

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Union Meetinghouse/Universalist Church

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing: \_\_\_\_\_

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 97 Amesbury Road

City or town: Kensington State: NH County: Rockingham

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A  B  C  D

<u>Richard Bonwit</u>	<u>DSHPO</u>	<u>12-17-12</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:		Date
<u>NH Division of Historical Resources</u>		
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government		

In my opinion, the property <input type="checkbox"/> meets <input type="checkbox"/> does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

*Jan Edson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

2-13-13  
Date of Action

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	_____	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION – religious facility

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)  
RELIGION – religious facility  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

---

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)  
MID-19TH CENTURY – Greek Revival  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)  
Principal exterior materials of the property:  
STONE/granite, WOOD/Weatherboard, ASPHALT

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

---

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

---

### Summary Paragraph

The Universalist Church on Amesbury Road/NH Route 150 in Kensington, New Hampshire, is a well-preserved rural church in the Greek Revival style. Built 1839-1840 as the Union Meetinghouse for use by several Protestant denominations, the building became the Universalist Church in 1865. The southeast-facing wood-frame building is located on the northwest side of the road at the northerly end of a linear rural town center. The Universalist Church is one of three of highly visible mid-nineteenth century buildings in the area historically known as Meetinghouse Hill. To the northeast is the 1846 Greek Revival Kensington Town Hall and on the opposite side of the road is the 1865 Italianate Congregational Church. In addition, immediately south of the Universalist Church is the Upper Burying Yard, opened in the 1730s. The Universalist Church remains largely unchanged on the exterior and interior, retaining most of its historic building fabric and decorative detailing. The gable-front façade features paired doorways with double-leaf paneled doors, sidelights, and a frontispiece comprised of paneled pilasters supporting an entablature. A 12/6 sash window flanked by shutters is located above each doorway. Additional Greek Revival detailing on the façade includes paneled corner pilasters and a semi-circular blind fanlight centered in the gable end. The symmetrical fenestration on the side elevations consists of tall 20/20 double-hung sash windows surmounted by blind semi-circular fanlights and flanked by shutters for each sash. The interior is equally unaltered, retaining its vestibule with gallery stairs at each end, auditorium with twin aisles, slip pews, bowed sound bay, grained paneled doors and Norfolk latch hardware, gallery, coved ceiling, and pulpit platform with the original Grecian style furniture. A furnace and exterior brick flue chimney were added ca. 1915; electricity was added later in the twentieth century. Most recently the belfry has required repairs for stabilization purposes.

---

### Narrative Description

#### Location and Setting

The highly visible Universalist Church is located on the northwest side of Amesbury Road/N.H. Route 150 in the center of the rural town of Kensington. The southeast-facing wood-frame Universalist Church is situated at the beginning of a reverse S-curve in the road, nearly opposite the T-intersection with Osgood Road (or Fryingpan Lane). Amesbury Road/N.H. Route 150 is the principal north-south road through Kensington, and the main road between Amesbury, Massachusetts, to the south and Exeter, New Hampshire, to the north. The road runs diagonally through the center of Kensington and was laid out in various segments in the eighteenth and nineteenth century (Sawyer 1946:247). Nearly opposite the

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

church Osgood Road (laid out 1854) runs east from Amesbury Road to the Hampton Falls line. A lawn and paved driveway separates the church from the Greek Revival Kensington Town Hall (built 1846) to the northeast. In the northeast quadrant of the intersection of Amesbury and Osgood roads is the 1865 Congregational Church, an Italianate gable-front building that faces southeast. At the southeast corner of the intersection of Amesbury and Osgood roads is a ca. 2005 asphalt parking lot used by the Congregational Church and now by the Police Department that has temporarily set up a mobile trailer for their temporary offices while the town hall is undergoing some work. Immediately adjacent to the church to the south is the Upper Burying Yard, the town's original cemetery, in use by 1735 and expanded several times up to the early 1770s, (Sawyer 1946:282). A granite wall of dry laid, rough-cut granite stones extends south from the south corner of the church between the cemetery and the road. The yard was seeded in with pines around 1820, which were allowed to grow quite large until they were removed in the early 1900's (Sawyer 1946:283). Rows of gravestones extend back to the woods behind. The two churches and town hall constitute a highly visible group of mid-nineteenth-century civic, ecclesiastical, and social buildings situated on a rise once referred to as Meetinghouse Hill. The area had developed as the town's ecclesiastical center, even before Kensington had been established as a separate parish from Hampton Falls. The Universalist Church is located on the site of the town's first meetinghouse (framed 1733) and just southwest of the site of the second meetinghouse, which was still extant at the time of construction of the Universalist Church.

