

John Ruggles House
29 Main Street (U.S. Route 1)
Thomaston
Knox County
Maine

HABS No. ME-106

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

JOHN RUGGLES HOUSE

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Address: 29 Main Street, (U.S. Route 1), Thomaston, Knox County, Maine.

Present Owner and Occupant: This large, impressive, frame house was built for Judge John Ruggles, a lawyer, congressman, and prominent citizen of Thomaston.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: Built for John Ruggles, the house has remained in his family.

2. Date of erection: 1827.

3. Architect: According to the family, John Ruggles designed the house himself.

4. Sources of information: Samuel M. Green, "The Architecture of Thomaston, Maine," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Vol. X, No. 4, pp. 24-32.

Samuel M. Green, Exhibition of Maine Architecture from the 17th Century to the Civil War (Catalog of an exhibit arranged by the Art Department of Colby College, Waterville, Maine, 1945).

Cyrus Eaton, History of Thomaston, Rockland, and South Thomaston, Maine, 2 volumes (Hollowell, Maine: Master, Smith and Co., 1865), Vol. 1, pp. 316-317, et passim.

B. Supplemental Material: The following is transcribed from Green, "The Architecture of Thomaston, Maine":

"Before turning to the Greek Revival, one conspicuous house, probably by an amateur designer, should be mentioned because of its unusual facade, an excellent example of vernacular architecture as distinguished from the academic. The Ruggles house, one of the most impressive in size and refinement of detail, is said by a descendant who lives in it to have been designed and built in 1827 by her grandfather, Judge John Ruggles, lawyer and prominent citizen. He was one of the favored few in town who went to play whist with the Widow Knox, whose tastes in society were so exalted that she had never entered the house of anyone in Thomaston, always sending her coachman on any errand while she remained in her carriage. The house is gabled, with four chimneys, and of conventional plan, a central hall and four large rooms on each floor. A capacious ell joins the house to the barn (a common practice due to the severity of the winters), which itself is nicely finished, the openings being decorated with

pilasters and covered by blind keystone arches. Formerly the land contained a small one-story building which was Mr. Ruggles' law office. It is a large house and unusual pains were taken with its detail. The mantels, some of Thomaston granite, are as pretentious as any in town. The interior doorways on the ground floor are as elegantly proportioned and refined in their many-moulded detail as those by Alexander Parris in Portland, and finer than anything in Thomaston. But the front entrance and the second-story window above it comprise the most interesting feature of the house. This combination makes an impressive unit, though an examination of the proportions and some of the detail reveals a less than professional hand. Much of the ornamental detail is naive. The prominent medallions in the entablature, though common to Adam design, are too large and are incised rather than raised. Actually it can be said in extenuation of this unconventional treatment that the incised design is more appropriate to wood and wood-cutting tools, especially since the Adam designs were often conceived to be executed in stucco relief. Similar in effect and in appropriateness to medium and tool are the dots and dashes taking the place of the middle fluting in the pilasters, and the diamond shaped pattern in the door and window. The former is a common enough American adaptation in wood of Adam detail but not usually employed in so unconventional a place. All this indicates that Mr. Ruggles hadn't the professional task of such a designer as Keith. Yet, if the detail is judged not by academic standards but as that appropriate to execution in wood, it exemplifies a more original conception than the conventionally correct, and at the same time has a local flavor."

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: This is a large, frame house with an unusual facade, an example of the vernacular architecture of the early 19th century.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Technical Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: This is a large, two-story, five-bay house with a rear wing connecting with an attached barn.

2. Foundations: Stone.

3. Wall construction: Clapboards, plain corner boards.

4. Chimneys: Two brick chimneys in main block at the outside walls.

5. Openings:

a. Doors and doorways: Six-panel door, flat panels; side lights and elliptical top light with lead tracery; similar window on the second floor over the doorway. Pilastered frontispieces around both doorway and superimposed window with elaborate carved ornament.

b. Windows and shutters: Double hung windows, six-light sash; louvered shutters.

6. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: Low hip roof, shingled.

b. Cornice: Simple boxed, molded cornice.

C. Technical Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Central-hall plan

2. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster. Wallpaper in the parlor is supposed to be original.

3. Doors: Six-panel doors, flat panels, small moldings.

4. Trim: Molded wood trim. Pilaster trim on doors and windows. Principal doors have cornices.

5. Hardware: Butt hinges, mortise locks with round knobs.

6. Lighting: Electric

7. Heating: Central. Original fireplaces throughout. One-story, black marble mantel in parlor.

D. Site

1. General setting and orientation: House faces south on a medium-sized lot in a residential section of Thomaston. The lot is slightly elevated above the road.

2. Walks, driveways, etc.: Brick walk to front door. Crushed rock driveway leading to attached barn on the east side of the house.

3. Landscaping: Informal with lawn, trees, shrubs.

Prepared by James M. Replogle and Osmund R. Overby,
Architects
National Park Service
August 1962.

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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FRONT ELEVATION

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FRONT ELEVATION

Left and right overlap: 90%

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

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