

FORM B - BUILDING

Assessor's number

USGS Quad

Area(s)

Form Number

61-163

Weymouth

1159

Massachusetts Historical Commission
80 Boylston Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Town Hingham

Place (neighborhood or village) Downtown Hingham

Address 70 South Street

Historic Name John Thaxter House

Uses: Present Hingham Community Center

Original Single residence

Date of Construction 1718

Source Hingham Journal, 5/1/1885

Style/Form Seventeenth Century

Architect/Builder

Exterior Material:

Foundation Granite

Wall/Trim Wood shingles, clapboards

Roof Asphalt shingles

Outbuildings/Secondary Structures None

Major Alterations (with dates) 1786 - west wing added. 1900, new portico on North Street bowling alley, 1904, addition to west.

Condition Good

Moved [X] no [ ] yes Date

Acreage 14,517 sq. ft.

Setting The structure is prominently situated on the southwest corner of historic 1636 South St. and Central St. in the center of the commercial center of Hingham. The facade faces the right of way of the Old Colony road as it crosses Central St. to the

Photograph

(3"x 3" or 3"x 5", only black and white) Staple onto the left side of the form. Indicate the address of the property on the back of the photo. Indicate the roll and film number of the negative here on the form.

roll film number

Table with 2 columns: roll, film number. Row 1: 15, 20

Sketch Map

Draw a map of the area indicating properties within it. Number each property for which individual inventory forms have been completed. Label streets including route numbers, if any. Attach a separate sheet if space is not sufficient here. Indicate North.



Organization Hingham Historical Commission

Date (month/day/year) July 21, 1991

## BUILDING FORM

### ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION *see continuation sheet*

*Describe architectural features. Evaluate the characteristics of this building in terms of other buildings within the community.*

### HISTORICAL NARRATIVE *see continuation sheet*

*Discuss the history of the building. Explain its associations with local (or state) history. Include uses of the building, and the role(s) the owners/occupants played within the community.*

Generations of the descendants of Thomas Thaxter (d. 1653-1654), one of Hingham's earliest settlers, owned the property at 70 South Street for 190 years, from 1697 to 1887. The location of the house, which was built in 1718 on one of Hingham's oldest streets (1636), was described in 1893 as "South Street, opp. Thaxter's Bridge," this being the bridge which crosses the now covered-over Town Brook at Central Street between North and South Streets.

Thomas Thaxter arrived in Hingham by at least 1638 for it was in that year that he was granted a house-lot near the "training field" at Hingham Centre. Becoming a freeman in 1642, Thomas was a "linenweaver" and a deacon of the church. According to Julian C. Loring, the land and possibly an older house at 70 South Street, was sold to Thomas Thaxter's grand-son, Samuel Thaxter (1665-1740), in 1697 by Nathaniel Beal who had kept an ordinary on the premises. Colonel Samuel Thaxter, who served as magistrate, delegate to the General Court, selectman, etc., was one of Hingham's most prominent and influential citizens. Apparently he never lived at 70 South Street but instead built a house on the property for his son, John Thaxter (1693-1733), on the occasion of his marriage to Grace Stockbridge in 1718.

### BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES *see continuation sheet*

- Recommended for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. *If checked, you must attach a completed National Register Criteria Statement form.*

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

|                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Community:<br><br>HINGHAM | Form No:<br><br>1159 |
| Property Name:            |                      |

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE (Continued)

70 SOUTH STREET JOHN THAXTER HOUSE

A farmer by occupation, John lived at 70 South Street until his death in 1733. Following Samuel Thaxter's death in 1740, the property was inherited by John Thaxter (1721-1802), John's son. The latest John Thaxter "Esquire" was as outstanding as his grandfather Samuel; described by Solomon Lincoln as a "respectable, intelligent and wealthy farmer" (p.123), he graduated from Harvard in 1741, and later became a constable, selectman, town-treasurer, representative to the General Court as well as a colonel of a regiment.

