

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

RECORDED  
APR 10 1990  
NATIONAL REGISTER

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name \_\_\_\_\_  
other names/site number Rumsey Hall

### 2. Location

street & number 12 Bolton Hill Road NA  not for publication  
city, town Cornwall NA  vicinity  
state Connecticut code CT county Litchfield code 005 zip code 06753

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: NA  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register NA

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

*John W. Shannahan* 4/6/90  
Signature of certifying official John W. Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer Date

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*Allores Byers* 5/10/90  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

*for* \_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/granitewalls WOOD/weatherboardroof WOOD/plywood, ASBESTOS

other \_\_\_\_\_

MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Built in 1848 as a boarding school, Rumsey Hall originally consisted of a group of half a dozen structures of which the large administration building is the principal survivor (Photograph 2). In addition, the gymnasium (Photograph 16) continues to stand on the remaining 2.2 acres that still go with the buildings. (See Site Plan, Figure 1.) The former infirmary has been demolished, the classroom building moved next door to the east to become the parish hall of the Congregational Church, and a cottage and tennis court have been acquired by the owner to the west. The administration building, itself familiarly known as Rumsey Hall, and the gymnasium, both contributing, are addressed by this nomination.

Rumsey Hall is a two-story frame Greek Revival building in the shape of a cross fronted by a colossal hexastyle Doric portico. It faces south, toward the Green, in the center of Cornwall. Next to it to the east is the Greek Revival Congregational Church (Photograph 1), while across the street is the Gothic Revival Lutheran Church. Aside from the Neo-Classical Revival Public Library at the east end of the Green, other structures in the center are domestic in character.

In ground plan, the main north-south block of the school is approximately 40' x 114'. The two wings, which form the cross, are about 30' x 22'. In interior space, there is more than 5,000 square feet per floor.

The building constructed as a barn in mid-19th century was remodelled to serve as a gymnasium, c. 1910. Its dimensions are 30' x 52'. The principal interior space is a large two-story open room whose ceiling is supported by a truss system. The 14' x 74' one-story addition across the rear houses a bowling alley.

Although mostly vacant and unused since 1950, Rumsey Hall was in sound condition and reasonably tight until Cornwall was struck by a tornado on July 10, 1989. On that date, the strong and unprecedented storm raised the roof, removing some 60 percent of the rafters, nailers, and shingles. The same action lifted the roof of the porch enough for five of its six columns to become free and topple over. The westernmost column, having recently been rehabilitated as a pilot project, remained in place. The five toppled columns are now stored inside the building, the main roof has been temporarily closed with plywood panels covered by plastic sheeting, and the

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porch roof is supported by temporary posts. In addition to opening up the building, the storm introduced much water to the interior, causing floors to buckle. Following the storm, the school was examined by a civil engineer who in his report found that the building "is in sound structural condition."<sup>1</sup>

Visible foundation walls of the school are granite ashlar, except in the ell where frame construction continues almost to grade (Photographs 2, 4). The portico is approached by wide wooden steps of six risers, between low wooden piers. The columns, about 19' tall, are solid wood. There are pilasters at the corners of the building. The columns and pilasters support a wide plain architrave and frieze that encircle the building. While the sheathing of the exterior walls generally is clapboards, the surface of the tympanum of the pediment above the porch is flush boarding. A rectangular window there is framed by grooved casing with raised corner blocks and a raised central panel. (Photograph 5) Until the 1989 tornado, the window was glazed with small lights divided by seven pairs of vertical muntins and, near the top and bottom, single horizontal muntins.

In the main five-bay front elevation, windows are 6-over-6. The central six-panel door is flanked by rectangular side lights under a divided transom light and dentil course. Windows elsewhere in the building are uniformly 6-over-6. Each projecting elevation has pilasters at its corners supporting a plain pediment (Photographs 3, 4). The several side elevations usually have two bays, except for the ell, which is longer and has six bays. On the rear, there are doors at basement, first-, and second-floor levels.

