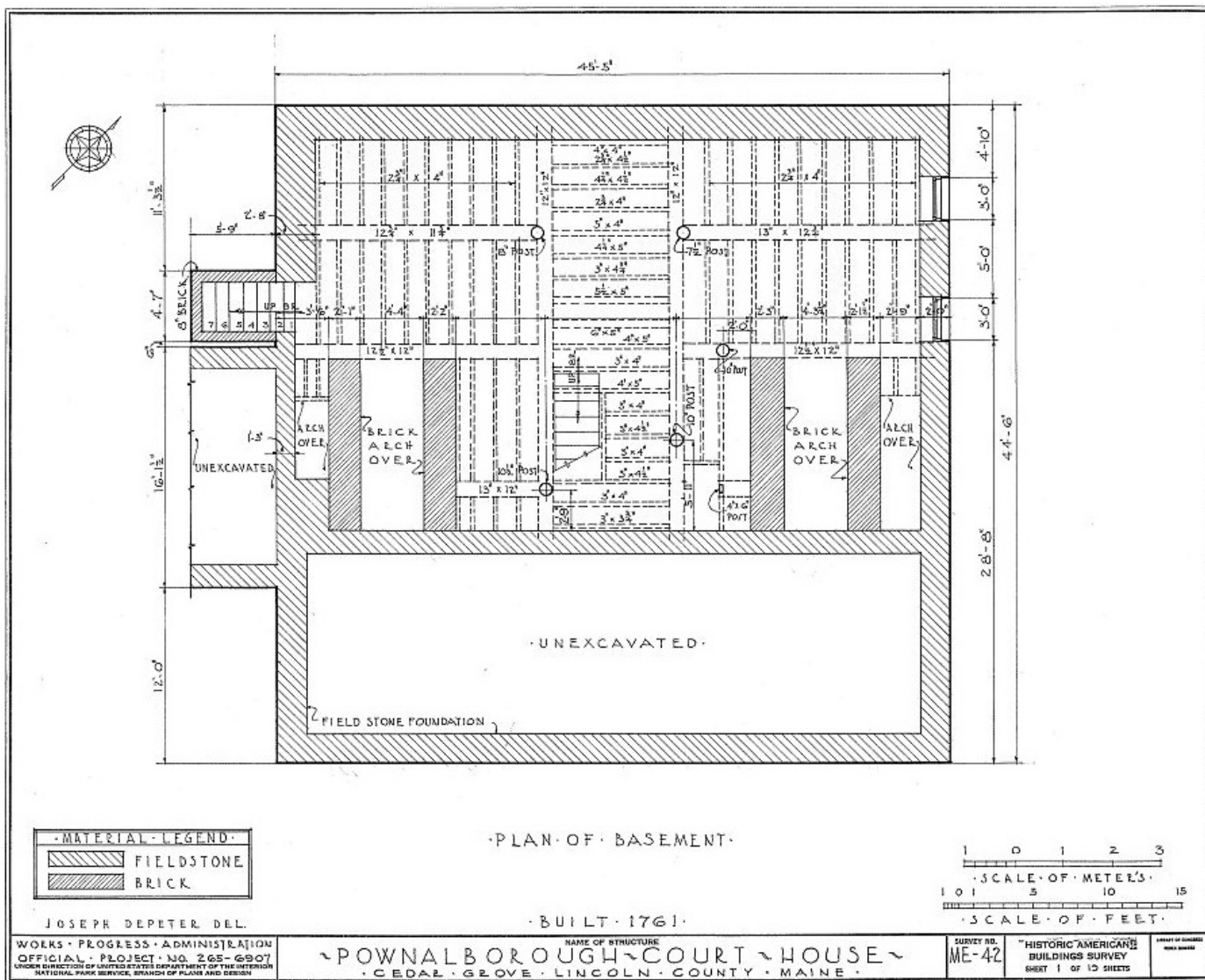
elevation, section, and architectural detail in the pages ahead is part of the official 1936 Historic American Buildings Survey, created to preserve an accurate architectural record of one of Maine's most significant colonial buildings.

Looking Closer

Several details on this cover sheet deserve special attention.

- **Field work and drafting were separate processes.** The courthouse was measured during July 1936, while the finished drawings were completed in November 1936. This reminds us that much of the precise drafting occurred after the survey team returned from the field.
- **The sketch map provides historical context.** Rather than serving as a navigation map, it identifies the courthouse within its surrounding community and preserves the place names used in 1936.
- **The notation "19 Sheets" identifies a complete survey.** From the very first page, readers know they are looking at a coordinated set of measured drawings prepared as a single architectural record.
- **The approval signatures document the survey process.** Before being accepted into the Library of Congress, the drawings were reviewed and approved, emphasizing that these were official archival documents prepared to professional standards.

Next: *The survey began where every great building begins, with its foundation. Before we can appreciate the courthouse's rooms, doors, and architectural details, we first understand the structure that has supported them since 1761.*



Sheet 1 – Basement Plan

The first measured drawing in the survey begins beneath the courthouse. Although visitors rarely see this part of the building, the basement reveals much about how the structure was engineered and how its builders adapted to the site nearly two and a half centuries ago.

Unlike a modern basement, this space was never intended as finished living or working space. Instead, it provided a solid foundation for the building above while supporting massive masonry fireplaces and carrying the weight of heavy timber framing. The plan documents both the structural elements that made the courthouse possible and the practical solutions employed by eighteenth-century builders.

One of the most striking features of the drawing is the large central area labeled "Unexcavated." Rather than excavating beneath the entire building, the original builders removed only the soil necessary to construct the foundation walls, support the fireplaces, and provide access beneath portions of the floor. Leaving much of the interior undisturbed reduced labor while providing a stable base for the structure.

The drawing also illustrates the substantial fieldstone foundation that supports the courthouse. A material legend identifies the two primary construction materials: fieldstone for the exterior foundation walls and brick for the large masonry arches beneath the fireplaces. These brick arches carried the tremendous weight of the chimneys above while creating protected spaces beneath each hearth.

Running through the center of the building is a series of heavy timber posts supporting the principal floor framing. Together with the stone foundation and masonry arches, these supports distributed the weight of the building above and created a remarkably durable structural system that has served the courthouse for more than 260 years.

Although the basement itself receives few visitors today, this drawing reminds us that every historic building depends upon strong engineering hidden from view. Before a single courtroom session could be held or a family could make the building their home, its foundation had to be designed to support generations of use.

Looking Closer

- **Only part of the basement was excavated.** The large area marked "Unexcavated" demonstrates that eighteenth-century builders removed only as much earth as was necessary for construction and maintenance.
- **The fireplaces begin in the basement.** The brick arches shown beneath each fireplace supported the weight of the masonry chimneys that rise through the building.
- **A simple material legend tells an important story.** Only two materials are identified: fieldstone and brick. They form the structural backbone of the courthouse.
- **The basement reveals the building's hidden framework.** While later sheets focus on rooms, doors, and architectural details, this plan introduces the unseen structural system that supports everything above it.

Next: *We begin where every visitor begins, on the first floor. Before exploring the courthouse's history room by room, we'll examine the spaces recorded by the 1936 HABS survey and the evidence they preserve.*