

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 24 1985

date entered FEB 21 1985

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

1. Name

historic Union Church (1829-1877), St. Paul's Church (1877-1971)

and/or common The John Tarrant Kenney Hitchcock Museum

2. Location

street & number Riverton Road

NA not for publication

city, town Barkhamsted

vicinity of Riverton

state Connecticut code 09

county Litchfield

code 005

3. Classification

Category

- district
- building(s)
- structure
- site
- object

Ownership

- public
- private
- both
- Public Acquisition**
- in process
- being considered
- NA

Status

- occupied
- unoccupied
- work in progress
- Accessible**
- yes: restricted
- yes: unrestricted
- no

Present Use

- agriculture
- commercial
- educational
- entertainment
- government
- industrial
- military
- museum
- park
- private residence
- religious
- scientific
- transportation
- other:

4. Owner of Property

name Connecticut House, Inc.

street & number NA

city, town Riverton

NA vicinity of

state CT 06065

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc.

Barkhamsted Land Records, Town Hall

street & number

Route 318

city, town

Pleasant Valley

state

CT

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of  
Historic Places

has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975

federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records

Connecticut Historical Commission  
59 South Prospect Street

city, town

Hartford

state

CT

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Built in 1829, Union Church is a small granite structure, with wooden steeple, of Greek Revival proportions but with Gothic Revival stylistic features. The church is sited in the center of the rural village of Riverton, facing north on Riverton Road just west of Route 20 and is surrounded by the well-spaced houses, stores and factory of the village. (Photographs 1 and 2)

The 41x60-foot main block, which has no basement, has a gabled roof of asphalt shingles. The granite ashlar of the walls is of local origin, laid up with ribbed mortar joints. The proportions of width, length and height and the pitch of the roof are those commonly found in Greek Revival structures of the era. The squat, 2-stage tower, square in plan, also is similar to towers found on contemporary Greek Revival churches. The fenestration and decoration of Union Church, however, are decidedly Gothic Revival. All the door and window openings have pointed arches, the windows are lancet windows with pointed, interlacing muntins, and ten pinnacles embellish the roof line. The Gothic Revival dominates.

On the front elevation of the church there is an 8½x16-foot projecting tower that forms the entrance vestibule and helps to support the steeple above. A tall lancet-shaped opening in the front of the tower contains the double door, flanked by iron lamps, a stone panel over the door with incised lettering reading "Union Church Founded July 4, 1829," and, above the panel, a lancet window of stained glass. The inner edge of the molded enframingent for this opening is fluted.

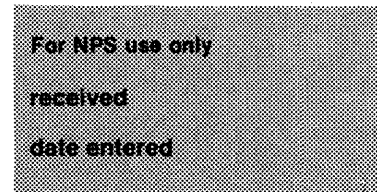
On either side of the tower is a lancet-shaped masonry opening that contains paired lancet windows separated by a wooden mullion. Each window consists of two 12-over-12 sash, a total of 48 lights, surmounted by lancet-shaped glazing with pointed, interlacing muntins. The spandrel between the two lancet windows is glazed with stained glass. Above the windows, at the top of the wall, there is a projecting molded cornice without the wide frieze usually found in a Greek Revival style building.

The first stage of the steeple is formed by recessed panels of horizontal weather boards, framed by paneled corner boards. (Photograph 2) There is a lancet-shaped louver on the front panel placed high so that its arch touches a flat projecting cornice. This cornice has mutules in the manner of the Greek Revival style. The cornice breaks out over the corner boards. The cornice is surmounted by a parapet with a pattern of blind lancets between its paneled corner piers. Each pier supports a pinnacle. The second stage of the steeple, smaller in plan than the first and set back, is the belfry. Its faces are made with vertical boarding with a tall, lancet-shaped louver inserted in each. The piers are rusticated, and support a cornice similar to the cornice of the first stage.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Union Church, Barkhamsted, CT



Continuation sheet      Description      Item number      7      Page      1

Pinnacles rise above the cornice at each corner. The steeple is flanked at the roof line by stepped parapets that terminate with pinnacles. Thus, there are pinnacles at three levels.

On each side elevation there are four double-lancet windows, the same as those flanking the tower on the front. Sills of the windows are granite. The rear elevation is dominated by a tall, tripartite pointed-arched window of stained glass. There is a small door at the left. (Photograph 3) A small graveyard with about six headstones abuts the south-east corner of the church.