The front door opens to a long narrow hall that runs the full depth of the building. The front stairway rises against the east wall in the hall; it is a conventional Greek Revival design (Photograph 6), apparently original, as is much of the interior layout and trim. To the west of the hall is a series of rooms currently open to form a large assembly area. (See Figure 3.) The portico columns are stored in this room (Photograph 7). A window surround there shows the eared architrave and panel below the window typical of most of the door and window trim in the front part of the building (Photograph 8).

To the east of the front hall, what apparently was originally a large room has been divided; currently, a partition abuts a Greek Revival mantel that is supported by engaged fluted Doric columns (Photograph 9). The adjoining east wing is open space for the dining hall (Photograph 10). In the rear wing the trim is different; it is composed of grooved casings with small bullseye corner blocks.

On the second floor, narrow hallways run both north-and-south and east-and-west. The hall of the east wing, for example, is double-loaded with small bedrooms (Photograph 11). The front section is arranged as an apartment, once occupied by the school's principal (Photograph 12). A ceiling area exposed by water damage and deterioration shows the structural system of the building (Photograph 13).

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In the attic, the roof support system of common rafters on massive braced purlins is clearly evident (Photograph 14). Apparently, the rafters were simply resting on the plates and purlins, thereby facilitating removal by the tornado. The original rafters and roof sheathing and the present replacement rafters and plywood are both seen in Photograph 15.

So far as is apparent to the eye, changes over time to the school have been minor on the exterior, such as introducing apertures in the rear pediment. On the interior, alterations appear to have been mostly decorator's changes, such as paint and wallpaper and revised partitions, and the introduction of electricity in 1922. However, more substantive changes are indicated by the statements that "in 1892, the rear of the main building was torn down and built larger," and, in "the summer of 1906 the buildings were extensively improved...."<sup>2</sup> Evidence such as the difference in trim in the rear section and the lack of visible foundation walls is consistent with the history of rebuilding the rear section. But the continuation of the purlin roof-support system through the length of the rear ell confirms that this section was original (and rebuilt) rather than being an addition.

<sup>1</sup>Grant, James K., Registered Professional Engineer, in letter to Cornwall First Selectman, quoted in "The Renovation of Rumsey Hall" (Cornwall: Municipal Building Committee, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup>Garnett, Michael R., "Rumsey Hall" (1987), p. 1, and Starr, Edward C., A History of Cornwall, Connecticut (New Haven: 1926), p. 160.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1848, c. 1910  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1848, c. 1910  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

NA  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

NA  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builders

Silas P. Judson  
Elizur G. Perry  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Summary

Rumsey Hall is significant architecturally because it is a fine example of a Greek Revival institutional building. Although some alterations have occurred since it was constructed, the building possesses a reasonably high level of integrity. It continues to maintain a dominant position in the center of Cornwall.

Architectural Assessment

The popularity of the Greek Revival style of architecture in America during the second quarter of the 19th century made it the obvious choice for Rumsey Hall. The hexastyle portico is suitably impressive for an educational institution which was, and is, the most imposing structure in the town. The character-defining stylistic features of portico, pilasters, entablature, and pediment are straightforward and complete. Pilasters and pediment define the three secondary elevations, giving the building as a whole a welcome cohesiveness and consistency.

The interior plan and detailing also well fit the style. The screen of columns in the left front room, the fireplace mantels, and the eared-architrave trim, still present in good quantity, make the interior as significant as the exterior in contributing to the excellence of the building's architecture. The door and window surrounds of the rear ell, grooved and with small bullseye corners, are representative of typical late 19th-century work.

The architect of the building is unknown, but two builders' names are recorded. They were Silas P. Judson (c. 1805-1870) of Cornwall, who constructed the basement, and E.G. Perry of Sandersfield, Massachusetts, who built the rest of the structure. Total cost, including the land, was \$5,000.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Garnett, Michael R., Town Historian, Town of Cornwall. "Rumsey Hall."  
1987

"The Renovation of Rumsey Hall." Cornwall: Municipal Building Committee,  
1989.

