

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

DEC 23 1988

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 POMFRET TOWN HOUSE
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Town House Road N/A not for publication
city, town Pomfret N/A vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county Windham code 015 zip code 06259

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u> </u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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.

[Signature] December 9, 1988
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
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:)

[Signature] Entered in the National Register 1/19/89
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
 GOVERNMENT

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
 SOCIAL: meeting hall

7. Description

Architectural Classification
 (enter categories from instructions)

No style

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls WOOD

roof ASPHALT

other BRICK

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Pomfret Town House (Photographs 1 and 2) is a one-story gable-roofed building erected in 1841 to accommodate Pomfret's town meetings. It is of post-and-beam construction, with the exterior covered with clapboards. The long side of the building, which is approximately 40' x 24' in plan, faces a circular driveway off Town House Drive, itself a short loop off Route U.S. 44. The small open lot is defined by fieldstone walls, with the Town House only a few feet away from the wall at the rear of the property. The symmetrical facade (southeast elevation) has two entries and five windows, with the entries located one bay in from the ends. Each entry has a large door of six raised panels, three over three, and a fluted surround with plain blocks in the upper corners (Photograph 3). The right door has a modern latch, but the left one retains its original wrought-iron latch. Each entry has a large stone step. Window openings have plain board surrounds and retain their original 12-over-12 double-hung sash, which have spring catches to hold them open. There is a partial return to the cornice, which is made up of simple cyma moldings. Side elevations have three windows each, and the rear elevation (Photograph 2) has five windows. Small brick exterior chimneys at the south and north corners are additions, probably made in 1928 when the building was remodeled. The building has no cellar and rests on a fieldstone foundation.

The interior of the Town House (Photograph 4) is entirely open and reflects the 1928 remodeling in its narrow-board hardwood floor (concealing the original wide boards) and lamp globes hanging from the plaster vaulted ceiling. Original woodwork includes simple board window surrounds and post casings. In the middle bay of the northeast wall is a raised platform about 1' high. Along the rear wall, a projection about 8" wide extends out from the wall just below the level of the window sills; the face of the projection is plastered, as are the other interior walls. The board top suggests it may have served for additional seating.

Outside, near the rear of the building on the northeast side, is a small privy (Photograph 6) which, to judge from its beaded-board siding, dates from the early 20th century; however, the two seats appear to be older.

The Town House is presently used for meetings by the Pomfret Historical Society, which acquired it in 1979.

See continuation sheet

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)

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1841-1928

Significant Dates

1841

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Significant Person N/A

Architect/Builder

Not known

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

Summary

Pomfret Town House is significant in local history as the town's first public building for government purposes (Criterion A). Built in 1841, it accommodated the town meeting, a central institution of Connecticut local government, for many decades. Even after town meetings were moved to another location, the Town House continued to serve as a polling place and facility for meetings of various town boards. A well-preserved structure which retains most of its original form and materials intact, the Town House is a local landmark and symbol of the community's identity.

Pomfret's town house also is significant on the state level as one of a small number of surviving early town halls (or town houses, as they were originally known). There are similar structures from the 1840s in Mansfield and Stafford, and an 1870 town house in Plainfield, but most of these structures, such as Killingly's c.1845 town house, are apparently no longer in existence.¹ These buildings are all of a type: simple, utilitarian structures with only the entrances enhanced by the architectural style then prevalent. Two entrances were common in these town houses, just as they were for the religious meetinghouses and schools of the period. (There is a tradition that close votes in Connecticut town meetings were resolved by having the townspeople walk through one of two doorways.) Town houses such as Pomfret's are important artifacts of the time when the direct democracy of the town meeting played a large role in local government. As a well-preserved example which embodies the distinctive characteristics of the early town house as a building type, Pomfret Town House has architectural significance as well (Criterion C).

¹There is no statewide inventory of early town buildings to substantiate this assessment.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Larned, Ellen D. History of Windham County, Connecticut. 2 vols.
Worcester: Charles Hamilton, 1880

Pomfret Land Records, Vol. 15, page 522 (1841).

