

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
RECEIVED FEB 20 1980  
DATE ENTERED SEP 22 1980

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Salem Historic District

AND/OR COMMON

**2 LOCATION**

CT 85

STREET & NUMBER

see continuation sheet

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Salem

VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Connecticut

New London

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS

**ACCESSIBLE**

- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Multiple ownership, public and private--see continuation sheet

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Salem Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

RFD #3 Colechester 06415

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Salem

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

1966

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

STATE

59 Prospect St., Hartford, Ct.

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> _DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> _UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> _RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> _MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> _FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> _UNEXPOSED		

## DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Salem is a sparse, loosely-assembled rural township between Colechester, Montville and Lyme; the three towns from which lands were transferred when the town of Salem incorporated in 1819. At that time, Salem had reached a peak population of 1,027 people, who generally turned to their parent towns for commerce and services. Salem did not develop its own identifiable town center until the early 19th century when two churches, a town hall, a post office, homes and a music school grew up along a five mile section of Governor's Road, now Rt. 85. The historic district encompasses Salem's central, most intact zone.

This is an area of simple, plainly styled buildings set in open farmlands. It has always been a place between places where building has the appearance of being done randomly. Visually, Salem's most outstanding feature is its green, where, contrary to the town's largely unplanned environment, a trio of public places stand in a distinct crescent facing the main road. This remarkable composition of ascetic white frame buildings was assembled over a 54 year period, 1831-1885. Northern-most is the Congregational Church c. 1840, Greek-revival in style with a portico of doric columns fronting its small body and blunt steeple. The Grange Hall, next to the church, has pared silhouette wrapped in an assortment of fancy shingles and sheathings. It was built in 1885 as the Central district schoolhouse. Completing the group is the Salem Town House, originally built in Norwich, Connecticut in 1749 as an episcopal church. It was moved to Salem in 1831 when the Episcopal Society purchased it for \$500.00 (a stove and table were included in this price). The lancet windows and columned portico date from this reconstruction. A vaulted ceiling spans the entire interior space. Its congregation quickly diminished so that by 1840 the church closed and was obtained by the town for general meetings. Since 1969, this elegant and serene building has been the home of the Salem Historical Society. The exterior has been painted and repaired, and the Society is working on the interior. A small rear ell has been added to house kitchen and laundry facilities and a fire-proof vault.

Immediately surrounding the green are several 18th and 19th century houses, and but one intrusive element; a cement block shed opposite the green. Maps of 1854 and 1867 show no building in this location despite the densely built-up east-side. These maps also indicate that in this immediate area, no buildings have been lost or added. Today the condition of these structures varies from good to fair. The southern section of the historic district has not retained the remarkable physical integrity of the northern zone, but it does contain buildings of notable historic value; the principle ones being the "Methodist Tavern," and a house and barn that were once parts of the Music Vale Seminary. The Methodist Tavern derived its name when, as the home of Rev. John Whittlesey, it was a stopping place frequented by state officials and politicians on trips between New London and Hartford. Whittlesey, himself a state senator, invited them for debate and company. The "Tavern," built c. 1720, is a single story cottage with a central chimney and said to be the oldest structure remaining in Salem.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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CONTINUATION SHEET Ownership ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE 1

ALL ADDRESSES ARE: RFD# 3, COLCHESTER, CONNECTICUT 06415

Block #	Lot #	Owner	
19	1	Alex Palekewitz	
	2	"	
	3	Shirley Sonnichsen	
	4	Roger Rathbun	
	5	George Joseph	
	6	Salem Grange	
	7	Jeffery & Martha Zimmerman	
	17	Town of Salem	
	18	Salem Congregational Church	
	19	Town of Salem	
	20	Town "	
	21	Salem Congregational Church	
	22	Andrew Zemko, Sr.	
	23	Oliver & Julia Scovel	
8	5	John & Helen Bodman	
	6	Dennis & Sandra Chopp	
	7	Edward Mitchell	
	20	57A	Ernestine Conforti
		63	Town of Salem

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Rev. Whittlesey's son, Orramel, founded the Music Vale Seminary in 1835 on farmlands across the road from the "Tavern." It was the first degree-granting school of music in the United States. Between 50-100 women attended Music Vale each year. Orramel's modest, federal-style house c. 1820, was the first building on site, and later the school's "headquarters." A classroom and dormitory building accumulated as one expansion followed another. A large, rambling barn (c. 1849) with fancy barge-board trim completed the institution's physical plant. In 1868, the classroom building was destroyed by fire. It was replaced by an elaborate, Tuscan-mode structure which had practice rooms and pianos for each student, and a theater with a stage complete with painted backdrops. Two grand stone lions flanked the school's entrance. These have now been retired backland to the Whittlesey Cemetery gates. The school closed in 1876 soon after Orramel's death, and in 1897 fire destroyed the main building. Antique musical instruments and valuable records were destroyed with the building; but important artifacts have been discovered in the barn and with family. The Salem Historic Society is custodian of these materials.

