

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 2 1982

DATE ENTERED

APR 12 1982

**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

Gurdon Bill Store

AND/OR COMMON

Gurdon Bill Store

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

15 Church Hill Road

N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Ledyard

N/A VICINITY OF

2 nd -

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Connecticut

CODE
09

COUNTY

New London

CODE
011

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

N/A

NO

MILITARY

OTHER: storage

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Ecclesiastical Society of the First Congregational Church, Ledyard

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 77 722 Colonel Ledyard Highway

CITY, TOWN

Ledyard

N/A VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Ledyard Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

P.O. Box 38 741 Colonel Ledyard Highway

CITY, TOWN

Ledyard

STATE

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input 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

The Gurdon Bill Store is a small frame building which sits very close to the corner of two country roads in Ledyard, Connecticut. As the main north-south highway was rerouted to the west, the setting has remained relatively undeveloped. The area is wooded, with few other buildings nearby. Across the street is an 18th-century house, and there is a later carriagehouse further down Church Hill Road. The nominated property is part of a much larger tract: only the quarter acre immediately around the store was included, however, as this reflects the original extent of the property when land for the store was purchased in 1818.

The store measures 18 x 30' in plan and is 1½ stories high. The walls are carried up higher than the level of the ceiling of the first story, giving more headroom in the attic. The ridge of wood-shingled roof is parallel to Church Hill Road, and the main or east facade is on the long side. The underpinning is of cut stone blocks above grade and fieldstone rubble below; there is a full cellar. The exterior is clapboarded. The main facade has two large windows, a large batten Dutch door within a plain board frame, and a smaller window to the right of the door. The large windows have twelve by twelve-light sliding sash, and are fitted with batten three-part shutters, the bottom two sections of which fold down, while the top part folds upward and is held in place by a twisted iron hook. The hinges on the shutters are attached by huge hand-forged rivets; like the batten door, the shutters are constructed of wide boards and rose-head nails and appear to be original. A pent roof runs across the front of the store, projecting about a foot beyond the wall. Bed molding beneath the pent roof look appropriate to the period, whereas the main cornice and wide overhang at the gables appear to be a mid-century reworking of the main roof. There are no window openings on the rear facade, and none on the first story of the south gable end. The four windows on the north end, the two for the attic on the south, and the one small window on the front all have six-over-six sash, most of which appears original.

The interior is divided into one large south room, entered directly by the front door and lighted by the large windows, and two smaller rooms, one behind the other at the north end. Stairs up and down are enclosed and located in front of the door but toward the rear of the store. The walls of the main room are entirely covered with wide-board horizontal beaded wainscoting. There is a large L-shaped counter paralleling the south and west walls; the counter front is finished with similar beaded boards and the back is open. Along the east wall is a plank bench supported on large wooden brackets. Into the plastered ceiling have been set rows of iron hooks. These run above the counter and along the north wall as well. The walls behind the counter are completely filled with tiers of pine shelving with varied spacing. On the west wall are several built-in drawers of rabbetted joinery and with simple wooden pulls. Along the bottom is a row of open bins. The woodwork throughout the store appears to be all of the same period and as early as the store itself: nail heads are square and look to be wrought. All the woodwork was stained or has aged to a nutty brown color. The walls in the main room are covered with stamped and painted names, dates and messages, such as "Cow went to Bull, 30th of July."¹ Most of the objects in the room are articles being stored by the church which owns the building, but two may date back to the nineteenth century - - a cast-iron and sheet-metal stove, "Beckwith's Air Tight," and an early forged spring vise bolted to the south counter.

The north or back rooms are small and nearly identical: both have plastered walls, a narrow beaded board for pegs or hooks, simple sliding shutters on the windows, beaded post casings, and brick diagonal fireplaces. The latter have no

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAR 8 1982
DATE ENTERED APR 12 1982

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Gurdon Bill Store
Ledyard, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

Description (continued):

mantels, merely a simple plaster finish over the brick. (The small brick stack was taken down to the attic floor). Remnants of shelving in these rooms show the shelves to have been set against the lath before plastering. In the attic above, the store's plank-wall construction is visible, as is the roof system, rafters pinned together at the top and braced with collar beams. Against the east slope of the roof is a row of several built-in storage bins whose hinged lids lift and can be secured by carved wooden latches pivoting on the rafters. The bins are pine and similar in construction to the other furnishings and likely date from the store's early years. Most the interior hardware is incomplete, but there is one forged Suffolk-type latch on the cellar door and on the Dutch door, large strap hinges, an iron box lock, and a large cast Norfolk latch. Throughout the store are the original wide-board floors.

The building is presently used for storage by its owner. There are some problems requiring attention: the roof is sound for now but is old and deteriorated and the sills, joists and summer in the cellar show the effect of dry rot; some sills have already been replaced and the cracked summer rests on posts. The interior plaster has cracked and fallen away in places. Yet on balance, the store is in fairly good condition: a more active use might well have necessitated the removal of the many built-in features which make the store significant.