In 1786 a large addition was added to the "paternal homestead" to accommodate John's son, Quincy Thaxter (1762-1837) and his new bride, Elizabeth Cushing. At this time 70 South Street was the only house on South Street between Main Street and the Anchor Tavern (taken down 1885) which stood at the corner of South Street and Lafayette Avenue. Quincy, also a farmer, later sold the land for 66 South Street to Israel Whiton in 1804-1806.

The well-known John Thaxter, Esquire (1755-1792), who is most commonly associated with 70 South Street, was like his brother, Quincy, born at the "paternal homestead." This John, a lawyer, graduated from Harvard College in 1774, was Deputy Secretary to Congress in 1776, and Private Secretary to President John Adams at the close of the Revolutionary War in 1779. As bearer of the Peace Treaty from France to the Continental Congress in 1783 he drew national attention. Although he set up a law practice in Haverhill after returning to private life in 1784, John Thaxter (1755-1792) was always considered one of the most distinguished inhabitants of Hingham. Norton Q. Thaxter (1803-1873), John's nephew and son of Quincy Thaxter, resided at 70 South Street until his death in 1873 and in 1877 the property passed out of the Thaxter family. (There is further information about John Thaxter (1721-1802) and Quincy Thaxter in the Manuscript Collection of the Hingham Historical Society).

Acquired by St. Paul's Church, 70 South Street became a rectory for the period of 1877-1898 and thereafter was briefly in private hands from 1898 to 1900. In 1900 the property was purchased by the Wompatuck Club and J. Sumner Fowler, architect of the two chapels at Hingham Cemetery (1886) and High Street Cemetery (1905) designed the additions and alterations for the adaptive re-use of the building with William J. Nelson, builder of 4 High Street (1901), as carpenter/contractor. The Wompatuck formally dedicated its new quarters at 70 South Street on January 3, 1901.

The Wompatuck Club, established in 1897 in the William O. Lincoln House (taken down 1947) situated a little further west on South Street from 70 South Street, was one of the earliest clubs used exclusively for men. The Club took its name from Wompatuck, the Chief Sachem of Massachusetts, which included Hingham, and who, with two other Indians, conveyed in 1665 all the territory of Hingham to the inhabitants thereof that they might "quietly possess and enjoy" the same (Hingham, D.A.R., p. 113). In 1957 the Club members, amending the original by-laws, changed the name and purposes of the organization so that it might serve the town as a Community Center (Hall, p. 6). MJF

INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

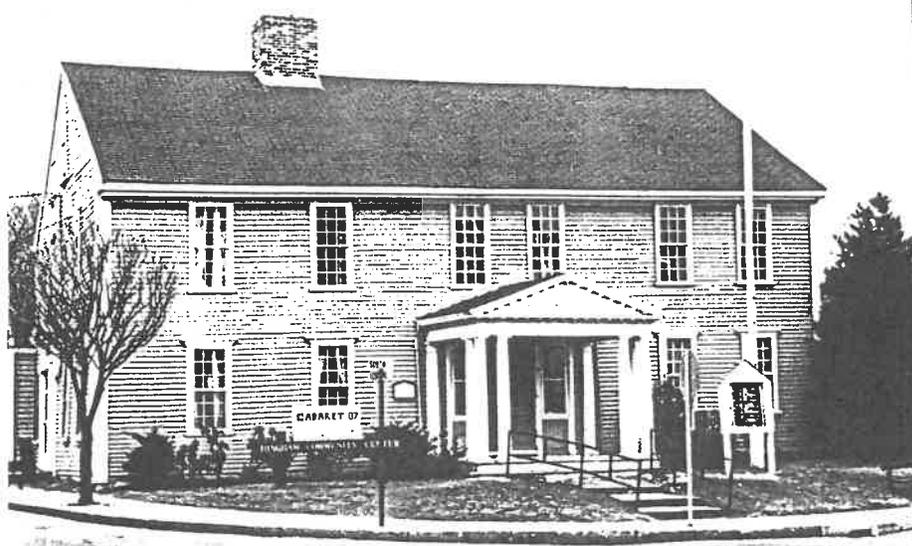
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|---------------------------|----------------------|
| Community:<br><br>HINGHAM | Form No:<br><br>1159 |
| Property Name:            |                      |

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

BIBLIOGRAPHY and/or REFERENCES

70 SOUTH STREET                      JOHN THAXTER HOUSE

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Lehner, Monique B. and Minxie J. Fannin. "History in Towns: Hingham, Massachusetts," The Magazine Antiques, October 1989, p. 812-825.  
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South Shore Advertiser, April 26, 1907.  
South Shore News, Dec. 6, 1972.



