

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JUN 28 1977
DATE ENTERED NOV 28 1978

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

AND/OR COMMON

West Greenwich Baptist Church (and Cemetery)

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Plain Meeting House ^{and} ~~Road~~ at Liberty Hill ^{Pls} Road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

West Greenwich Center

VICINITY OF

2-Representative Edward Beard

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Rhode Island

44

Kent

003 ✓

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

(See Continuation Sheet #1)

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

West Greenwich Town House

STREET & NUMBER

Victory Highway

CITY, TOWN

West Greenwich

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State of Rhode Island Preliminary Survey Report
Town of West Greenwich

DATE

1978

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input 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 type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The West Greenwich Baptist Church is located at the intersection of Liberty Hill and Plain Meeting House Road at what was once West Greenwich Center. Of the formerly thriving village, only the church and an adjacent large, stone-wall-enclosed cemetery, surrounded by second-growth woods, now remain. Both church and cemetery are nominated.

Built about 1822-1825, the church is a modest, rectangular, one-story, clapboarded structure, without a belfry or steeple. It is sited gable end to the road, and is entered by two doors in the south gable end. All the windows are of the double-hung, six-over-six type, and are fitted with solid wood shutters. Most of the sash are duplicates of originals which have fallen prey to vandals in recent years.

The exterior retains its plain, molded, Federal-style gable cornice with returns; most of the rest of the exterior detailing, including the wide corner boards and unmolded frieze, the cornice-topped, wide-board-framed doorways, and the plain board window trim, however, is styled in a vernacular version of the Greek Revival.

The building, which possesses no narthex or vestibules, contains only an audience room or sanctuary. Entered through two doorways in one of the narrow ends, the audience room contains three sections of pews, divided by two aisles. The pulpit, raised on a small, step-high dais, is located at the opposite end from the entrances.

The audience room has a flat plaster ceiling, projecting cased wall and corner posts, and a horizontal-board, windowsill-height dado, with a molded upper rail. Much of the interior detail, including the window and doorway trim, and quite possibly the dado, bears the stamp of Greek Revival influence and probably dates from an 1856 refurbishing. The dark wood pulpit furnishings, which consist of a small desk and pedestal-like lamp stands set at each corner of the dais, are Late Victorian in style. The pulpit set includes two high-back, Late Victorian, Gothic-style chairs. The seating, which has been altered, includes some theater-type, folding plywood seats, with iron stanchions and arm rests, and some plain-end, early-twentieth-century, stained-wood pews salvaged from another church. In the back of the room an iron stove, installed at an unknown date, remains.

It appears that the orientation of the auditorium was reversed twice, once in 1856 when the church was repaired and refurbished, and again in the first decade of the twentieth century. A now-closed-up window, located high up in the center of the north or rear wall of the building, appears to have served originally to give light to

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1823-25 BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The West Greenwich Baptist Church, often called the Plain Meeting House because of its location on "the plain" at West Greenwich Center, possesses statewide importance as the oldest church building in the rural western edge of Rhode Island. It is of regional significance within southeastern New England as a rare survivor of a once numerous class of early nineteenth century churches of modest size and unpretentious design erected by smaller and less well-to-do congregations. Of all the churches of the first half of the nineteenth century remaining in southeastern New England, the Plain Meeting House is, with the exception only of the always stark Quaker meetinghouses, probably the most modest and primitive extant. Its interior, despite the inharmonious seating, retains many early and mid-nineteenth century features.

The church also bears great local significance as an historical landmark. A former focal point of community religious observances, the meetinghouse was erected c. 1822-1825 by a long since defunct organization known as "The Independent and Union Society" of West Greenwich as a union meetinghouse for the use of all Christian denominations. The society, organized in 1822, financed the structure through the sale of shares to individuals. The precise date of the church's construction is not known, but the property on which it and a large cemetery was placed was purchased December 1, 1823.

During its one hundred fifty-year history, the structure has been used by two organized church groups. When the building was opened, the Maple Root Six Principle Baptist Church of Coventry, the town directly to the north, established services there for its West Greenwich membership. This branch church used the structure until about 1868, when they merged with the West Greenwich Baptist Church.

