

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received **MAY 5 1986**

date entered **JUN 5 1986**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Merryall Union Evangelical Society Chapel

and or common The Merryall Union Chapel

2. Location

street & number Chapel Hill Road N/A not for publication

city, town New Milford Lower Merryall, 1/8 mi. north of the junction of
— vicinity of Chapel Hill and Merryall Roads

state Connecticut code 09 county Litchfield code 005

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name The Merryall Union Chapel Society

Clifford Burnett, President

street & number Treasure Hill Road

city, town Kent N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk's Office, New Milford Town Hall

street & number 10 Main Street

city, town New Milford state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission - 59 So. Prospect St.

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Merryall Union Evangelical Chapel is a small, late-19th-century vernacular Gothic Revival rectangular frame building with a steeply pitched gabled roof. The chapel stands at the edge of a quiet rural road in an open river valley, approximately four miles north of the center of New Milford. The fenced-in lot on which the chapel stands is surrounded by a field; to the south are woods and to the north and west is a meandering section of the West Aspetuck River. A combination of flat and rolling fields comprise the more distant surroundings to the northwest and are the setting of a late-19th-century schoolhouse and two Federal-period farmhouses with outbuildings. Beyond these lowlands are mostly wooded hills. Directly across the road from the chapel is a small dwelling; further south on the road and visible from the chapel is a former dwelling and grange hall. The chapel stands on the fringe of the center of Lower Merryall, a distinct concentration of 19th-century dwellings, mills, and other contemporaneous utilitarian buildings situated along a tributary of the West Aspetuck River.

The chapel's frame structure rests on a fieldstone and cut-granite foundation which contains a full basement. The rectangular body of the building is covered by a steeply pitched gabled roof (photograph 1). The south roof slope has old, patterned tin shingles; the north slope has asphalt shingles. The original roofing material was wood shingles.¹ The exterior walls are faced with white clapboards, and the door and window trim are painted dark red. Originally, the walls were probably a yellow-green color, and the trim a darker shade.² The entry is contained in the base of a tower which projects from the building's gabled front and rises above the main roof peak. A fleur-de-lis finial decorates the peak of the tower's pyramidal roof.

The double front doors have three, diagonally-laid infill panels each. An applied lancet arch surmounts the entrance. The building has four lancet-arch, double-hung windows per side, including one in each side of the entry tower. The back wall of the chapel has one lancet-arch window of the same size, containing orange, yellow, and green stained glass (photographs 3 and 4). Near the southwest corner of the rear wall is a plain door leading out to a set of granite slab steps. The front and side walls of the tower contain round-arch vent openings.

The plan consists of an eight-by-eight-foot vestibule at the entry which leads into a rectangular audience room. The latter is a tall space shaped by the lower slopes of the gabled roof and the horizontal plane of the ceiling. These surfaces and the wainscoting in the vestibule and audience room are paneled with three-inch, tongue-in-groove, dark-stained boards (photograph 5). The walls are plaster. The window frames are dark-stained wood.

The bell tower contains the original, working rope-and-pulley bell, which is rung from the entry vestibule. A three-pronged brass Victorian chandelier hangs from the vestibule ceiling. In the audience room, an original, slightly raised wood platform forms an altar at the west end, below the stained-glass window (photograph 4). Red velvet armchairs and curved-back sofa, and a contemporaneous Bible stand and cabriole-leg tables stand on the platform. A late-19th-century Mason and Hamlin pump organ and a cylindrical cast-iron stove made by Rathbone, Sand & Company remain in place near the front of the space. About 50 original spindle-back chairs provide seating for the congregation (photograph 5).

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Representation in Existing Surveys:

New Milford Historic Resources Inventory
1979, local

Records available at the Connecticut Historical Commission, The New Milford Town Hall,
Town Clerk's Office, and The New Milford Public Library

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Three silver-plated oil lamps embossed with acanthus leaf patterns hang from the ceiling. Several ornate, wall-mounted brass brackets cradle glass oil lamps (photograph 5). A detailed description of most of these furnishings and fixtures in a newspaper article reporting the dedicatory service bears out the integrity of the chapel's interior.