The small 0.1-acre church lot is level with the roadway. The church is set back slightly from the heavily trafficked roadway, separated from it by a small front lawn that wraps around the northeast side of the building. Northeast of the side lawn is an asphalt driveway leading to the large paved Town Hall parking area. In 1980 the town hall was moved approximately twenty-five feet back from the road, so the façade now generally parallels that of the church. Seven symmetrically placed granite posts linked by a running chain divide the lawn from the paved driveway. At the rear the land slopes away from the building and is wooded with a mix of mature deciduous trees and conifers. A small section of the Town Hall paved parking lot separates the wooded area from the wetlands and Mill Brook to the northwest. Mill Brook is a small waterway that runs north from Hog Pen Meadow through the northeast corner of Kensington. Extensive stands of mature conifers are present along the northwest side of the parcel, the adjoining burying ground, and to the northeast of the Congregational Church.

#### Exterior

The Universalist Church, built 1839-1840, is a typical rural church of the Greek Revival period. The one-and-a-half-story clapboarded wood-frame building rises from granite block underpinnings to an asphalt-clad gable roof. The granite blocks have plug marks, characteristic of post-1830 splitting tools. An exterior brick flue chimney, added ca. 1915 at the time of a furnace installation, is nearly centered on the rear elevation, rising above the southwest roof slope. This gable-front building exhibits a number of characteristic Greek Revival elements including paneled corner pilasters, a simple plain board frieze below the molded cornice, and tall 20/20 sash windows. A two-stage square belfry surmounted by Gothic pinnacles, though a later addition is in keeping with the Greek Revival style. Local

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

sources, supported by the framing evidence, suggest a ca. 1860 date, which is in keeping with the features of the belfry.

The regularly fenestrated building is two bays wide and three bays deep. The interior plan is evident on the exterior with the two entries on the façade. Each doorway is flanked by three-quarter sidelights and frontispiece with molded pilasters supporting a full entablature. Single large granite steps now provide access to a double-leaf five-panel door. Originally a single wood step spanned the width of the church, providing access to the doorways. Ironwork, added at the time of the granite step reworking ca. 2004 includes a boot scrap and a simple post and curved rail attached to the outer door frame (though the railing to the northerly entry is missing). Centered above each doorway is a 12/8 sash window flanked by shutters. A keystone blind semi-circular fanlight is centered in the closed gable pediment. Two wood panels are affixed to the wall between the windows.

The upper panel reads: "Union Meeting House 1840-1865 Universalist Church 1865."

The lower panel reads: "Services First, Second & Third Sunday in August 10:00 a.m."

The two-stage steeple straddles the roof peak, set back slightly from the façade. The unrelieved first stage supports a stepped-in square belfry.<sup>1</sup> Each face of the belfry has a louvered opening edged by thin pieces of trim to suggest pilasters and corner blocks, resembling the detailing on the windows. The belfry is surmounted by Gothic pinnacles atop short pedestals that are bridged with pedimented boards. These features are in keeping with a ca. 1860 date for the structure, according to local sources.