The southern-end of the district contains a number of contributing buildings; a Greek-revival style home on Pratt Road, and an 1800's house opposite the "Tavern" on the corner of Chapman Road and Rt. 85. Further north on Rt. 85 is the Salem Public Library, given to the town by Hiram Bingham III. In addition to his career as a Latin-American scholar at Harvard, Princeton and Yale, Bingham was governor of Connecticut for one day in 1924, but was elected the next day to the U. S. Senate where he served from 1924-1932. He remained a member of the Salem Grange, and held a strong faith in local self-government. At the time the library was given c. 1920, Salem's population was near its low of 400. The amazingly tiny library (about 20' x 15') was built in what the New London Day praised as "a pure colonial style..." i.e. wood shingles, shutters, and a cupola above the gambrel roof. Composed symmetrically, the formality of the small building is decidedly quaint; and an interesting statement of Bingham's philanthropy and view of the town.

There are two non-contributing buildings in this area; a two-story house c. 1940 (out of scale, disruptive in color); and its neighbor, the Salem Elementary School. While the design of the school's front entrance bay does make an allusion to the front facade of the Salem Town House, it succeeds only in demonstrating the difficulties of rendering earlier styles in contemporary materials and scale.

Other buildings of historic value lie further north along Rte. 85. (such as the home of Orramel Whittlesey's brother, John, a manufacturer of pianos). But as they are both separated from the district by large housing sub-divisions; and inter-penetrated by 20th century houses, they offer no district potential. Salem Historic District is surrounded by farm and open-lands. Although these lands protect the district's perimeters, land ownership patterns within could contribute to incongruous developments.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Salem Historic District records the early growth, the decline, and recent renewal of a small rural town, which with the exception of the Music Vale Seminary and a few sawmills, was a farming community. The district is significant for the unusual building arrangement of its green, and for the cluster of building around it, which typifies rural modes of the 18th and 19th centuries. Among these structures, the Salem Town House stands out as being particularly well-designed. The balanced, graceful combination of Greek and Gothic motives is remarkable in itself, and more so considering the building's two relocations (and concomitant redesign), and the limited resources of the small Salem congregation responsible for its present form.

The district is equally important for the surviving structures of the Music Vale Seminary, an early music school established in the United States. The young women it trained to be instructors settled and taught throughout the country. Students came to the school from coastal towns and southern states, with some coming from Nova Scotia and the West Indies. Tuition, room and board totaled \$300 for the one-year program. Widows, orphans, and daughters of clergy were afforded special fees. Lessons included notation, composition, guitar, voice and piano. The schedule was demanding; rising at 5 o'clock, practicing from 6 to 7, then breakfast, followed by a full day of study. A normal degree was awarded to students successful in exams and a recital before a board of examiners.

Orramel Whittlesey was a demanding instructor, but with a taste for the romantic. The appeal that the rural, remote life held for him is expressed in the name he chose for the school, and in Salem places -- Fairy Lake, Witches Wood, Elfin Glen, and Walden Road -- that he is said to have named. When students arrived in Norwich or New London they were brought to Salem in the Red Robin or the Bluebird -- the school's carriages. In a paper called "Connecticut Fairy-land" John Sullivan Dwight of the Harvard Music Association described Music Vale as:

...a mystical Community of romantic, beautiful young ladies, segregated from the coarse and selfish world, and leading the happiest life imaginable, a life all music, in a secluded valley, unapproachable to vulgar feet, in the midst of the very land of "blue laws" and "wooden nutmegs!" (1855)

Whittlesey's school was a family industry in which his wife was manager, his brothers manufactured pianos (patenting some improvements), and where his four daughters also taught. The farm remained an important part of the operation, supplying animals and crops. Enrollment dropped after the Civil War when fewer Southern students showed an interest in coming north. This and the death of Whittlesey in 1876 precipitated the school's closure.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Johnson, Frances Hall. Music Vale Seminary. New Haven, Yale Press and the Tercentenary commission of the State of Connecticut, 1934.

New London Day. special edition April 1931.

Perkins, Mary E. Chronicles of a Connecticut Farm 1769-1905. Boston, privately printed, 1905.

Bingham, Alfred; and Bodman, John and Helen. Salem Historical Society, interviewed, 27 July 1977.