The West Greenwich Baptist Church, founded, it is thought, in 1750, has for many years made use of the Plain Meeting House, and has had sole custody of it since the 1868 merger. The church, organized only nine years after the town of West Greenwich was created, may have originally been, like many of its sister churches in other parts of Rhode Island, Six Principle Baptist in sentiment. Such churches held

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bates, John A. Historical Sketch of the West Greenwich Baptist Church (1890). Western Rhode Island Historical Society Proceedings, Vol. 2, No. 3. (October, 1956)
 Cole, J. R. History of Washington and Kent Counties, Rhode Island N.Y.: W. W. Preston & Co., 1889

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,9	27,071,0	4,61,300,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The bounds of the West Greenwich Cemetery correspond with the stone walls which surround the property. A "Plan of the West Greenwich Cemetery" appears in the West Greenwich Land Evidences, XIV, 93. The West Greenwich Baptist Church property is bounded east by Plain Road, south by Plain Meeting House Road, north by the West Greenwich Cemetery, and west by a stone wall which runs from the cemetery south wall to Plain Meeting House Road.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Robert Osborne Christensen, Survey Consultant April, 1978

ORGANIZATION

R.I. Historical Preservation Commission

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

(401) 277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL X

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

Frederick R. Williams

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE June 21, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Charles D. Hays
 DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE 11-28-78

ATTEST: *Grace Mae Dwyer*

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 11/21/78

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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CONTINUATION SHEET 1 ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE 2

Church - West Greenwich Baptist Church
c/o Mrs. Fred W. Arnold, Jr.
Victory Highway
West Greenwich, R.I.

Cemetery - West Greenwich Cemetery
Mrs. Peter Langlais
13 Chestnut Street
Coventry, R.I. 02816

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CONTINUATION SHEET 2

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

a pulpit located at that end of the structure. It is known, however, that in the late nineteenth century the pulpit was located at the south end, between the two entrances, the pews facing both it and the doors. This interior arrangement, the reverse of the usual plan, attained a considerable degree of acceptance in New England and elsewhere along the east coast between 1820 and 1840, and was still being adopted in the rural areas of western Rhode Island in the 1860s, '70s, and '80s.

During the first decade of the twentieth century (the precise year is not known), the orientation was again reversed. The pulpit platform was returned to its original position, the window behind it plastered over, and the theater-type seating installed.

Changes since this time have been minimal. They have consisted mainly of cosmetic repairs, such as painting and wallpapering work done in 1959, and repairs necessitated by the vandalism to which this isolated church has been increasingly subject since 1959.

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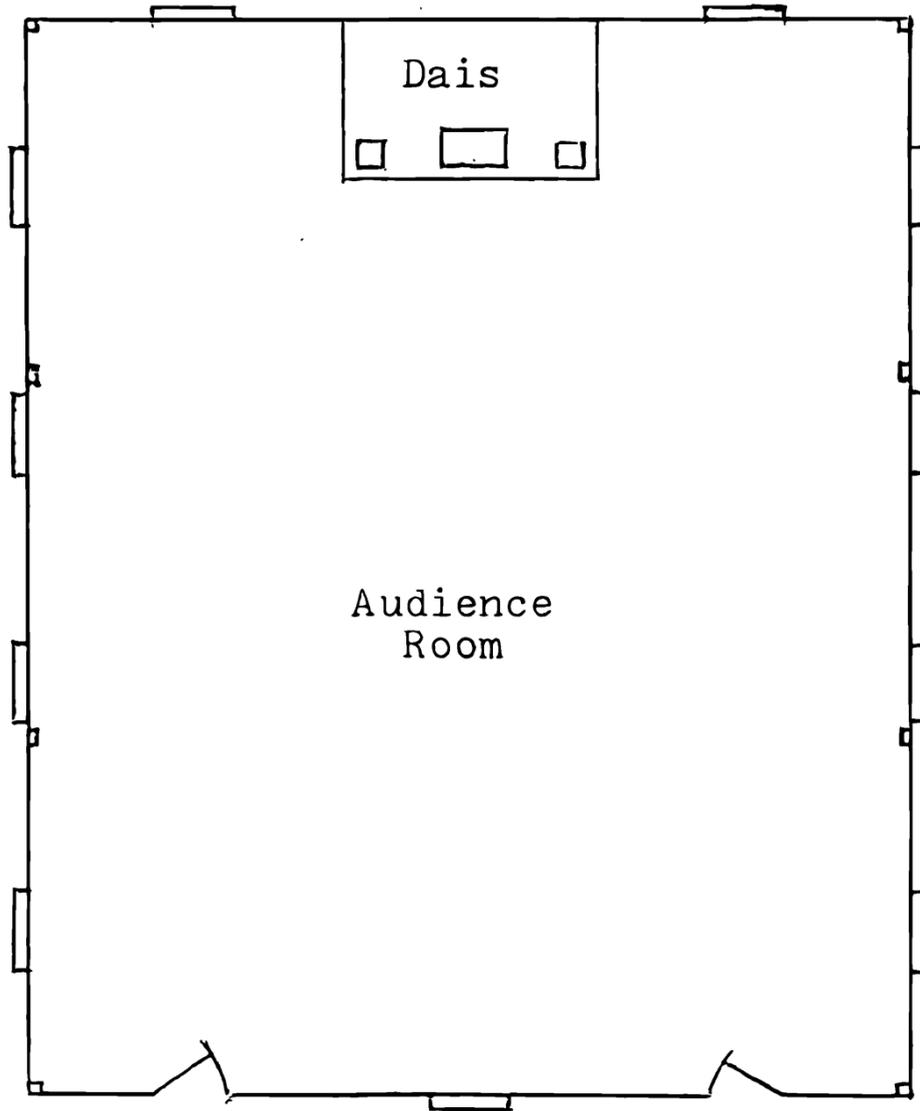
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ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