## INVENTORY FORM CONTINUATION SHEET

MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
Office of the Secretary, Boston

|                       |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Community:<br>Hingham | Form No:<br>1159 |
| Property Name:        |                  |

Indicate each item on inventory form which is being continued below.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE 70 South Street  
John Thaxter House

Hingham is fortunate to have still in existence over one hundred and twenty Colonial houses which were built between 1637 and 1775. Many of the high styled examples reflect the classic Georgian mode which came with the English settlers. The style, developed by Inigo Jones, Christopher Wren and James Gibbs, was based on the Italian Renaissance vision of order, balance and dignity and on architectural details emanating from Roman antiquity. As the colonies become more established and prosperous, leading merchants and farmers were using pattern books (Batty Langley, Abraham Swam, William Salmon and others) to construct elegant Colonial houses. In small towns such as Hingham, vernacular versions were built; they were simpler and less grand yet reflected the forms and proportions of their prototypes. The John Thaxter House, built in 1718, is a fine example of a Colonial house which has been altered and enlarged throughout the years with sensitivity. The changes and additions reflect the varied uses of the house, from residence, to rectory, to club and today, to a community center.

When the John Thaxter House was originally erected, it had a facade of four windows, a chimney placed left of center on the ridge of the gable roof and a second chimney to the west end which was removed in 1900. "The house originally had two rooms in the front, the "Hall", which includes the easterly half of the large assembly room of the club (The Wompatuck Club), and the "Front Room", now the reception room (today a small office, and entrance hall of the Central Street door) on the the first floor, and the two rooms above (with their raised field panelling still intact), with the front entry and the stairs between." (Hingham, D.A.R., 1911, page 111). The John Thaxter House still retains the original small stairway which was placed left of the entrance; it is a fortunate survivor as these early cramped small angular stairs were often vulnerable to alteration or demolition. Of significant interest is the information given in the 1911 Hingham D.A.R. book that the entry has always opened directly into the "Hall" (the assembly room, to the right of the door); only one other Hingham house, also owned by the Thaxter Family, was known to have had this unusual plan: the demolished Thomas Thaxter House, now the the site of St. Paul's

Massachusetts Historical Commission  
60 Boylston Street  
Boston, Massachusetts 02116

Community Property Address  
Hingham 70 South Street

| Area(s) | Form No. |
|---------|----------|
|         | 1159     |

## National Register of Historic Places Criteria Statement Form



Recommended:

Individually    District    Contributing to a Potential Historic District

Criteria:

|                                     |                          |                                     |                          |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A                                   | B                        | C                                   | D                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Statement of Significance by Fannin/Lehner, Preservation Consultants  
*The criteria that are checked in the above sections must be justified here.*

The 1718, John Thaxter House, 70 South Street, possesses integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and meets National Register Criteria A and C. The John Thaxter House is associated with at least five generations of the Thaxter Family several of whom were of unusual distinction. John Thaxter, Esquire (1755-1792) was Deputy Secretary to Congress in 1776 and Private Secretary to President John Adams at the close of the Revolutionary War in 1779. Under Criteria C, the residence is a fine example of an early 18th century Colonial house which has been sympathetically enlarged to accommodate its various functions, residence, the Wompatuck Club (a social club) and today, a Community Center. The Assembly Room has a paneled fireplace wall decorated with paintings attributed to John Hazlitt (1767-1837), an Englishman who worked in Hingham from 1784 to 1787.



Miller, Printer.

Old Thaxter House, Hingham, Mass.  
Now Wompatuck Clubhouse



Brook & B...

Middlemire 31  
S H 7/2 44

Wompatuck Club, South and Central Sts., Hingham, Mass.

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