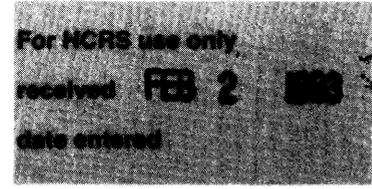


**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 South Canaan Congregational Church

and/or common " " " "

**2. Location**

street & number Route 63 and Barnes Road N/A not for publication

city, town Canaan N/A vicinity of congressional district 6th

state Connecticut code 09 county Litchfield code 005

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <span style="margin-left: 20px;">N/A</span>
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Falls Village-Canaan Historical Society

street & number Main Street

city, town Falls Village N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Canaan Town Clerk

street & number Town Hall - Main Street

city, town Falls Village state Connecticut

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1982  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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 South Canaan Congregational Church is situated on the southwest corner of the intersection of Route 63 and Barnes Road, a rural crossroads in the town of Canaan\*, Connecticut. The setting creates a feeling of isolation: the extensive open land and scattering of houses (some from the early 19th century) are not the environment one expects for such a stylish meetinghouse. The church was completed in 1804 and is in the Federal style. It is of post-and-beam construction, 2 1/2 stories high, and is oriented with its gable end and principal entrance facing eastward toward Route 63, the former Litchfield turnpike. The exterior is covered with narrow pine clapboards which stop against quoins formed from beveled wooden blocks. Windows are original and have twelve-light double-hung sash; the first-story openings have projecting head moldings. Above the limestone ashlar foundation is molded wooden water table. (Photos 1 and 2).

The center part of the three-bay facade is brought forward to form a deep pavilion containing three entrances. The main entrance (Photo 3) has original eight-panel double doors hung on large strap hinges and is flanked by fluted pilasters. Above the doorway is an entablature composed of a frieze decorated with triglyphs and a pediment with mutules along the cornice. The simpler secondary entrances are located on the sides of the pavilion: each has fluted pilasters, pediments with a partial cornice return, and a semi-elliptical overlight with the muntins forming interlaced arches. Centered above the main entrance is a Palladian window. The center portion has interlaced muntins and is outlined by a molded arch with a carved keyblock. The sidelights are set off by fluted pilasters which support an entablature with modillions and dentils. A similar use of modillions is found in the building's main cornice, which forms a full return across the front of the church and across the pavilion, where it forms a second pediment.

Rising from the front of the building is a three-stage tower. Only the first stage is original. Of large proportions and square in plan, it repeats many of the decorative elements already described: it has quoins, a cornice with modillions, and a somewhat less ornate Palladian window on each of three sides. The second stage belfry is Greek Revival in inspiration and dates from 1843. It is also square in plan, with paired pilasters, rectangular louvered openings, and a simple entablature; the iron bell within is unmarked. The third stage is a short, square-plan spire of oddly diminutive proportions. Despite its seeming incongruity, it dates from 1847, and may be seen in an 1853 engraving of the church (Fagan 1853). It supports the original wrought-iron weathervane of a stylized, fish-shaped pattern. The original tower almost certainly included an open belfry with a shallow octagonal dome resting on slender columns. It probably offered inadequate protection, for the 1843 changes were initiated to correct damage done to the bell. The tower has been extensively re-inforced with modern construction materials.

(continued)

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\*There is also a village named Canaan within the incorporated town of North Canaan. Until 1858 Canaan and North Canaan were one town.

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

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

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received

date entered

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South Canaan Congregational Church  
Canaan, CT

Description (continued):

The interior of the church retains much of its historical fabric intact. The most formally finished part is the audience room (Photo 4). Windows and doors have frames formed from a series of moldings, and those surrounding the three entrances from the vestibule have crossetted corners. Modern carpeting covers the original wide-board pine floor, and the walls are plastered above a dado of horizontally placed boards with beaded edges. The present low platform and paneled reading desk (Photo 5) is a mid 19th-century replacement for a larger high pulpit, for at the level of the gallery on the west wall is a Palladian pulpit window (now clapboarded over) of atypical design. Although it has the usual arched molding, keyblock, and classical cornice, the three parts of the window are separated by engaged columns of unknown inspiration: they taper downward toward the bottom of the window, and they resemble nothing as much as table legs, though greatly elongated. The design is rare in Connecticut.