The regularly fenestrated three-bay-deep side elevations have tall 20/20 sash windows flanked by wooden shutters and topped by keystone blind semi-circular fanlights, like that in the front gable. Each window is detailed with trim as on the front windows. Three irregularly spaced windows in the granite underpinning on the northeast elevation provide light to the basement. The rear elevation has a pair of 20/20 sash windows, flanking the pulpit on the interior. The windows also have shutters but no blind semi-circular fanlights. Above in the gable is a smaller 6/6 sash window, illuminating the attic. Centered on the rear elevation below grade level is a doorway leading to the basement. The door is constructed of diagonally laid edge-and-center-bead boards, suggesting it was added ca. 1915 at the time of the heating equipment installation.

#### Interior

The interior plan of two side aisles is clearly articulated on the exterior by the pair of symmetrical doorways on the façade. Entry is into a vestibule that has pairs of characteristic raised field four-panel Greek Revival doors at each end. The westerly doors at each end provide access to the gallery stairs. At the northerly end the easterly doorway leads to the basement stairs while the one at the southerly end leads to unfinished storage space under the gallery stairs. Entry into the auditorium is through doorways on the northwest vestibule wall flanking a centered bowed sound bay; the sound bay projects into the vestibule. The doors from the vestibule into the auditorium are grained and retain their original 1830s Norfolk latch and cast butt hinges. Features include a sheared back plate with fleur-de-lis finial at

<sup>1</sup> Examination of the roof framing shows the steeple is not original as it is not framed to carry the load of such a structure. This explains why there have been problems with the belfry, including leaning and water infiltration.

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

the top and cast-iron grasps. This style is thought to be the latest type of Norfolk latch (Streeter 1971:25). The auditorium walls are plastered, rising to a plastered coved ceiling. The door trim consists of fluted architraves and corner blocks, resembling the frontispiece illustrated in Asher Benjamin's *The Architect, or Practical House Carpenter* Plate XXVII (first published 1830).

The auditorium layout, seating, and lowered pulpit are characteristic of rural churches of the 1830s. The Universalist Church has two aisles with rectangular slip pews in a double center section and in side sections; the front row in the center section was removed sometime before the 1920s. Smaller pew sections are set at ninety degrees to and on either side of the pulpit. The pews retain their original hardware. This two-aisle plan first appeared in reverse church plan meeting houses. Those meeting houses placed the pulpit on the entry gable end, requiring the use of two side aisles in the place of a central aisle for entry into the meeting space from the vestibule (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 4:3).

At the northwest end of the church is the characteristic low height pulpit. Typical features include two runs of stairs (though without balustrades) leading to the platform that lacks any panel decoration. On the pulpit is the original Grecian style mahogany painted furniture. The pieces include a table with a double frieze supported by thick Tuscan columns with exaggerated entasis. On the interior face is a curved screen to hide the legs of the minister. The table is flanked by similarly styled columnar stands. Behind the table along the rear wall is a Grecian sofa with scrolled arms and feet.

At the southeasterly end, above the vestibule is the gallery. Such a space was more commonly a singers' gallery by the 1820s though it is not clear if this was the original use of the Universalist Church gallery (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 4:10). Short benches are only present at each end, in front of the stairs; a long one runs along the northeast half of the exterior wall. The wide-board floor slopes slightly. The southeast wall has wide horizontal board wainscoting. A small square trap door provides access to the attic and belfry.

#### **Changes Since Construction**

Changes to the building over its 170-plus year history have been relatively minor and have predominantly involved repairs rather than alterations. The most significant alteration, done well within in the historic period, was the addition of the steeple ca. 1860. Other changes, as previously noted included the ca. 1915 exterior brick flue chimney for venting the newly added furnace. Grills were added in the church floor to provide heat to the auditorium. The building was electrified in the second half of the twentieth century with the insertion of a few outlets. The auditorium however remains illuminated by natural light. More recently, ca. 1995, the front lawn was regraded and a single full-width concrete front step was replaced with single granite steps in front of each doorway. The iron boot scrapes and railings were also added at that time. The belfry was also stabilized at that time but no major changes were made to its appearance.