Starr, Edward C. A History of Cornwall, Connecticut. New Haven: 1926.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 2.2

UTM References

A 

1	8
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6	3	8	4	8	0
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4	6	3	3	6	4	0
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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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B 

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Zone Easting Northing

D 

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is described at volume 68, page 78, of the Cornwall Land Records.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The land that now goes with the buildings is included in the nomination. See site plan.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title David F. Ransom, Consultant, Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register  
organization Connecticut Historical Commission date December 26, 1989 Coordinator  
street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone 203 566-3005  
city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

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Historical Background

The extension of the Housatonic Railroad through Cornwall in 1842 opened up the region for a variety of activities. Now it was possible to travel to and from New York with relative ease, making it practical for New Yorkers, among other things, to send their children to boarding schools in northwestern Connecticut. Several schools were built, one of them being the nominated building. It opened in 1848 as the Alger Institute, a boys' boarding school named for Charles C. Alger of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, who was one of the ten subscribers. The largest subscriber (19 percent) was the Reverend Edward Warner Andrews (1811-1895) of Cornwall, who was the Institute's first principal. In 1851 he became the sole owner, only to sell out and leave town in the same year.

Thereafter, until 1866, the school had several owners, being sometimes known as the Alger Female Institute. During the Civil War it was vacant and then, until 1884, was operated as a summer boarding house called the "Beers House" when owned by the Beers family. In 1884, the Beers family returned the property to use as a school, leasing it to a succession of tenants who operated it as the Housatonic Valley Institute, with indifferent financial results. The will of Silas G. Beers (d. 1892) established a trust under the name of Housatonic Valley Institute,<sup>2</sup> which continued to rent the buildings to successive tenants. None of them survived more than a few years until Mrs. Lillian Rumsey Sanford in 1907 moved an established school from Seneca Falls, New York, and opened Rumsey Hall for boys, which occupied the premises until 1949.

During the Rumsey Hall years, the nominated structure contained assembly, cooking, and dining facilities for some 70 students and staff, music room, library, office space, an apartment for the principal and another for an assistant, living space for three masters and six domestic staff, and dormitory space for perhaps 24 boys, for a total of 35 or more residents.

From 1950, the buildings mostly were vacant. In 1955, the family who lived next door to the west bought the property. By their testamentary bequest the premises became the property of the Town of Cornwall in 1986. The town now plans to rehabilitate the building for use as the Town Hall.

The 19th-century grandeur of the school's architecture was not matched by a successful record of school keeping. The reasons why the school did not succeed as an educational institution in the 19th century are not clear. The longevity of Mrs. Sanford's operation suggests that either she was a better manager or conditions were more auspicious in the 20th century than they had been in the 19th century.

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It appears that generally the students, whether boys or girls, were of grade-school age. The 19th-century trials and tribulations and eventual 20th-century stability of a boarding school for children of that age may be read in the century-long career of the Greek Revival building which continues to dominate the center of the village of Cornwall.

<sup>1</sup>Elizur Graves Perry (1809-1858) was born in Chatham, New York. In 1835, he married Philenda Miller White in Winsted, Connecticut. The couple lived for some years in Barkhamsted, near the Massachusetts line, raising a family of nine children. They later moved to Iowa, where they died.

<sup>2</sup>The Housatonic Valley Institute Trust continues in existence, using its financial resources for scholarship purposes.

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Section number Photos Page \_\_\_\_\_

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Photographs were taken by D.F. Ransom in December, 1989. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Photograph 1  
General view northeast.  
Congregational Church  
on right.

Photograph 12  
Second floor, front  
apartment, view  
northeast

Photograph 2  
View northwest

Photograph 13  
Second floor, front,  
exposed structural  
members, view east

Photograph 3  
View southwest

Photograph 14  
Attic, roof purlin  
support system, view  
north

Photograph 4  
View southeast

Photograph 5  
Window in front  
pediment, view north

Photograph 15  
Roof, front, west side,  
original fabric at left,  
plywood at right, view  
west

Photograph 6  
First floor, front  
stair, view northeast

Photograph 16  
Barn/Gymnasium, view  
northeast

Photograph 7  
First floor, left front  
room, view south

Photograph 17  
Historic view

Photograph 8  
First floor, window in  
west wall of left front  
room, view northwest.

Photograph 9  
First floor, mantel in  
right front section, view  
southeast.

Photograph 10  
First floor, dining  
hall, view southeast

Photograph 11  
Second floor, hall in east  
wing, view east

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