3



West Greenwich Baptist Church,
West Greenwich Center, R.I.



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NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

4

ITEM NUMBER

8

PAGE

2

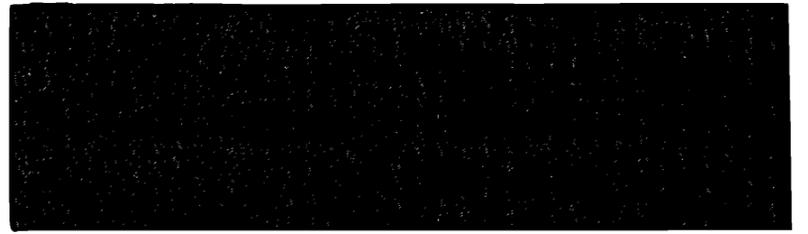
an Arminian view of salvation, and adopted as their articles of faith the six principles of repentance, faith, baptism, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment given in Hebrews 6: 1-2. By the end of the century, however, the congregation, along with many other Rhode Island Baptist churches, had become thoroughly Calvinistic.

The church served a large area embracing the western sections of West Greenwich and Exeter and parts of Hopkinton and Richmond. In the first part of the nineteenth century, the area served was so extensive that services were held in several locations - in a meetinghouse at Nooseneck Hill, several miles east of West Greenwich Center, in private homes, and probably in the Plain Meeting House. In 1859-60 the congregation erected, as a branch meetinghouse, the building now known as the West Exeter Baptist Church at the Four Corners in the western part of Exeter, four miles south of the Plain Meeting House.

With the gradual decline of the population in this rural region, regular Sunday services of the Plain Meeting House ceased early in the twentieth century. A Sunday school, kept in operation after the suspension of regular services, also finally succumbed. The church membership (now numbering about fifteen) however, has made valiant efforts over the years to keep the church alive. An annual event which was instituted before 1920 and has been continued down to the present is a service held on the second Sunday in June. Since the late 1950s a second service has been held on the first Sunday in October. Both services are well attended, many of the worshippers coming long distances.

The continuing importance of the West Greenwich Baptist Church as a local landmark, as well as its historical value and architectural significance, merit its listing in the National Register.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

5

ITEM NUMBER

9

PAGE

2

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Providence: George H. Whitney, 1854.

Shippee, Iva W. History of the Plain Meeting House and Its
Vicinity. Mimeograph of talk given June 28, 1960.

Smith, Mrs. Evelyn Arnold. Plain Meeting House. Brief mimeograph
history prepared in 1975, covering the years from 1934 to 1975.