The gallery which runs along three sides of the room rests on square paneled columns. Above the columns is an entablature which is one of the decorative focal points of the church's interior: the frieze has a delicate applique of a flowing, interlaced pattern, and the cornice is decorated with a row of small modillions. The gallery rails are formed of long recessed panels surrounded by rope-turn molding. Continuing upward toward the ceiling are square fluted columns with reeding near their complexly molded capitals. The entablature above the second tier of columns has a plain frieze and modillions along the cornice. The ceiling above the simple white-painted pews (probably dating from 1843) is considerably higher than that above the galleries: the transition is made by plaster vaulting which terminates in yet another dentillated cornice.

Three doors from the audience room lead into the vestibule. The interior finish of this room is simpler, though the vestibule has the same dado as the main part of the interior. Here are visible the strap hinged and other early hardware affixed to the entrances (Photo 6). Here also on the left is the stairway to the gallery, an open flight with simple scroll ornament applied to the sides and a plain rail, newel and balusters (Photo 7).

The building is no longer used as a church, but has been bought by a local historical society intent on its preservation. Its physical condition appears generally good, though there are some instances of broken glass and decayed exterior moldings.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input 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		

Criteria A, C

**Specific dates** 1804 - completed **Builder/Architect** Thomas Dutton (?)

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The South Canaan Congregational Church is an excellent example of early Federal architecture (Criterion C). Well-preserved and relatively unaltered, the building is notable for retaining a large amount of historical fabric, for the extent and variety of its ornamental detail, and for the rarity within Connecticut of its particular form. The building has local historical significance (Criteria A) as well. The Congregational church was an important institution in Connecticut towns, and the completion of a stylish new meetinghouse was undoubtedly a noteworthy event for a large portion of Canaan's residents.

The South Canaan Church represents the first generation of church buildings which, in the period 1790–1810, departed from the plain-style meetinghouses of earlier times. The plan of the church was changed, placing the pulpit along the shorter side, usually opposite the main entrance, and the building was re-oriented with its gable end facing the street. Churches of this period were embellished inside and out with the details associated with English Georgian architecture - - pilasters, pediments, Palladian windows, classical cornices, quoins, and vaulted ceilings. At the same time, these churches can be viewed as transitional, leading up to the more richly embellished and attenuated designs of David Hoadley and Lavius Fillmore. The South Canaan church is clearly a model of the type. Its main entrance, to take but one of its many Georgian features, was described by J. Frederick Kelley in his definitive study of Connecticut meetinghouses as "faultless in design and scale, and an excellent example of the skillful translation of classical forms and proportions into wood effected by the earlier builders (pp. 212-213)." Although not overly elaborate, the exterior shows a careful attention to detail, particularly in such things as the molded water table (instead of just a plain sill cover) and the head moldings over the windows.

It is the interior, however, that really sets the building apart from other Connecticut churches. Kelly called it "one of the most charming and least changed interiors of any church edifice in Connecticut," and it certainly is outstanding for its unusual and extensive detail. The pulpit Palladian window, the several cornices, the two types of columns, and the crossetted door surrounds all exhibit inventiveness and a thorough-going quest for stylishness. The interlaced, flowing applique has been the focus of special attention: it is apparently directly derived from Plate XXXII of William Pain's Practical Builder, published in its first American edition in Boston in 1792, just a dozen years before its use in the South Canaan church.

(continued)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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Columbia University Press, 1948. (continued)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acres of nominated property 3/4

Quadrangle name South Canaan

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

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6	37	9	60
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### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is the parcel shown as lot 19 on Canaan Property Map 19. It represents the historical boundary of the church property as purchased in 1801.

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

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette, Partner, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Historic Resource Consultants date July 20, 1982

street & number 103 Mansfield Hollow Road telephone (203) 423-8903

city or town Mansfield Center 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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

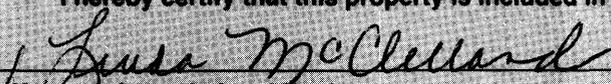
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

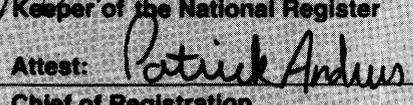
date January 28, 1983

For HCERS use only

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

  
Keeper of the National Register

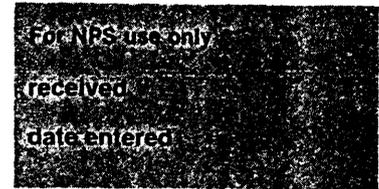
date 3/16/83

Attest:   
Chief of Registration

date 3/16/83

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South Canaan Congregational Church  
Canaan, CT

Significance (continued):

