

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

PH0021016

STATE: Connecticut	
COUNTY: Middlesex	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	FEB 23 1972

**1. NAME**

COMMON: The Old Town Hall ←

AND/OR HISTORIC: (Second Congregational Meeting House)

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER: On the green between Liberty Street and Goose Hill Road

CITY OR TOWN: Chester

STATE Connecticut	CODE 09	COUNTY: Middlesex	CODE 007
----------------------	------------	----------------------	-------------

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Public <input type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <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 (Specify) <hr/> <hr/>

Comments will be used for Civic meetings

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME: Town of Chester

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Chester

STATE: Connecticut	CODE: 09
--------------------	----------

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Town Clerk's office, Town Office building

STREET AND NUMBER: Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Chester

STATE: Connecticut	CODE: 09
--------------------	----------

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY: Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings, 1965-68

DATE OF SURVEY: 1965-68

Federal   
  State   
  County   
  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Connecticut Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: 54 Pratt Street

CITY OR TOWN: Hartford,

STATE: Connecticut	CODE: 09
--------------------	----------

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: CONNECTICUT

COUNTY: MIDDLESEX

ENTRY NUMBER: 007

DATE: FEB 23 1972

FOR NPS USE ONLY

**7. DESCRIPTION**

CONDITION

(Check One)

Excellent     Good     Fair     Deteriorated     Ruins     Unexposed

(Check One)

Altered     Unaltered

(Check One)

Moved     Original Site

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Little is known of the original appearance of this building beyond the fact that it was frame and rectangular -- roughly 30 by 40 feet. Early records state that a new meeting house "should be set at the north end of the green against the road leading from the main road to Cedar Swamp" and should be "about the bigness of the old meeting house" but no dimensions are given (Jan. 1, 1793 Records of the Fourth Parish of the Congregational Society of Saybrook, Vol. 1). The framing was set up by July 1793 and the building was completed in 1794. Renovations were made to the 1793 building in 1876-77 when an enlarged entrance wing was added to the south side and a stage and proscenium arch to the north side. Originally, there were two rows of five windows each across the south side (now the entrance) and presumably the same on the upper floor of the north side. The east and west ends have identical Federal door frames flanked by two windows; three windows on the second floor and a single window under the peak of the roof. There was no heat until c. 1827 when a stove was installed, thus only two small chimneys were added.

The building is clapboard, two stories with a steep roof whose massive framing with its great trusses is perhaps the most notable architectural feature of the building. It is hoped that at some future date a glass wall with ladder stairway and access door may permit the visitor to study this feature.

The meeting house was sold to the town in 1847 for \$300.00 with the stove and furniture; it was used for town meetings until 1960. The unique features were added when it was remodelled in 1876 with a stage, entrance wing and balconies extended to their present outline. This is the interior we see today with the white panelling of the earlier pews used as ceiling and walls of the stage and dressing rooms beneath the stage. The panelling is also used at the top of the curving stairs at each side of the balcony. Two cylindrical stoves on either side of the stage provided heat until the building was abandoned and the small entrance houses the plumbing facilities and coatrooms. The theater thus created in 1876 has no permanent seating on the first floor; there are wooden chairs (numbered in fixed groups of three or four) in the balcony. The seating capacity would be about 200-225.

The building is situated on its original site on the town green; at the foot of the green are two early burying grounds. Facing the green is an early 19th century house and on adjoining Liberty Street are several of Chester's earliest and most important houses. Thus the Town Hall is the logical focal point for the town's first Historic District which we hope to initiate soon.

This happy combination of an eighteenth century public building in its unspoiled original location and in continuous public use is rare and of interest far beyond the boundaries of Chester.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                       |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian | <input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century | <input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century  | <input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 19th Century |                                       |

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) built in 1793-94; remodelled in 1876-77

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Political           | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry         | <input type="checkbox"/> Science                        | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention        | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture                      | _____  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater             | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military         | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 | _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Music |   |  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |   |   |  |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Perhaps few buildings have as many or as varied "areas of significance" checked as appropriate as the Old Town Hall. Since it was built as a Congregational Meeting House in 1793 until the town gave up holding town meetings there in 1960 it served as a public building for almost 150 years. Architecturally, it represents a somewhat arbitrary and unique blending of an eighteenth century meeting house and nineteenth century theater.

As a church, it served Chester from 1793, when the community was still the Fourth Parish of Saybrook, until 1845 by which time the town had become incorporated as a separate political entity. As a theater, the building was rented for concerts and was part of a musical renaissance in the lower Connecticut Valley which produced the Goodspeed Opera House in nearby East Haddam and a number of music schools and conservatories. Among the performers on the Town Hall stage were Jenny Lind and Tom Thumb. In later years local dramatic clubs, barber shop quartets, recitals, and pageants were presented. In still another of its many lives, the building was the scene of high school proms, masquerades, square dances, and was the scene of graduations until the 1950's when the new elementary and high schools were built.