The boundary of the nominated property, an 85 by 100' rectangle, closely approximates the outline and extent of the quarter-acre lot upon which the store was built. Because of the undoubtedly widened roads, the original boundary can only be determined through extensive surveying; moreover, the store today likely sits much closer to the corner than it did when the roads were narrower. In view of this uncertainty, the nominated quarter-acre is a reasonable approximation.

¹Other examples include "George A. Lewis 1869," "H.L.Treat 1839," and "E. HOLMES," the latter stamped into the wood.

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 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 checked="" 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 1818 - built BUILDER/ARCHITECT Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Gurdon Bill Store is the best preserved early 19th-century store known in Connecticut. There are earlier store buildings and more elegant ones, but it would appear that the Bill Store is unique in retaining so many of its original features intact, particularly in the interior. The "country store" (the term itself dates back well into the 19th century) was one of the standard features of the New England landscape, an essential component of the rural economy. These stores carried a wide range of manufactured goods, seeds, tools, prepared foods, cloth, and anything else farming people needed but could not make or grow for themselves. The store was an integral part of rural life in the last century, just as much as barns and farmhouses, and as such, the country store played an important part in Connecticut history (Criterion A). The Gurdon Bill Store is significant because it is such an outstanding example of the type.

Architecturally, the building is remarkably well-adapted to its commercial function: it is framed in three bays, providing for the one large room and a pair of smaller (and heated) back rooms. A full cellar and high attic (formed by extending the posts above the height of the attic floor) create bulk storage space. Because most of the wall space was needed for shelving, the windows in the main room are large to admit adequate light, and the other walls were left without openings. All the lower-story windows are provided with shutters. Those on the large windows are the more interesting: their three-part design provided some shading effect by the top part, but what the purpose of the other hinge was is less obvious. It may be the shutters could form window ledges outside the sliding sash. The function of the pent-roof, an unusual feature in New England, also is less clear, but it likely was intended to shelter the entrance. The heavy batten door, like the shutters, helped protect the goods within the store.

The remarkably well-preserved interior clearly illustrates how a store was operated in 1818. The long counter separated the goods from the customers, who waited for their turn on the built-in bench, or in one of the heated rooms, or passed time writing graffiti on the walls. Someone stood behind the counter and retrieved items for the purchaser from the array of shelves, drawers, and bins along the walls. Other goods hung from hooks overhead, and still others were stored in the attic, where grains or flour might be stored in the large bins, or in the cellar. The wide-board floors, beaded wainscot, and plastered fireplace treatment are typical of the interior finish of the period, especially in shops and the rear rooms and kitchens of residences.

Gurdon Bill (1784-1856) and his partner, Philip Gray, bought the land for the store in 1818, but by 1822 Bill had gained sole ownership of the property. Bill was from a farming family, but received an education at Plainfield Academy starting at the age of 21. He worked with other merchants in Groton, Stonington, and New York City before returning to North Groton, later incorporated as Ledyard, where he kept his store and ran a farm. He also let out home work for a Jewett City textile manufacturer, and was a representative one term to the General Assembly.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Avery, Rev. John. History of the Town of Ledyard, 1650-1900. Norwich: Noyes & David, 1901.
- Bill, Ledyard. History of the Bill Family. New York: Ledyard Bill, 1867.
- Ledyard Land Records, Vol. 17, p. 88-89; vol. 18, p. 253-256.
- Walling, H.F. (surv.). Map of New London County. Philadelphia, 1854.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/4

QUADRANGLE NAME Uncasville

~~ADJACENT NOT VERIFIED~~

UTM NOT VERIFIED

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 749400 4593630

C

E

G

B

D

F

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is part of Lot 15 as shown on Ledyard Assessor's Map 40, and includes 100' of frontage on Church Hill Road and 85' of depth, approximating the dimensions of the store lot as purchased in 1818.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Bruce Clouette, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE December 10, 1979

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford

STATE CT

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE X 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 19, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Entered in the National Register

DATE 4/12/82

ATTEST: Belorus Byers
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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

FOR HCRS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAR 8 1982
DATE ENTERED	APR 12 1982

Gurdon Bill Store
Ledyard, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Significance (continued):

While the location of the store seems isolated today, in the 19th century it was at the intersection of two fairly well-travelled roads, one from Preston to New London and the other the principal route from Norwich to Mystic. Bill kept the store for over thirty-five years, though he must have closed shop shortly before he died in 1856; his will mentions "All articles behind the counter of the store . . . \$1.50." After his death it was briefly sold out of the Bill family. Around 1875 the Bills sold the store to the Congregational Society as part of the parsonage lot. Their limited use of the building in the subsequent years has preserved for the present and future generations an outstanding historic resource.