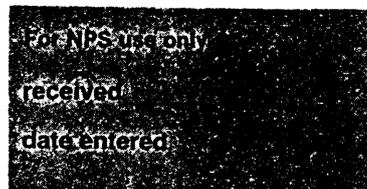
The South Canaan church is one of three in Connecticut modeled on Charles Bulfinch's Pittsfield, Massachusetts, meetinghouse, completed in 1793 and allowed to fall into ruin 150 years later (Photo 8). Directly or indirectly, Bulfinch's design was followed closely in Canaan, the only variation being a somewhat narrower facade and smaller overall proportions. The key feature of Bulfinch's church, the deep entrance bay with side entrances (rather than three doors across the front), was retained in the Canaan church, as were the quoins, pedimented entrance treatment, and Palladian windows. The somewhat ungainly proportions of the first stage of the tower make sense when one realizes that the Pittsfield church had a tower clock; the hard-pressed South Canaan society may have intended one but may never have been able to afford a clock.

No architect or builder is mentioned in the records of the South Canaan church, but Connecticut's other two churches of this form were designed and built after Bulfinch's example by Thomas Dutton, a carpenter from Watertown. Dutton was sent by the Salisbury society to study Bulfinch's church at Lee, Massachusetts, but apparently saw the Pittsfield meetinghouse on the way and preferred it to the substantially different design at Lee, as he reproduced it in smaller form for the Salisbury church, completed in 1799. The meetinghouse at Washington, Connecticut, was also built by Dutton and was finished in 1802. In its form and in many of its details, it is remarkably similar to both the Salisbury and South Canaan churches. All three are important specimens of early Federal architecture. The Salisbury meetinghouse still has its Bulfinch-inspired open belfry, but its interior has been completely changed. The South Canaan church has most of its exterior, with the major exception of the upper parts of the tower, and its interior is relatively unchanged. The Washington church has been extensively altered, both within and without.

The Congregational church was organized in Canaan soon after the town was platted, sold and settled in 1738. For many years a single society was sufficient, but in 1767 the town was divided into two societies, north and south, with the south retaining the title of First Congregational Church of Canaan. Several sporadic attempts were made to replace the 1761 meetinghouse, but nothing came of these until 1799, when plans for the present church were begun. The church was finished by early 1804. Construction was paid for by a combination of taxes, subscription, and a trouble-plagued lottery. In 1810 the meetinghouse was proclaimed open and available to any Christian group so long as their

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South Canaan Congregational Church  
Canaan, CT

Significance (continued):

hours of worship did not conflict with the Congregationalists.

In 1843 repairs were made necessary by damage to the bell. In addition to changes in the tower, the church was made more modern by the replacement of the high pulpit with the reading desk and the substitution of slips for box pews.

The site for the church had been chosen as the geographic center of the scattered farming community which was Canaan in 1804. However, for this very reason, neither the church nor the crossroads of South Canaan prospered, not having any real reason for growth. Both were destined for decline in the 19th century as the manufacturing settlements of Falls Village and East Canaan as well as the railroad junction of Canaan center outpaced the older crossroads.

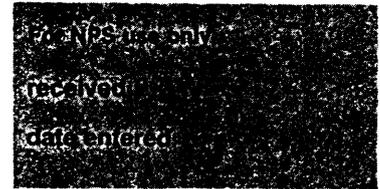
Historians are only beginning to come to terms with the reasons for the appearance of stylish meetinghouses like that at South Canaan, but clearly a church like this one represents more than just the need to replace an older structure. Communities had always rivaled each other in the construction of meetinghouses, but the elevation of the meetinghouse to the status of an architectural monument, with pediments, quoins, and columns, must have resulted from profound changes in the role that religion played in the community. Certainly growing cosmopolitanism was a factor, as better transportation facilities made access to Bulfinch's Berkshire masterpiece possible, but we still need to ask why people wanted to imitate, to have a stylish church. One school of thought is that these churches derive from the decline of Congregationalism as a thoroughly integrated and universally accepted part of community life. Increased religious diversity as well as competing economic and political identities challenged the role of established religion. Unlike the society which had produced the old plain-style meetinghouses, the 19th century witnessed a separation of religious concerns from everyday life. "Buildings and objects required a new identity to distinguish them from their domestic and civil counterparts. . . the need for familiarity had passed."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Philip D. Zimmerman, "The Lord's Supper in Early New England: The Setting and the Service," in Peter Benes (ed.), New England Meeting House and Church: 1630-1850 (Annual Proceedings, Dublin Seminar for New England Folklife, Boston, 1979), p. 134.

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National Park Service

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"The First Congregational Church of Canaan," c. 1955, State Library.