Upon entering the church, there is a stairway leading up to the left from the vestibule to the balcony. At the entrance from the vestibule to the main space of the church there is, in the middle of the opening, a cluster of three columns, to support the balcony. Three similar, wooden clusters run from floor to ceiling along each side of the church. Originally, there were balconies along the sides as well as the balcony along the back that remains. (Photograph 4) The interior church space is rectangular. Its principal decorative feature is the tripartite stained-glass window in the south wall of the church in dark colors, installed c. 1870. The wooden surrounds and mullions of this window are molded and have double channels, with molded capitals at the imposts of the arches.

The side windows of the church have no surrounds, and are clear glass except for the spandrels. In contrast to the front window, the stained glass in the spandrels is in several light colors, forming the motif of a simple, stylized sunflower. These windows have blinds. There is an organ at the front, left, bearing a sign that says it dates from c. 1840, builder unknown. The organ is in a handsome case of dark wood with some metal pipes on the front of the case and more on the wall behind it. (Photo 5) The balcony at the back has a central concave bow. The front of the balcony is paneled, with moldings at top and bottom. (Photograph 6) The ceiling of the church is flat on the sides, between the posts and the side walls, over the former balconies. The central section of the ceiling, between the posts, is deeply coved. Molded cornices connect the tops of the posts, at the junctures of the flat ceilings with the cove.

The floor is made up of wide boards. The high desk pulpit and pews formerly in the church have been removed. The pews, or slips, originally had doors. The main space of the building now serves as a museum of furniture, mostly chairs. There is some stenciling in the church, probably added in recent years.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Union Church, Barkhamsted, CT  
Continuation sheet Description

Item number 7

Page 2

1.

The bell was cast in 1811 and re-cast in 1875, using silver spoons contributed by parishioners, after being broken by excessive ringing in a July 4 celebration. See Phillips Brooks Warner, "History of St. Paul's Church, Riverton, Conn.", Lure of the Litchfield Hills, 12 (June 1954) 4, 11 ff.

# 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1829 (over door)    **Builder/Architect** Unknown

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

Criteria C (Architecture) and A (History)

Union Church is a valuable example of a building constructed in the proportions of the Greek Revival style, but dominated by characteristic features of the Gothic Revival style. The importance of the church in architectural history is enhanced by the fact that the exterior, the interior except for the furnishings, and the site are so little changed from the time when the church was built. (Criterion A) The edifice is unusual in the history of the Episcopal Church because it was built for use by other sects as well as by Episcopalians. (Criterion A)

Criterion C - Architecture

The chunky, solid proportions of Union Church are typical of the Greek Revival style. The relationship of width to height and the low pitch of the gable roof are found in many churches and other structures of the era in the Greek Revival style. The squat steeple of square stages, diminishing in size, is also typical of steeples found on many Greek Revival country churches throughout Connecticut. The year of construction, 1829, was at the height of popularity of the Greek Revival style, making it easy to understand why a country church was so constructed.

The surprise is the use of the pointed-arch masonry openings and lancet windows characteristic of the Gothic Revival style. While the asymmetry, elongated vertical proportions, steeply pitched roof, cusps and foils and stone mullions of the Gothic all are not represented at Union Church, and it therefore cannot be called a fully developed Gothic Revival building, there is no doubt that the pointed arches and lancet windows have no other source.

While the first buildings in America reflecting the popularity of the Gothic Revival style in England were built at the turn of the century, the period of greatest popularity of the style dates from the 1830s.<sup>1</sup> Accordingly it is surprising to find these Gothic Revival features on a country church as early as 1829. The explanation may lie in the affiliation of Union Church with the Episcopal faith. Episcopalians long had maintained close contacts with the established Church of England. Indeed, these contacts had caused some Episcopalians automatically to be classed as Tories by their fellows only 50 years earlier, during the Revolutionary War. The Church of England strongly espoused the Gothic Revival style

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Union Church, Barkhamsted, CT

Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number

8

Page

1

For NPS use only

received

date entered

with a vigor formalized by the Ecclesiologist Society founded in 1836. It is possible that this connection encouraged the use of Gothic Revival features at Union Church. In addition, there was some precedent in Connecticut for use of the Gothic Revival style in construction of Episcopal churches as Ithiel Town had designed such an edifice on the New Haven Green in 1814 and his Christ Church was built in Hartford in 1828.

