

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Rhode Island	
COUNTY: Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER JAN 11 1974	DATE

1. NAME

COMMON:  
Old Congregational Church

AND/OR HISTORIC:

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: ~~West side of Greenville Road, approximately 1/3 mile north of the Danielson Pike~~ <sup>77 U.S. 6 (E.I. 116)</sup>

CITY OR TOWN:  
North Scituate

STATE: Rhode Island, 02857      CODE: 44      COUNTY: Providence      CODE: 007

3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<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
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:  
Town of Scituate

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Scituate      STATE: Rhode Island, 02857      CODE: 44

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Scituate Town Clerk

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: Scituate      STATE: Rhode Island, 02857      CODE: 44

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

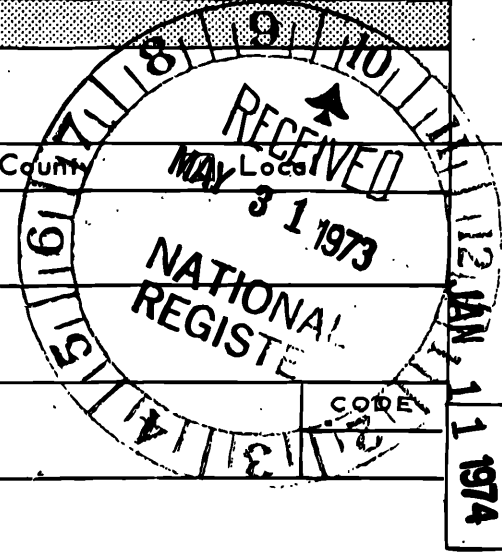
TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:       Federal       State       County

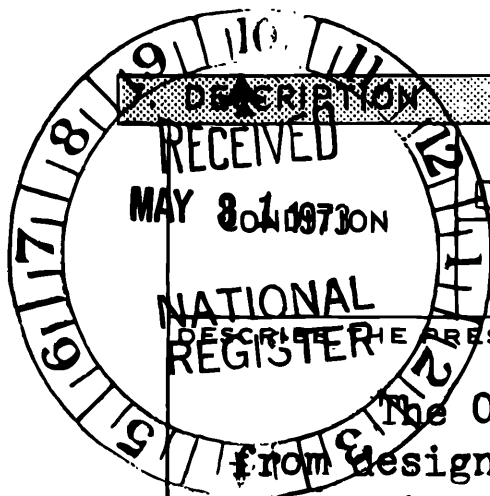
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE:



SEE INSTRUCTIONS



DESCRIPTION  
RECEIVED  
MAY 8 1973  
NATIONAL  
REGISTER

(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

The Old Congregational Church of North Scituate, completed in 1831 from designs by Clark Sayles, is on a slightly raised grassy site in the centre of town and has beside it the Greek Revival building of the former local academy and behind it a large cemetery bordered by a picket fence. It is a timber-framed rectangular structure of one high storey upon a low basement of dressed stone and measures about 38 feet by 52 feet. Its roof is a gabled one, end-to-the-street, and is covered by shingles; other exterior surfaces are covered by clapboarding with corner quoins, all painted off-white. At the east end a square tower rises above the gable, and set upon this is an octagonal belfry, smaller in latitudinal dimensions, with four round-headed openings between pilasters. A slightly smaller octagonal base on top of the belfry supports a tapering four-sided spire capped by a gilded finial with two balls and a weathervane. The front (east) elevation has a central window flanked by two doors; sides each have three window openings more widely spaced; the rear has one central window and a new fire-exit door at one corner. All window openings are tall ones, and round-headed in design: they contain triple-hung, 15-pane sash; however, the uppermost, rounded portions are blind and filled by louvred fans. Flanking the central frontal window are two flat-headed doorways whose heavy entablatures are broken-out over paired consoles supported by fluted Tuscan pilasters. At some distance over each doorway is a blind, louvred lunette, and a glazed lunette occurs in each gable.

Entrance to the church auditorium is gained through two corner vestibules within these doors, and each vestibule contains a stair leading to the choir gallery at the east end of the building. Between these vestibules are the former pastor's study and a storeroom. The three-aisled church proper, or preaching-hall, is a fully-open rectangular space with a high, coved plaster ceiling above a bold cornice of crisp wooden mouldings. Below this cornice, painted cream-colour like all the woodwork in the church, plaster walls are of oyster-grey above a wainscot of wide horizontal boarding. The tall windows are framed by sharp symmetrical mouldings with circle-in-square upper corner-blocks and are equipped with louvred folding shutters painted a deep sage-green. Excepting some corner seating just inside the vestibules, all pews face east towards the entrances and have ends with simple recessed panels, topped by S-curved, mahogany-stained armrests. The frontals of the first-row and corner pews are capped by a stained rail and are concavely scooped at their corners. The pews originally had doors, which are no longer present and will not be replaced; they are now furnished with cushions of a green not far from the colour of the interior shutters. In this room, acoustics are fortunately--if by chance--excellent, and provision for vision and attention to devotions was carefully arranged when building, as the basement framing gives the floor an intentional, gentle slope from west to east.