#### **Integrity**

The Universalist Church has a high degree of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship. It is largely unchanged since its construction over 170 years ago. The exterior finishes and trim, interior plan and finishes, window sash, interior grained doors and hardware, pews, and pulpit and pulpit furniture are all intact. The most significant alteration,

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

the steeple addition, was done well within in the historic period, ca. 1860 according to local sources. The detailing closely resembles the original exterior window trim and the overall form and detailing is characteristic of the Greek Revival style used in rural New England churches. More minor alterations include the installation of heat ca. 1915 (with the addition of an exterior brick flue chimney and floor heating grates) and electricity later in the twentieth century. The architectural integrity and prominent location in the town center in a group of mid-nineteenth century institutional buildings along a primary thoroughfare contribute to the historic feeling. The property has integrity of location. The moving of the neighboring town hall back from the road about twenty-five feet in 1980 did not significantly alter its relationship with the Universalist Church. The church conveys its sacred associations.

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Areas of Significance**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**  
1839-1870

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**  
1839 (Construction)  
1840 (Completion/dedication)  
ca. 1860 (Steeple addition)

**Significant Person**  
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**  
Josiah B. Sanborn (builder)  
Dearborn T. Blake (builder)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Universalist Church is nominated for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for significance in the Area of Architecture. The property is significant at the local level, as an excellent example of a mid-nineteenth century rural church in the Greek Revival style and as a recognized landmark in the Town of Kensington. The church retains the character-defining architectural features and details, materials, and craftsmanship that convey its architectural significance as a mid-nineteenth-century Greek Revival rural church and reflecting the design and workmanship of the local builders Josiah B. Sanborn and Dearborn T. Blake. The form, massing, and decorative detailing are all characteristic of this type, style, and period of construction. The distinguishing features that constitute the style include the wood-frame construction, gable-front façade with two entries with sidelights and frontispieces with pilasters supporting an entablature, molded corner pilasters, closed pediment with blind semi-circular fanlights, and tall 20/20 sash windows on the side elevations illuminating the auditorium. The belfry, though a later addition, was done well within the historic period. Local sources and the framing evidence suggest a ca. 1860 date for the addition. The detailing of the belfry closely resembles the original decorative trim of the church and the style and form is in keeping with the character-defining architectural features of the Greek Revival style. The interior with an integral vestibule, corner stairs to the gallery, two aisles, and slip pews is significant for its original finishes such as plastered walls and coved ceiling, grained auditorium doors, in addition to its original low pulpit with Grecian furniture. The Universalist Church has a high degree of architectural integrity making the property a good example of the building practices of a particular time in history. The Period of Significance for the property represents the years of its design, construction, and completion, 1839-1840, through 1870, with the completion of the steeple addition ca. 1860 when it fully attained the character-defining features of its architecture. The Universalist Church meets National Register Criteria Consideration A for religious properties because it has significance in the Area of Architecture.

---

**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Criterion C: Architecture**

The Universalist Church is significant as an excellent example of a regionally characteristic mid-nineteenth-century rural church in the Greek Revival style. The construction of the church coincides with the height of popularity of the Greek Revival for small rural ecclesiastical buildings throughout New Hampshire and New England, especially in the 1830s and 1840s. The Kensington Universalist Church features many of the characteristics common to this scale and type of Greek Revival rural church constructed in the 1830s in Rockingham County. The building displays fine workmanship and retains a high degree of integrity. The Universalist Church embodies the main characteristics of this type and period of architecture including wood-frame construction, gable roof, entry on the gable end, corner

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

pilasters, and tall windows on the long side elevations. On the interior common characteristics include a vestibule with a gallery above, cove ceiling, twin aisles, slip pews, and a low pulpit at the gable end opposite the entry. The plans for small Greek Revival rural churches of this period could be two aisled, like the Kensington Universalist Church, single-aisled, or in some cases the pulpit was located on the wall closest to the vestibule entries.