The use of Gothic Revival features on a Greek Revival shell, however, was regarded disparagingly in some circles. Andrew Jackson Downing, for example, whose books on architecture were highly regarded, held a low opinion of such work. "Unity is the principle of oneness," he wrote in 1842, "and its violation always shocks a tasteful and consistent mind. As an example of the violation of unity of style, we might refer to a number of country chapels or churches within our knowledge, where a Grecian portico and Gothic or pointed windows occur in the same composition!"<sup>2</sup>

While architecture such as Union Church may have been the object of Downing's derision, the church nonetheless is a valuable example of work combining the two styles, its importance enhanced by its fine state of preservation.

Criterion A - Church History

In the early 19th century, Riverton in the town of Barkhamsted was a thriving manufacturing village because of the water power provided there by the Farmington River. Axes, farm tools, coaches and hats were among the products produced, but the most important industry was the manufacture of chairs by Lambert Hitchcock. For a period of years the village was named after Hitchcock. At the organization meeting for the Union Church held December 25, 1828, Hitchcock was elected chairman of the building committee, and he sold the land for the church, from the parcel on which his factory was located, for \$200. The full name of the church organization was the "Protestant Episcopal Society of Union Church in Hitchcocks-ville, Connecticut".<sup>3</sup>

Use of the name "Union" in the name of the Society was an indication of the intent that the edifice be available to other sects as well as to Episcopalians, a highly unusual practice in the history of the Episcopal Church. One of the few other churches built by Episcopalians for such broader use also was in the town of Barkhamsted, the "Church in the Hollow" that is now covered by water in the Barkhamsted reservoir.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Union Church, Barkhamsted, CT

Continuation sheet      Significance      Item number      8      Page      2

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Other sects that used Union Church when it was built included the Congregationalists, Methodists and Adventists. Over time, these groups grew stronger and built their own edifices. Union Church did not prosper. In 1842 upon the formal founding of a Congregational Society, the Congregationalists, knowing the Union Church trustees were in financial difficulty, offered to buy the church, but the offer was declined. The situation worsened when the Connecticut and Western Railroad was put through the smaller nearby community of Winsted, instead of through Riverton. Simultaneously, the importance of Riverton's water power was declining as the use of steam power increased. The situation is summed up in the statistics that the population of the Town of Barkhamsted, of which Riverton is a part, was 1700 people in 1829 and 724 people in 1940.

Union Church had no rector for the years 1849 - 1872. But in 1877 a renewal effort was mounted by the Episcopal Diocese. With a change of name to St. Paul's Church, the church was consecrated September 21, 1880, by the Rt. Rev. Thomas C. Brownell, Bishop of Connecticut. The following year the property was sold to the Missionary Society of the Diocese of Connecticut.<sup>4</sup> This determined effort by the Episcopal Diocese to sustain the Riverton parish eventually came to naught, and the church was sold in 1971<sup>5</sup> to become a museum for the company producing Hitchcock chairs. Thus, after almost a century and a half, care of the building became the responsibility of the successor to the company founded by Lambert Hitchcock, chairman of the church's building committee.

<sup>1</sup>. Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780, Cambridge: The M.I.T. Press, 1969, pp. 52-60.

<sup>2</sup>. A. J. Downing, Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture & Landscape Gardening, Watkins Glen: Library of Victorian Culture, 1967 (reprint of 1842), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>. Warner, op. cit.

<sup>4</sup>. Barkhamsted Land Records (BLR) 22/62, April 20, 1881.

<sup>5</sup>. BLR 49/369, January 27, 1971.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Winsted

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	6	6	4	0	6	0	4	6	4	7	2	6	0
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

The nominated property is described at Barkhamsted Land Records, volume 49, p. 369

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

state	NA	code	NA	county	NA	code	NA
state	NA	code	NA	county	NA	code	NA

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title David F. Ransom, Consultant, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Connecticut Historical Comm. date August 13, 1984

street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone 203 566-3005

city or town Hartford 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 *John W. Stouffer*

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date 1/8/85

### For NPS use only

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

*for Robert Ryan*  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 2-21-85

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Union Church, Barkhamsted, Connecticut

Continuation sheet

Bibliography

Item number 9

Page

1

Barkhamsted Land Records 22/62, 49/369.

Downing, A.J., Cottage Residences, Rural Architecture & Landscape Gardening, Watkins Glen: Library of Victorian Culture, 1967 (reprint of 1842).

Warner, Phillips Brooks, "History of St. Paul's Church, Riverton, Conn.," Lure of the Litchfield Hills, 12 (June 1954) 4.

Whiffen, Marcus, American Architecture Since 1780, The M.I.T. Press, 1969.