In front of the low inner east wall which screens the vestibules etc., a platform two steps high accommodates to-day a simple and removable lectern. Across the top of this (See Continuation Sheet 1.)

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**SIGNIFICANCE**

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1831

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |                                                  |                                                 |                                                         |                                          |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education              | <input 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 Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian            |                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature             | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater                        |                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Military               | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                 |                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Music                  |                                                         |                                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            |                                                 |                                                         |                                          |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

North Scituate's Old Congregational Church--placed on its simply-landscaped but conspicuous site, with a Civil War memorial on the south and World War memorials to the north--remains an important adornment of its small community. It is very fortunate that it does remain there, for at one time there was a real danger that the structure would be dismantled and re-erected elsewhere in Rhode Island. This building is a fine, intact example of the small-town New England church of the early XIX Century, conceived and erected simply and economically, but with conscious taste, reflecting proudly if naively a relationship with earlier or grander products of classical and academic architecture and displaying plainly the careful thought and excellent workmanship of local designers and artisans.

The designer-builder in this case was Clark Sayles (b. 1799), member of a family numerous and prominent in northern Rhode Island. At an early age he went to work for Elias Carter, a builder-architect of nearby Massachusetts who first worked in the Federal style but later became a noted exponent of the Greek Revival style. In 1820 Sayles returned to Rhode Island and designed a house for his brother in the town of Foster. He established himself in Pawtucket in 1822, and among his designs were the First Congregational Church there, the Greenville Meeting House and the Old Congregational Church in North Scituate, here under review. He made several extended trips to the South--perhaps continuing to work for or with Carter, who executed many commissions there--and had a part in erecting the Burke County Courthouse in Georgia.

On March 24, 1830, fourteen residents in and around North Scituate formed the North Smithville Society and raised \$3,000 to build the area's third church. The present site was then chosen and was acquired in May, after the Society had been granted a charter by the Rhode Island General Assembly. Sayles was soon engaged as designer-contractor and agreed to produce a building for \$2,360. For unknown reasons (perhaps the gallery and its columns) costs exceeded this estimate by more than \$900, but the church was ready for dedication and use on July 4, 1831.

The congregation flourished until the latter part of the XIX Century; attendance then began to decline, and regular services were suspended about 1897 or 1898. However, the church society or corpo-

(See Continuation Sheet 1.)

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Downing, Antoinette Forrester Early Homes of Rhode Island (Richmond, Virginia, 1937), pp. 463-464.  
 Old Congregational Church Restoration Committee, North Scituate, Rhode Island: Historical Background. Restoration Background. The Future of the Building (North Scituate, Rhode Island, 1971), 3 pp.

19/285-160/463-464-920

OTM Ref  
12-16-73 am

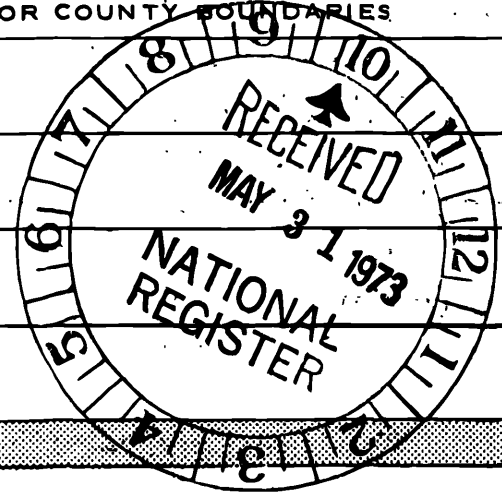
**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	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° 50' 3.29" N	71° 35' 14.93" W	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **Less than one acre**

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

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Richard B. Harrington, Consultant

ORGANIZATION: Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission  
 DATE: Feb. 15, 1973

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 John Brown House, 52 Power Street

CITY OR TOWN: Providence  
 STATE: Rhode Island, 02906  
 CODE: 44

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION**      **NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

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: Richard B. Harrington  
 State Historic Preservation Officer

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: 5/7/73

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

[Signature]  
 Director, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: 1/11/74

ATTEST:

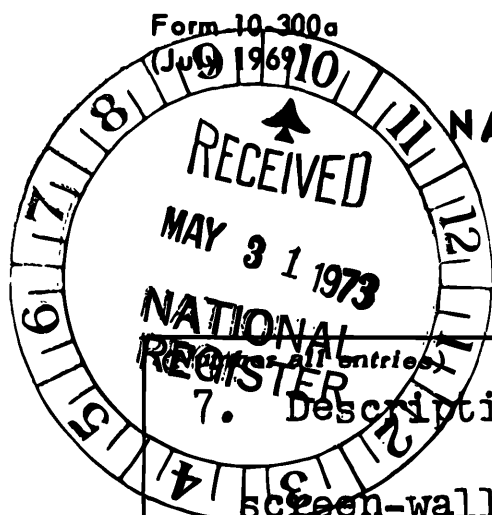
[Signature]  
 Acting Keeper of The National Register

Date: 1-7-74

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)-1

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
JAN 11 1974	



7. Description.

Screen-wall runs the panelled frontal parapet of the choir gallery, which supports two symmetrically-placed Tuscan columns, each with its own square bit of full entablature. These rise to the ceiling but appear to exist only for decorative effect, and it is interesting to note that they are reeded rather than fluted--a treatment frequently favoured by Elias Carter, with whom Clark Sayles, the architect, had trained. From a carved rosette in the centre of the ceiling (replacing a disintegrated plaster rosette), hangs a brass chandelier, a reproduction substituting for the original and now-lost one, and there are brass wall sconces.

To a remarkable degree, this building remains unchanged from its state when dedicated on July 4, 1831: enlargements or decorative alterations did not occur. The steeple once was blown down in a storm and pierced the roof, but it was either resurrected or exactly reproduced, according to record, and the finial and vane are its original ones. One row of pews was removed at the rear of the auditorium a long time ago and will not be replaced, so that there can be better passage to a new, rear fire-exit door. Whatever other small changes had taken place were so obvious that their correction has been easy.

Refurbished quite recently through community efforts, this church building (though no longer housing a congregation) presents externally a handsome and picturesque appearance upon its lawn, and internally--through careful work both in 1831 and now, and great restraint in trim and colour--it shows an elegance which sometimes only simplicity can achieve. It is worth noting the contrast between exterior form and adornment, stylistic hold-overs from the Georgian and Federal periods, and the interior, which in proportion and detail is essentially of the Greek Revival era and certainly belongs to the 1830's.

## 8. Significance.

ration continued to preserve the building, to open it occasionally for special services and to decorate it with many lights each Christmas-time (for which last it received a certain amount of fame). By 1940 surviving members of the society had dwindled to only seven, and financial resources were greatly reduced. In order to avoid future decay or razing of the church and a then-immediate threat of having its components bought, moved and rebuilt elsewhere, the church corporation on May 27 of that year deeded the structure and its land to the Town of Scituate "to be used for religious and historical meetings and purposes. The town was also enjoined to maintain and preserve the grounds for park purposes."

Certain events in 1967 and 1968 came together to start a full and energetic restoration of this landmark. First, in 1967, an anonymous

(See Continuation Sheet 2.)



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
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(Continuation Sheet)-2

STATE Rhode Island	
COUNTY Providence	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER JAN 11 1974	DATE

(Number all entries)

8. Significance.

benefactor (identified after his death as Rathbun Willard, a local resident) provided \$1,000 for restoration use. Then, in 1968, several artists living in the town decided that there was enough local talent to initiate an outdoor art show, for which the church grounds were used. As a gesture of appreciation, proceeds from this autumn show were turned over for benefit of the church building and its site. (This art exhibition and sale has, incidentally, now become the town's biggest annual event.)

Also, on March 14, 1968, the town council had appointed a citizens' committee to study the feasibility of restoring the church building under the terms of the original conveyance. The study committee quickly determined that the church was ideal for restoration inasmuch as it had been little-changed from the time of its erection. The town council accepted the recommendation that work be commenced and reappointed the study group as the restoration committee; it also accepted the committee's contention that the council itself was bound by terms of the conveyance to "maintain and preserve" the building--at least, its exterior. However, the restoration committee would assume responsibility for restoration of the interior and for returning the building to a condition for public use. The division of labour continues to this day, with the citizens' restoration committee overseeing the entire project but itself undertaking only the interior work, and the raising of funds therefor by numerous means.

When work is completed, the church will be available under the same policy as the town's other community houses (one being the nearby old academy), and under the terms of the conveyance, to any local resident, institution or organisation making application; and it will provide the largest public gathering-place in the town. Its restoration has sparked interest in the formation of a Scituate Historical Society, with the possibility that the town could lease the structure to such a society in return for maintenance, preservation and regulation of public use. This plan would give the new organisation permanent and appropriate housing, while it would relieve the town of the financial burden of caring for the building; yet the church building would still be available for community uses.