Many of these characteristics had emerged in the early decades of the nineteenth century as ideas about the meetinghouse form and use began to change, a process that was accelerated in the wake of the disestablishment which occurred in New Hampshire in 1819, the third of the then five New England states to undergo the process (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 3:2).<sup>2</sup> In Rockingham County some builders began to use the church plan beginning in the late 1790s (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 4:1). By the time of the construction of the Universalist Church the characteristics common to Greek Revival rural churches were widespread and commonly accepted.

The eighteenth-century meetinghouse form typically consisted of a large, two-story building with entries on several elevations and on the interior box pews, pulpit on the long elevation, and no primary axis. The nineteenth-century transformation consisted of a gable-front building with one or two entries on the façade, steeples with "Renaissance-styled octagonal belfries with domed cupolas" straddling the gable roof and on the interior initially a central aisle with the pulpit on the gable end opposite the entry creating a church plan (Zimmerman:1984, Chapter 5:8). By the 1820s standardized features emerged and by the 1830s they were fully developed in the Greek Revival style. They included not only the building form but also the decorative detailing, the type of belfry, and the fenestration patterns. By the 1830s the steeples were typically spireless and boxy, comprised of two stages with Gothic pinnacles at each corner, as seen on the Universalist Church (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 5:12). Numerous examples from this period survive not only in Rockingham County but throughout the state, though many also include spires (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 5:9).

On the interior the change was even more dramatic from that of the eighteenth-century meetinghouse. Whereas initially a vestibule projected from the façade, by the time of the construction of the Universalist Church the incorporation of a front vestibule with gallery stairs into the main block of the building was common place. The plan of placing the gallery stairs outside of the meeting room was first popularized by the turn of the century with the use of porches, often added. Such a layout minimized disruption to the meetings or services by late comers. In addition they provided a transitional space between the exterior or out-of-doors (and thus the cold) and the interior meeting space (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 2:31-32; Chapter 3:15). The auditorium plan featured a central aisle or pairs of aisles on the interior with a lowered pulpit at one end. The adoption of the two-aisle plan in the 1830s was in part the result of a preference by the preacher to directly face those seated in pews as opposed to a center aisle (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 4:27). The slip pews allowed all members to face the preacher. The lowering of the pulpit was a significant change from the eighteenth-century meetinghouse and represented a change in preaching styles in the 1830s (Zimmerman

<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island had always maintained legal separation of church and state. Maine, of course, was part of Massachusetts until 1820, when it was admitted as the twenty-third state.

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

1984:Chapter 5:18). In particular the shift was from reading sermons to a more informal talking style that conveyed the feeling of what the preacher wished to convey. By being closer to their audience rather than confined in a small space high above them the minister could be more compelling in his or her expression of the gospel. This style also required a more spacious platform to allow the minister greater freedom of movement (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 5:23-24). The long side elevations were punctuated with regularly placed large windows, a feature that was well established by the late 1820s. This fenestration pattern was possible as the gallery was confined only to the end of the building opposite the pulpit (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 3:75a). Arch ceilings became standard in meeting houses by the 1830s (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 3:36). Even the pulpit furniture in the Universalist Church is characteristic of the period. Some of it closely resembles that shown in an illustration from an article, "The Pulpit" published in a February 1835 issue of *The Religious Magazine* (Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 5:26-27).

A number of Greek Revival style churches in Rockingham County, New Hampshire, are comparable to the Universalist Church though most have undergone alterations and additions over the years and have less integrity. The Universalist Church is comparably rare in the high degree of integrity including its original pews and pulpit furniture, wood grained doors between the vestibule and auditorium, and window sash.

Several of Kensington's better known building craftsmen are associated with the construction of the church. Carpenters Josiah B. Sanborn (ca. 1805-1846) and Dearborn T. Blake (born 1810) had one of four carpentry shops in Kensington in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. The shop, one of "considerable size" was located on North Road (Sawyer 1946:230). They had a role or hand in the design and likely construction of all 1830s and 1840s institutional buildings in Kensington, including the 1838 Christian Meeting house (now Grange Hall), the Universalist Church, and the 1846 Town Hall (Sawyer 1946:82). These buildings all display their fine workmanship and common building characteristics, one-and-a-half story gable-front buildings in the Greek Revival style with paired entries on the facade. John Blaisdell laid the stone foundations not only of the Universalist Church but also the Christian Church, the brick schoolhouse (1842), and the brick house on Shaw's Hill (Sawyer 1946:273).