End Notes:

- ¹ c. 1900 photograph of the Merryall Union Chapel.
- ² The older members of the chapel agree that the building's exterior was painted a muddy yellow-green color. The chapel appears this color in a watercolor painting by artist Woldemar Neufeld. Old photographs taken when the building was new indicate that the trim around the windows and vent openings in the bell tower was painted a darker shade.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	X architecture	education	military	social
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
X 1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater
1900-	communications	industry	politics government	transportation
		invention		other (specify)

Specific dates 1890 Builder Architect See below

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Merryall Union Evangelical Chapel is architecturally significant as the only unchanged example of Late Gothic Revival architecture remaining in New Milford (Criterion C). The pristine quality of the chapel's design, setting, materials, and workmanship vigorously conveys an immediate sense of the original function of the building, and of the time and place in which it was built.

Background

The chapel was built during the summer and fall of 1890 primarily to provide a conveniently located Sunday school for the children of Lower Merryall, a small farming community situated four miles north of the center of New Milford. The establishment of the 70-member Merryall Union Evangelical Association and its building committee on June 6th of that year, and the construction of the chapel were the culmination of intermittent, six-year efforts by a group of local residents and the Connecticut State Sunday School Association.¹ Earlier, Lower Merryall children and adults had travelled one to four miles by carriage or foot over hilly terrain to attend Sunday school and worship services at the Northville Baptist Church. Beginning in 1884, they gathered at the home of Miss Emeline Goode, Sunday school teacher, who lived near the site of the future chapel.²

The convenience of this "chapel of ease" extended to people of all faiths. Ecumenical services were conducted from the start, led by visiting clergymen from the churches of the surrounding towns. The non-sectarian and Sunday school related origins of the chapel probably belong to the liberal theology movement of the 1880s and 1890s. Following the Civil War, the revised Arminian view of man's innate capacity, given proper moral education, for altruistic action and spiritual perfectibility, stimulated the development of Sunday schools across the country.³ While liberal theology was comprised of differing camps and modes of thinking, its proponents generally de-emphasized formal religious distinctions in Christianity, and encouraged believers to unite in their Christian faith and participate in charitable social action. At the Merryall Chapel's dedicatory service on December 18, 1890, led by several clergymen of various Protestant denominations, the presiding ministers urged the gathering of 300 to recognize the essential universality of Christian faith despite its various forms of worship.⁴

According to a local newspaper account of the building of the chapel, Miss Goode and Mrs. A.M. Merwin solicited most of the \$1,009.26 cost of the building.⁵ In June of 1890 the 65-foot-square lot on which the chapel stands was donated to the Association by another local woman, Elise O. Nickerson.⁶ The chapel building

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Item 9 - Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property Less than 1/10 acre

Quadrangle name Kent, Connecticut

Quadrangle scale 1: 24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	3	1	5	9	10	4	6	1	1	5	9	15
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Item 10 - Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alison Gilchrist, National Register Consultant, edited by John Herzan,
National Register Coordinator

organization Independent

date November 1, 1985

street & number P.O. Box 415

telephone 203-868-2604

city or town New Preston

state Connecticut


12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

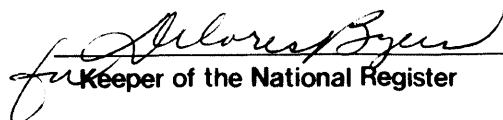


title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date 4/30/86

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register


Keeper of the National Register

date 6-5-86
National Register

date 6-5-86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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committee secured plans from Thomas W. Kimlin, a New Milford contractor.⁷ In a volunteer effort, local men excavated the cellar hole, laid the foundation, and framed the chapel. The Association hired Tourney Soule & Co., a leading construction firm in New Milford, to roof, side, and finish the building. Most of the interior furnishings were donated by individuals in the area and neighboring parishes such as the New Milford Congregational Church, or paid for by contributions obtained by the State Secretary of Sunday Schools.

