

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

PH0246964

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RECEIVED OCT 8 1975

DATE ENTERED

**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 First Congregational Church of Cheshire

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 111 Church Drive

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Cheshire

___ VICINITY OF

5th - Ronald A. Sarasin

STATE

Connecticut

CODE

09

COUNTY

New Haven

CODE

009

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 First Congregational Church of Cheshire

STREET & NUMBER

111 Church Drive

CITY, TOWN

Cheshire

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Wallingford Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

350 Center Street

CITY, TOWN

Wallingford

STATE

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Resources

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 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 DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Congregational Church is located on a large lot at the west end of Cheshire's small village green and is flanked on either side by 18th-century houses. Although the growth of the congregation has necessitated many additions - a two-story extension immediately to the rear, a brick one-story ell from this extension and a further one-story frame wing extending the ell - these do not obscure the basic form of the church, since they are on a small scale and are sufficiently removed from it.

The church, built in 1826-1827, is a two-story rectangular frame building with a medium-pitched gable roof. At the gable end, facing the street, are a portico the full height of the building and, projecting somewhat beyond main roof, a four-part steeple. The underpinning consists partly of hewn, fine-grained sandstone laid in the form of coursed ashlar, and partly of much rougher stone salvaged from an earlier church. The entrance steps and portico platform, also of the former material, have been cemented over. The exterior of the church is covered with narrow white pine clapboards, perhaps original, and the roof has been redone with asphalt shingles.

The front facade is dominated by the portico which projects from the vestibule behind it, about three fifths the total width of the facade. Four slender columns, of the Scamozzi Ionic order, support an entablature composed of a molded architrave, a plain frieze and a fairly heavy cornice with modillion brackets. Spaced along the wall behind the portico are three similar entrances and on the second story, three corresponding windows. The elements are framed by pilasters, fluted and partially reeded, exactly like the main columns. The doorways all have a five-panelled door, over which is a semi-circular fan with a carved shell at the center. The whole is framed by a heavily-molded architrave with a prominent key-block in the arch. This wall, as well as the typanum of the pediment, is covered with flush, horizontal matched boards. The only discordant element is a small pediment window which was added sometime after 1838 and is rectangular in shape.

The cornice of the portico is continued around the building as the main cornice, and the gable end of the main roof is also of pediment form. On either side of the projecting vestibule are two windows, one on each story. The facades of the sides are simply composed, having two rows of five evenly spaced windows. All of the windows have 20/20 sash with most of the glass original. The frames consist of plain architraves surrounded by a band molding and except for those back of the portico, an additional simple molding as a cap.

The first stage of the steeple consists of a square clapboarded tower with a Seth Thomas clockface on the front side and semi-circular louvers on the north and south; it is surmounted by a simple open railing of plain rectangular balusters. The second stage, the belfry, is an open arcade, octagonal in plan, formed by Ionic columns which frame round arched openings. The columns support a plain entablature and a Chippendale balustrade with urn finials. The third stage, also octagonal, is solid, with pilasters at the angles. On the four major sides are arch-headed louvers, and on the other four, panels carved with interlacing tracery. A circular Chippendale railing is placed above. All three of these stages have molded cornices supported by small modillions. Finally, there is a conical, shingled tower, painted white like the rest of the building, with a foliated finial. On this is mounted a tall wrought-iron weathervane, first installed in 1796 on an earlier church.

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The interior of the church has been somewhat changed. Originally, the pulpit was between the entrances on the east wall immediately adjoining the vestibule, and the floor sloped toward it. In 1857 the pulpit was moved to the far end and the floor was leveled. Today the pulpit, a Victorian piece of carved mahogany, is framed by a modern pilastered and arched wall treatment, and the floor has been covered with linoleum and carpeting. The seats are arranged in twelve curved rows with two aisles. Although they are not original, they are very early, and are of pine boards with mahogany top and arm rails. Except for a pewter chandelier (of appropriate design) which has been recently installed and wall stenciling which has been lost, the rest of the interior retains its original appearance.

The major feature of the interior is the shallow oval dome, constructed of plaster and lath, which completely fills the ceiling. Its surface is plain except for a central wooden ornament, carved with characteristic Adam forms. A continuous band of wooden panels surrounds the dome; plain panels alternate with carved ones of oval sunburst or "ginger cookie" motif. The ceiling has been painted white.

A gallery extends along three sides of the audience room. The railing is simply paneled with a band of Greek key ornament near the top and capped by a molded shelf. The gallery along the two sides is supported by reeded Scamozzi Ionic columns with a molded architrave, plain frieze and modillioned cornice. The east gallery, part of the 1857 changes, has a somewhat differently paneled railing and is free-standing; two columns of a Composite order rise to the ceiling on either side of the organ.

The audience room and the vestibule are separated by a partition and stairs to the gallery are found on either side immediately within the entrances. These have round handrails tenoned and pegged into plain square newels chamfered at the top and plain rectangular balusters. Two five-paneled doors open to the audience room aisles. Within they are framed by plain pilasters with oval sunbursts in the necking. The entablatures above have plain friezes and a cornice with bead molding and round dentils. Except for a matched board dado which extends up to the window stools, the interior surfaces are plastered and painted gold. All of the woodwork is painted white, except for the seat trim which has been stained. The windows have plain casings and swinging interior shutters, a later addition.

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 1827 - completed

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

David Hoadley

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Any Congregational church is of local historical significance because, although church-going was not universal, established religion played a major role in early New England. Beyond this, however, the church in Cheshire is important as an architectural resource, a design by a noted worker in the Adam or Federal style. The two points of significance cannot be entirely separated, however, because ecclesiastical building was one of few ways in which fine period architecture was made available to a large number of people.

David Hoadley (1774-1839) was one of Connecticut's foremost architects and is recognized as a major interpreter of the Federal style, especially in churches. His masterpiece is the brick United Church (1815) on the New Haven green, but he is more typically represented by his simpler country churches such as Cheshire. His churches are all very similar, as are several in Connecticut which, while not known to have been designed by him, seem to have been inspired by or even to have copied his work, e.g., Southington. Hoadley's distinguishing points are the steeple which consists of a square tower, two octagonal stages and a spire, the interior with the pulpit at the entrance end and the domed ceiling, which necessitated the use of an unusual scissors truss under the roof to provide sufficient clearance. A portico and three arched entrances are usually found in his work as well as in other contemporary churches. The importance of Hoadley is his success in fulfilling the demands of the Adam style: a rich embellishment of details, yet an avoidance of ostentation, a knowledge and use of classical forms, yet a freedom from strictly academic proportions, and above all, a light and airy elegance.

The Cheshire church illustrates Hoadley's handling of the style. The front columns, for example, are closely spaced and slender, 13 diameters tall, creating the vertical movement carried upward by the steeple, which is carefully graduated to decrease in size and increase in richness of detail as it rises. Despite the progression there is a unity to the facade achieved by the repetition of detail: the modillions throughout; the arches in the openings of the second stage which, complete with keystones, echo the arched doorways; the balustrades at each stage of the steeple, the first plain, as befits a plain square tower, and the other two more elaborate.

The same combination of elegance and restraint is found in the interior. The gallery columns, for example, are finely composed recall the exterior columns. The entablature above is also elaborate, but the railing above it is austere in its simple paneling and decoration. Unity as well as richness is achieved in the repetition of the sunburst motif. Finally, a magnificent feeling of lightness is created by the domed ceiling, whose plain curved surface seems to float in mid-air.

Although the Cheshire church is similar to other Hoadley churches and churches inspired by him, this does not diminish its individual impact as a fulfillment of the Adam style and as an aesthetic experience.