#### **Developmental History/Additional Historic Context Information**

The developmental history of the Universalist Church is intricately connected to the ecclesiastical history in the town of Kensington. The church was constructed in 1839-40 for use by several "religious sects of the Protestant religion" (Sawyer 1946:170). In 1838 prominent Kensington resident Ira Blake initiated a subscription pledge for the use "to build a new house of Public-Worship to be styled the Union Meeting-House in Kensington...said Meeting-House to be free for the use of the several religious sects of the Protestant religion, and each sect to furnish preaching according to their several shares in said Meeting-House" (Sawyer 1946:170). John T. Blake, Lewis Gove, and Josiah B. Sanborn (ca. 1805-1846) comprised the building committee to put up the new meeting house. Sanborn, Dearborn T. Blake, and George Rowe comprised the committee selected to draw plans for the building (Sawyer 1946:170-171).

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

The demand for such a meetinghouse has its origins in Kensington's earliest religious history. The area of Kensington where the Universalist Church is located, historically known as Meetinghouse Hill, developed as the town's ecclesiastical center, even before Kensington had been established as a separate parish from Hampton Falls. When first laid out, the large town of Hampton included what would become North Hampton, Hampton Falls, Kensington, Kingston, East Kingston and Danville, as well as part of Seabrook. As in other early New Hampshire towns, in the Colonial Period the building of a meetinghouse symbolized the establishment of a community. The construction of the first meetinghouse on Meetinghouse Hill in the early 1730s established the area as a civic and religious center even before Kensington became a separate town.

The area's first meetinghouse dates to the early 1730s, when in 1733 Elihu Chase gave one acre of land near Hog Pen Meadow to the "inhabitants of the upper or westerly part of the Falls' parish in Hampton." to establish a more central and mutually agreeable location for a meetinghouse. This lot, called the Meetinghouse Acre, included the location of the Universalist Church, the Congregational Church, the Kensington Town Hall, the Upper Burying Yard, and the Meetinghouse Parade where Amesbury Road now heads north from its intersection with Osgood Road (Sawyer 1946:282). A meetinghouse was framed in 1732, moved to the site now occupied by the Universalist Church the following year, but not fully completed until 1755. Kensington began to petition for status as a town as early as 1740, and in 1761 it was set off from Hampton Falls (Sawyer 1946:57). In 1762 the first town meeting was held and the first representative sent to the New Hampshire General Court in Exeter (Sawyer 1926:48). By the early 1770s the town had a new meetinghouse, erected on the site now occupied by the Kensington Town Hall (Sawyer 1946:156; Potts 1987:9). The new meetinghouse (built 1770-1771), a characteristic late eighteenth-century meetinghouse, was based on measurements of the North Hampton Church built in 1761.<sup>3</sup> The Kensington Meetinghouse was two stories with a gable roof, five bays wide and five bays deep with entries centered on the long and gable end elevations. The regular fenestration at both stories numbered forty windows. The interior featured galleries on three sides and an elevated pulpit (Sawyer 1946:157, 160). In characteristic New England fashion, the new meetinghouse housed sacred and civic activities. The space was used not only for Sunday services but also town meetings (Sawyer 1946:161).