For all of these reasons it is part of the fabric of Chester. Nationally, it is important as one of the few remaining public buildings in continuous public use and is a truly imaginative reminder of Yankee ingenuity. It is presently maintained but that is all -- except for occasional use for band rehearsals, charity auctions, etc. Plans are being made to provide heat, plumbing, and the necessary facilities so that it can be used for town meetings again. The building will not be a museum but will be used as it was in the past so that it will be for this generation what one member of an earlier generation has described as playing "a large part in my life -- school affairs, dances, dramas, concerts, Memorial Day observances, Fair exhibits, etc., and I doubt that there is an inch of it that does not hold memories." Such buildings are increasingly rare and need the protection of the National Register.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Connecticut Historical Collections, by John W. Barber, Durrie and Peck & John Barber, New Haven, 1836

Chester Scrapbook by Kate Silliman, Chester, 1953, privately printed

For Two Hundred Years the Same by Thelma Clark, Chester, 1953 privately printed.

Records of the Fourth Ecclesiastical Society of Saybrook Congregational Church, Vol I, 1740-1809

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		41° 24' 25"	72° 27' 9"	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 1 acre

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:  
Barbara S. Delaney, President

ORGANIZATION: Chester Historical Society

DATE: September 15, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Chester

STATE: Connecticut

CODE: 09

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name

*William M. ...*

Title State Liaison Officer

Date September 16, 1971

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

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

*Irvin A. Connally*  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

FEB 23 1972

Date

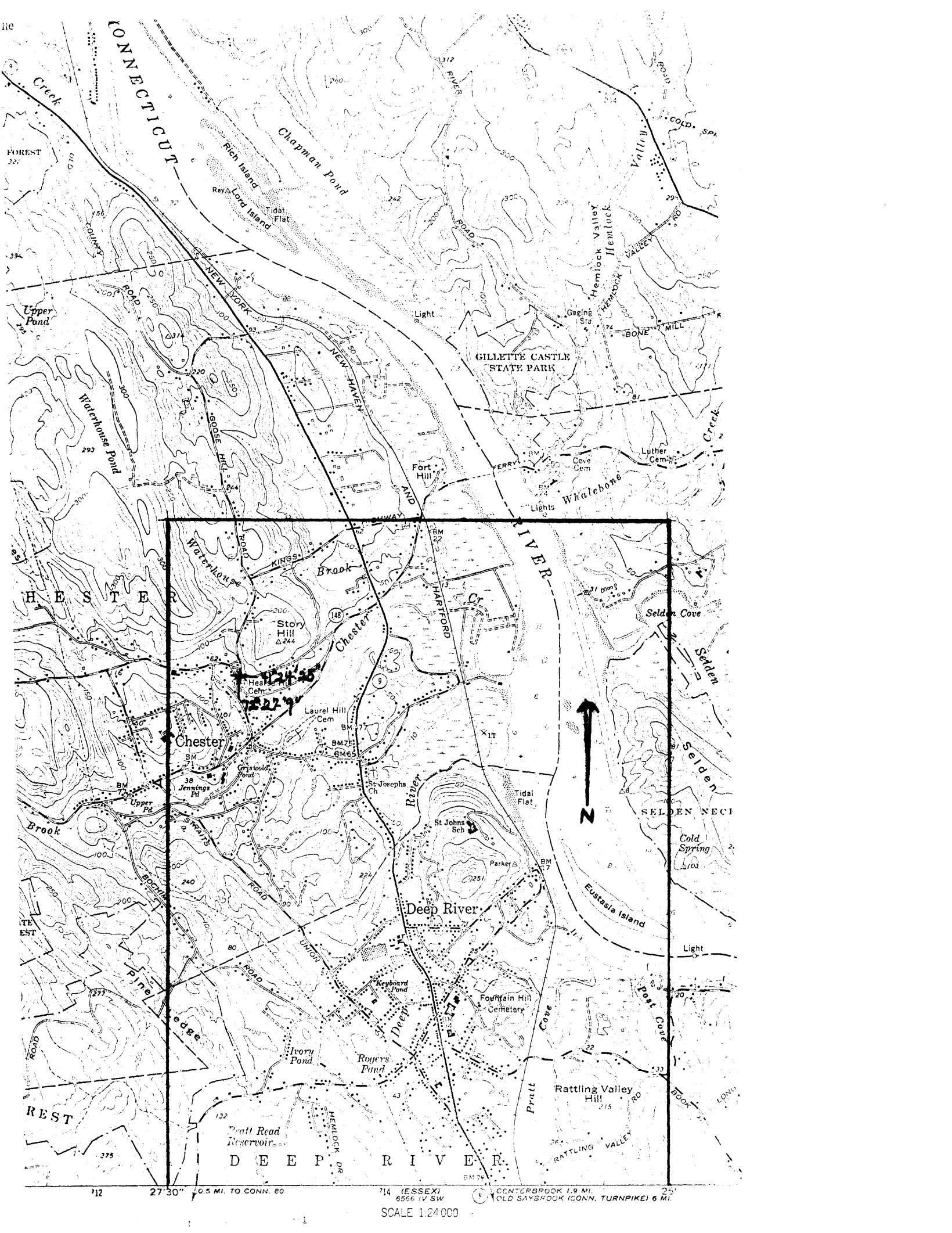
ATTEST:

*William M. ...*  
Keeper of The National Register

Date

JAN 20 1972

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



712 27°30' 0.5 MI. TO CONN. 80

714 (ESSEX) 6566 IV SW CENTERBROOK 1.9 MI. OLD SAYBROOK (CONN. TURNPIKE) 6 MI.

SCALE 1:24,000