"When Pomfret Built Its First Meeting House." Putnam Patriot, November 6, 1941.

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect St., Hartford CT 06106

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Approximately .5 acres

UTM References

A

1	9	2	5	4	0	0	0	4	6	3	8	8	0	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 boundary includes the entire Town House lot described in the Pomfret Land Records, Vol. 50, pages 644-46 (1980).

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

Except for a small piece deeded to an abutter in 1913, the lot is the same as that purchased by the town in 1841.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Bruce Clouette
organization Historic Resource Consultants date September 2, 1988
street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268
city or town Hartford state Connecticut zip code 06106

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1 Pomfret Town House
Pomfret, CT

Significance (continued):

Historical Context

The construction of town houses in this period directly reflects growing complexity in many Connecticut towns, as early industrialization and commercial growth resulted in diverging interests in geographically separate parts. The old practice of holding town meetings in the Congregational church survived the disestablishment of religion in 1818; in fact, public funds were still used to build Congregational churches in order to provide space for town meetings. Many towns, however, rotated town meetings among the churches in town (if there were more than one) or used various taverns, schoolhouses, and mills in order to give each section of town its due. While rotating the place of meeting avoided favoring one section over another, it often resulted in chaotic decision-making, as locally packed meetings passed resolutions which were then overturned when the next meeting was held in a different part of town. The solution adopted by many towns was to construct a building specifically for town meetings, usually after extended and acrimonious debate, at a centrally located or at least temporarily neutral site.

The origin of the Pomfret Town House was typical. In the early 19th century, Pomfret was primarily an agricultural town with important crossroad centers at Abington and Pomfret Center and manufacturing villages at Pomfret Landing and Pomfret Factory (later part of the town of Putnam). Building a town house was discussed (and rejected) as early as 1831. In 1840, the town house again became an issue, but there were too many diverse opinions as to where it should be located. Finally, the town appointed a committee of three outsiders -- one each from the adjoining towns of Hampton, Thompson, and Killingly -- to pick the spot. The present site was chosen, clearly because it lies between, yet apart from, the town's then-important population centers. The Town House was finished in 1841.

The heat of the controversy over the site of the town house in Pomfret and similar conflicts in other towns indicate the central importance of the town meeting in local government. Participants² at the town meeting, held at least twice a year and more often as needed, voted to build bridges and highways, approved local tax rates, named men to fill offices from fence-viewer to state representative, and arranged for the town's care of the

²From 1818 to 1876, the franchise was limited to white males.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 2 Pomfret Town House
Pomfret, CT

Significance (continued):

poor. Pomfret Town House provided the simple, open space appropriate for a frugal town's public deliberations. There was little need to provide office space or record storage in a town house such as Pomfret's, since the selectmen, town clerk, and minor officers typically conducted the town's day-to-day business in their homes.

The privy, while apparently not as early as the main building, was present during the Town House's period of significance. Its function is clearly related to the Town House's role as a place for town meetings and undoubtedly contributed to an attentive debate of public issues which might otherwise have required premature termination.

Pomfret Town House's historical significance is augmented by its well-preserved condition. With its simple form, original small-pane windows, old doors, clapboard siding, plaster walls, and simple interior woodwork, it has retained intact its historical appearance.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Photographs Pomfret Town House
Section number _____ Page 1 Pomfret, CT

All photographs:

1. POMFRET TOWN HOUSE
2. Pomfret, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. July, 1988
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission
Hartford, CT

South elevation, camera facing northwest
Photo 1 of 6

East and rear (north) elevations, camera facing southwest
Photo 2 of 6

Detail of west entry, camera facing north
Photo 3 of 6

Interior, camera facing west
Photo 4 of 6

Interior, detail of post casing and ledge along north wall, camera
facing northeast
Photo 5 of 6

Privy, camera facing east
Photo 6 of 6