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY ±76

*see phone report of 9/17/80*

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

UTM REFERENCES

*on USGS map*

A	_____	_____	_____
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	_____	_____	_____

B	_____	_____	_____
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
D	_____	_____	_____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary line starts at the intersection of the south and east lines of lot 8-5 on Rt. 85. Running north along Rt. 85, it bears east along the south lines of lots 19-28 and 19-27. Continuing to follow the lost line of 19-27, the boundary turns north, running without change in direction until it intersects Round Hill Road, where it bears west until meeting the easterly line of lot 20-57A and follows its eastern, northern and western boundaries back to the intersection of Round Hill Rd.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Anstress Paine, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

10 August 1977

STREET & NUMBER

59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE

566-3005

CITY OR TOWN

Hartford,

STATE

Connecticut 06103

# 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

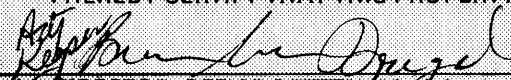
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

February 15, 1980

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER



DATE

9/22/80

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: Patrick Andrews

DATE

9/18/80

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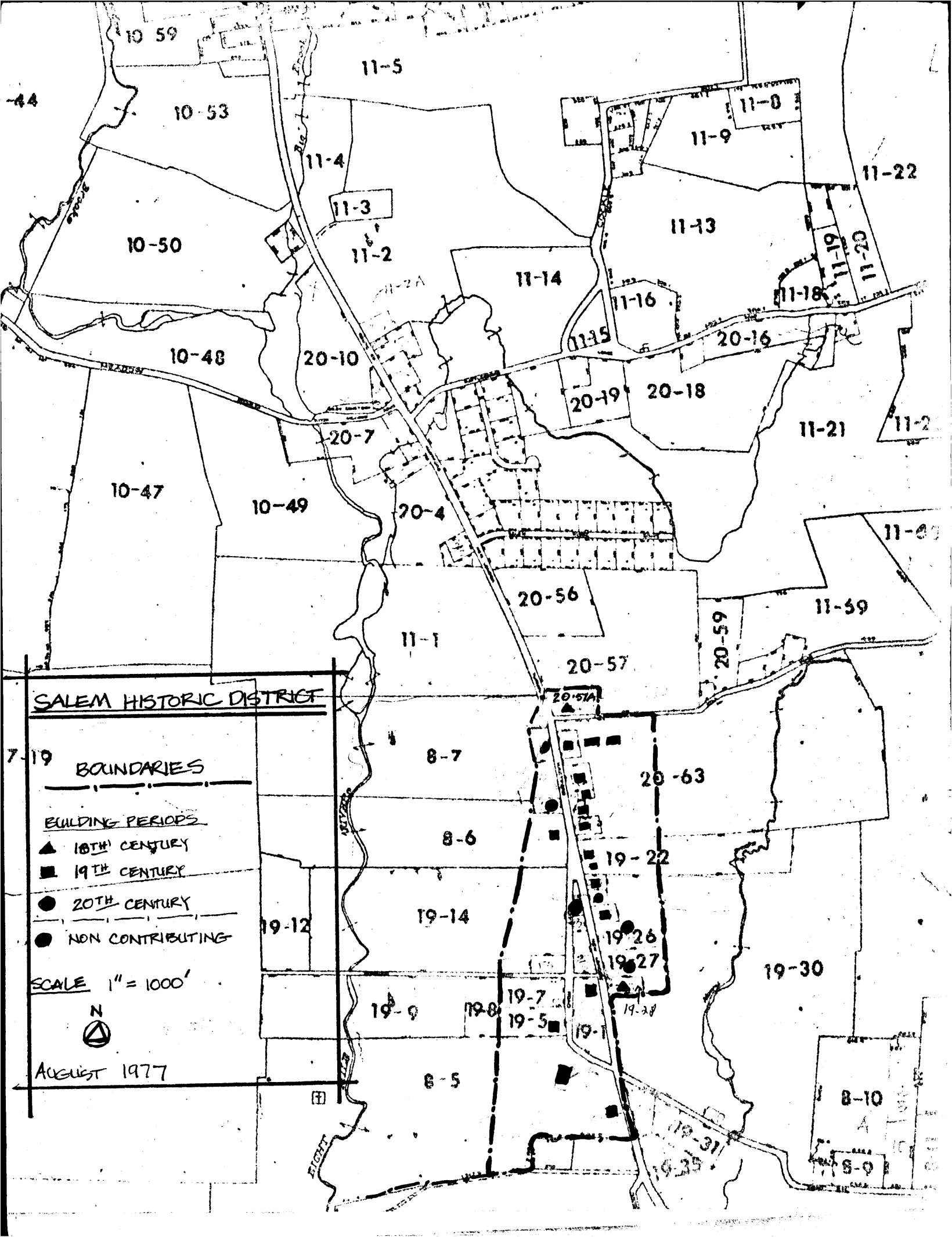
Geographical Data

CONTINUATION SHEET

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and Rt. 85. From this point, the line drops south to the intersection of the north and west lines of lot 19-7 where it continues south along this lot and lot 19-5 without change in direction until it intersects the south line of lot 8-5. And by following this line east, the starting point of this description is met at Rt. 85.



**SALEM HISTORIC DISTRICT**

**BOUNDARIES**

**BUILDING PERIODS**

- ▲ 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
- 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
- 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY
- NON CONTRIBUTING

SCALE 1" = 1000'



AUGUST 1977