The religious division that became a major theme in town in subsequent decades had begun in the 1780's with opposition to the liberal Arminian doctrines of Kensington's long-time minister Rev. Jeremiah Fogg. In 1789, a council voted 53-50 to dismiss him. He died shortly thereafter. The next minister, Naphtali Shaw, preached from 1792-1813 (Sawyer 1946:153; Hazlett 1915:479). In the early 1800s, the Christian or Baptist Church became increasingly popular in New England, because it was more democratic and less formal than the Orthodox Congregational Church. A Christian Church was organized in Hampton Falls in 1805, which drew families from the surrounding towns. Camp meetings were held in Kensington in 1808, 1809 and 1810 and numerous residents were baptized in Poor's Mill Pond (Philbrick Pond) on North Road. In 1813 a Christian Meetinghouse was erected on the

<sup>3</sup> Kensington's meetinghouse was then copied in Salisbury, Massachusetts, and that building still stands on Rocky Hill in what is now Amesbury.

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

site of the present Grange, and the church was formally organized in 1822 (Sawyer 1946:163-166). Following the Toleration Act of 1819, members of other churches were exempted from paying taxes for the support of the Congregational Church. The Congregational Church had no settled minister after 1816 and within the next decade it was virtually defunct (Sawyer 1926:23).

During the first half of the nineteenth century, the religious doctrines of Kensington residents continued to diverge. The popularity of the Baptist movement continued. In 1838, the same year that churches were erected in the towns of Stratham, Rye, and Hampton Falls, a new Christian Meetinghouse (now the Grange) was built on the site of the first (Sawyer 1946:163-166; Zimmerman 1984:Chapter 3:60). The Congregational church, divided by the Unitarian/Trinitarian controversy, no longer held regular meetings. Many families became Unitarian and Universalist, reflecting the liberalism and tolerance, which had begun with the town's original Quaker residents and with the anti-Calvinist beliefs of Rev. Fogg. Unitarian leaders were invited to preach in the old meetinghouse, and in 1832 the First Unitarian Society of Kensington was formed. In 1838, a group of subscribers, including the Unitarians, joined to erect a new meetinghouse, the Union Meetinghouse (now the Universalist Church), in 1839-1840 for the use of various Protestant sects. Pews were sold at auction (Sawyer 1946:170).

During the 1840s, a joint Unitarian Society of Kensington and Hampton Falls met in the Union Meetinghouse on Sunday mornings. In the afternoons, the Universalists held services in the summer and autumn months and occasionally in the winter. They had no settled minister, but were visited by itinerant ministers and many prominent members of the denomination. The Congregationalists held only occasional meetings (Sawyer 1946:172). Churches were important part of social and civic life. The Unitarians had an active social calendar holding dramas and concerts in conjunction with the Hampton Falls church (Sawyer 1946:119). In 1849, Mrs. Abby Lincoln, wife of the Unitarian minister, organized the Ladies Sewing Society Library. The group met each fortnight and sewed while one member read aloud. The proceeds of the sewing projects were then used to purchase new books (Sawyer 1946:256).

In the mid-nineteenth century, Kensington's religious lines shifted again. The "Christian" movement declined, particularly after the division, disappointment, and ridicule that resulted from Miller's failed prediction of the Second Advent in 1843-1844 (Sawyer 1946:169). At the same time, the popularity of the Orthodox Congregational Church began to revive, and the number of Unitarians decreased. In the early 1850's, the Congregationalists shared use of the Meetinghouse for morning services with the Unitarians, and later they met in the Town Hall (Sawyer 1946:172). In 1859, the Congregational Church of Kensington was organized and a year later a Congregational Society or Parish was formed. Under Rev. Erasmus Darwin Eldredge, who was minister from 1864 until 1875, a Congregational Church was built in 1865 (Sawyer 1946:176, 179). The Unitarian Church was dissolved in 1865. The society of Hampton Falls united with Exeter, and Kensington residents went there to church or joined the Universalists. The Kensington Universalist Church was strengthened and officially organized and hired its first settled minister (Sawyer 1946:172, 174). In 1915 the Town deeded the lot of the Union Church to the Universalist Society. In that same year the

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

Society united with the Newfields Society in calling a joint pastor, Rev. Fred L. Payson. Since the end of Payson's pastorate the church has only been used for summer services. For many years that has been three Sunday services (Sawyer 1946:186). Beginning in 1935, the Universalist Society observed Old Home Day one Sunday each August (these also continue to the present).

