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Secretary of the Commonwealth

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**DISTRICT NO. 5 SCHOOL, PETERSHAM, APPROVED FOR NOMINATION TO THE  
NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**

Secretary of the Commonwealth William F. Galvin is pleased to announce that the Massachusetts Historical Commission approved the District No. 5 School in Petersham for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places at its March meeting. The nomination will be submitted to the National Register of Historic Places at the National Park Service in Washington, DC, for final consideration and designation.

“The Massachusetts Historical Commission is dedicated to preserving the Commonwealth’s rich historic, architectural, archaeological, and cultural resources,” Secretary Galvin said. “Inclusion of Petersham’s District No. 5 School in the National Register will help to raise awareness of this well-loved, remarkably intact historic schoolhouse.”

The District No. 5 School, 311 East Street, also known as Second East School, is a well-preserved, one-room schoolhouse with modest Greek Revival-style characteristics. One of two existing one-room schoolhouses in Petersham, the school was built in 1849, and is located about three miles east of the town center. Charles Gates, who constructed the nearly identical District No. 4 School, likely built the District No. 5 school as well. Woods surround the building’s lot on three sides, and its south elevation faces open fields that look very much like they did at the time of the school’s construction. The building served as a school until 1889, when it was closed due to low enrollment.

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The town was preparing to demolish the District No. 5 School in 1905, when four former students purchased the building. These former students formed the Second East School Association in 1923, and held reunions there each August, beginning that year. Many of the association's charter members were students together at the school during the 1860s and 1870s. Membership dwindled as members aged, and the last reunion was held in 1937. The association transferred the school to the Petersham Historical Society in 1942.

The school's interior features a vestibule, which was used for students' coats and for wood storage. The vestibule's flushboard walls retain metal coat hooks, as well as examples of student graffiti. The District No. 5 school also retains a remarkable amount of historic finishes and furniture, including flushboard wainscoting, and the original student desks, settee, and teacher's desk. Particularly unusual in one-room schoolhouses, the interior also features very faded wallpaper. It appears to be machine roller-printed, and may date from the third quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The schoolroom's far wall holds two wood plaques, dating from about 1930, commissioned by the Second East School Association. They read, "The History of the World is the Biography of Great Men" and "The Foundation of Every State is the Education of its Youth." Two additional plaques commissioned by the association contain the names of all the teachers who worked at the school, and the names of the honorary and charter members of the association. Another plaque was added in 1941, to commemorate the transfer of the school to the historical society. The Petersham Historical Society carefully maintains the building, and makes it available to the public for educational programs and tours.

The District No. 5 School is one of six historic resources around the Commonwealth approved for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places by the Massachusetts Historical Commission at this meeting.

Secretary Galvin serves as Chairman of the 17-member board, which meets regularly and considers historic resources eligible for the National Register four times a year.

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The National Register is the nation's official listing of significant historic resources. In Massachusetts, there are more than 70,000 properties listed in the National Register. The Massachusetts Historical Commission has been administering the National Register of Historic Places program in Massachusetts since 1966.

The Massachusetts Historical Commission is the office of the State Historic Preservation Officer and the State Archaeologist. It was established in 1963 to identify, evaluate, and protect important historical and archaeological assets of the Commonwealth. Visit our website to learn more about the Commission's programs ([www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/mhc)).

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