Around 1900, the maintenance of the chapel fell to the Lower Merryall Sewing Club, a group of women which appears to have been an offshoot of the original chapel association. The club raised money by soliciting gifts and holding church suppers, quilting bees, and sales of their handiwork. Sunday afternoon worship services and Sunday school were held regularly during the summers and attended by 15 to 45 people.⁸ Until the 1930s, the majority of congregants were Yankee farmers and a small number of Swedish families, also farmers, of Baptist, Methodist, Congregational, and Lutheran backgrounds.⁹ During the 1930s the congregation was joined by New Yorkers and other newcomers to Merryall who had recently bought weekend homes in the area.

The chapel has been in continuous use during the summer months and is occasionally the site of christenings, weddings, and funerals. By the 1970s the chapel had declined physically, and a new group, headed by Merryall resident Dr. R. McFarlane Tilley, assumed leadership. This association, the Merryall Union Chapel Society, raised funds and made structural repairs, and has continued the tradition of inviting clergymen of the surrounding region to lead Sunday afternoon worship services. Sunday school classes are no longer held.

Architecture

Architecturally, the Merryall Union Chapel is peerless in the town of New Milford (Criterion C). The Late Gothic Revival style is developed more completely and exhibited more purely in the chapel than in any other local examples of the mode. The five other Late Gothic Revival buildings remaining in the town have either been altered or display a shallower stylistic expression.¹⁰

The chapel's overall proportions, materials, and details such as the applied lancet-arch, are vernacular in their expression but notable in the confidence with which they are integrated. A roughly contemporaneous and stylistically similar building, the Polish Catholic Church on Wellsville Avenue in New Milford, may have rivalled the Merryall chapel but has lost its distinguishing architectural features through its re-siding in synthetic clapboards.

The Late Gothic Revival architecture, finishing, and furnishings of the inside of the chapel constitute an unusually complete, late-19th-century-interior. The extraordinary integrity of the interior is immediately apparent to the observer and conveys a vivid sense of the spiritually devoted, rural community which created this building.

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End Notes:

- 1 The New Milford Gazette, "Dedication of Union Chapel," p. 1.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 Sidney E. Ahlstrom, A Religious History of the American People, p. 764.
- 4 The New Milford Gazette, op. cit., p. 1.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Deed of land by Elsie O. Nickerson.
- 7 The New Milford Gazette, op. cit., p. 1.
The article reports that "Plans for the building were drawn by Thomas Kimlin."
It is doubtful that Kimlin, a local contractor, designed the chapel. It is more likely that he obtained a design from an architectural pattern book and drafted the appropriate construction documents. The consultant's review of 19th-century architectural pattern books at the Art and Architecture Library at Yale University did not reveal a possible source. Further search is recommended.
- 8 Wesley Schultz, 70-year member of the Merryall Union Chapel.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 New Milford Historic Resources Inventory (1979).

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Major Bibliographical References:

Ahlstrom, Sidney E. A Religious History of the American People. Yale University,
New Haven, CT, 1972.

The New Milford Gazette. "Dedication of Union Chapel." December 26, 1890, p. 1.

Interviews:

Clifford Burnett, President, Merryall Union Chapel Society; 10/03/85, 10/18/85.

Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Schultz, Merryall residents; 10/03/85.

Benjamin Stone, former Merryall resident; 10/02/85.

Dr. R. McFarlane Tilley, former President, Merryall Union Chapel Society; 10/11/85.

Mary Wallian, Merryall resident and former Secretary, Merryall Union Chapel
Society; 10/18/85.

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Verbal Boundary Description:

"Commencing at the highway at a stake, and running southly along the highway 65 feet, thence westerly at right angles to the highway 65 feet, thence northly parallel with the highway 65 feet, easterly 65 feet to the place of beginning being a lot of land 65 feet square bounded east on the highway and on all other sides by my other land."

- Deed by Elise O. Nickerson to the Merryall Union Evangelical Society, June 1890. (New Milford Land Records - Vol. 59 p. 338).

The boundaries of the nominated property are as above and were chosen because they represent the legal and historic boundary of the site in question.

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