---

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

**Bibliography** (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Potts, Nathalie S. (compiler)

1987 *Kensington, New Hampshire 250 Years.*

Preservation Company (Lynne Monroe and Kari Laprey)

1997 "Historic Properties in Kensington, New Hampshire." Kensington Townwide Area Form (Area K). Copy on file NHDHR, Concord, NH.

Sawyer, Rev. Roland D.

1926 "An Outline History of Kensington." Typescript of articles published in the *Exeter Newsletter* 1918-1919 as "Sketches of Kensington History." Collection of the New Hampshire Historical Society, Concord.

Sawyer, Rev. Roland D.

1946 *History of Kensington, New Hampshire.* Reprinted 1972, Seabrook, NH: Woodbury Press, Inc.

Streeter, Donald.

1971 "Early American Wrought Iron Hardware: Norfolk Latches." *Bulletin of the Association for Preservation Technology* 3, no. 4, 12-30.

Zimmerman, Philip Douglas

1984 "Ecclesiastical Architecture in the Reformed Tradition in Rockingham County, New Hampshire, 1790-1860." Ph.D. diss: Boston University.

### Historic Photographs

Collection of the Kensington Public Library.

### Interview

Carl Rezendes, Church Historian, September 2012

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** 0.1 acres

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_  
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- |              |            |
|--------------|------------|
| 1. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 42.931302    | -70.945312 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

**Or**  
**UTM References**

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

- |          |           |           |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting:  | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the National Registered nominated Universalist Church is the legally recorded parcel that contains the historic building. This is the parcel owned by the Universalist Church. The boundary is shown on Town of Kensington tax map 11, parcel 1. The parcel is rectangular. On the southeast, the Universalist Church parcel is defined by Amesbury Road/NH Route 150. On the southwest the parcel is defined by the Upper Burying Yard. The northwest and northeast sides are defined by Town of Kensington land occupied by the Town Hall.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Universalist Church parcel has had roughly the same boundaries for over fifty years. In 1915 the town deeded the lot of the Union Meetinghouse to the Universalist Society.

---

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Laura B. Driemeyer, Lynne Monroe, Teresa Hill  
organization: Preservation Company  
street & number: 5 Hobbs Road  
city or town: Kensington state: NH zip code: 03833  
e-mail PreservationCompany@comcast.net  
telephone: 603.778.1799  
date: August 2012

---

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.



Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Universalist Church

City or Vicinity: Kensington

County: Rockingham

State: NH

Photographer: Lynne Emerson Monroe

Date Photographed:

August 2012

Description of Photograph(s) and number, including description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo 0001

Façade (left) and northeast (right) elevation, camera facing west.

Photo 0002

Northeast (left) and rear (right) elevations, camera facing southeast.

Photo 0003

Southwest (left) elevation and façade, with Upper Burying Yard in foreground and Town Hall and Congregational Church in background, camera facing north.

Photo 0004

Interior, vestibule with doorway to auditorium (left), doors to gallery (center left) and basement (center right), and front doors (right), camera facing northeast.

Photo 0005

Interior, auditorium with slip pews, looking towards pulpit, camera facing west.

Photo 0006

Interior, auditorium and gallery at front of building with bowed sound bay between grained doorways, camera facing southeast.

Universalist Church  
Name of Property

Rockingham County, NH  
County and State

Photo 0007

Interior, pulpit with original furniture, camera facing southeast.

Photo 0008

Interior, slip pews with original hardware, camera facing northeast.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



UNION MEETING HOUSE  
AND  
UNIVERSITY CHURCH  
SERVICES

SUMMER  
SERVICES  
FRI. 10:00  
SUN. 10:00  
1000















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Union Meetinghouse--Universalist Church  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW HAMPSHIRE, Rockingham

DATE RECEIVED: 12/28/12 DATE OF PENDING LIST:  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 2/13/13  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000008

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 2.13.13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_

REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_ DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.