

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

For NPS use only

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

received JUL 23 1985
date entered AUG 23 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Hill's Academy

and/or common Essex Historical Society, Inc.

2. Location

street & number 22 Prospect Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Essex

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county Middlesex

code 007

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Essex Historical Society, Inc.

street & number 22 Prospect Street

city, town Essex

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Essex Town Hall

street & number 29 West Avenue

city, town Essex

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Place

has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1975

federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 56 South Prospect St.

city, town Hartford

state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Hill's Academy is a two-story brick structure built in the Greek Revival style. (Photograph #1) Constructed in 1832, this building is situated in the west section of Essex at 22 Prospect Street overlooking the Middle Cove and Connecticut River shore. This tree-lined, residential street with several churches and a district firehouse is in a non-commercial area west of the business center of Essex. Hill's Academy is flanked on the south by a single family, two-story residence and on the north by a long driveway leading to a convalescent home set back 100 yards from the street. Across this drive is a church. The .27 acre property has a 48.3 foot road frontage and a depth on both sides of 244.3 feet. The nominated structure faces east and is set back about 125 feet from the street by a broad lawn on which are numerous mature evergreens which partially obscure the facade. A slightly inclined cement walk leads from the street to the wide stone steps that lead to the center front entrance.

Exterior:

The brick structure rests on a 28' x 38' cut-stone foundation. The facade is characterized by four two-story brick pilasters which project several inches from the brickwork of the building and are painted white. (Photograph #2) In the center of the three bays is a single, multi-paneled door surrounded with white wood trim over which is a stone lintel. Above the pilasters is a fully pedimented wooden gable with a raking cornice and a board tympanum. Beneath the gable and across the facade is a wide denticulated cornice.

The asphalt roof features a flagpole and a clapboard-sheathed bell tower with a hip roof and projecting eaves. A small chimney is at the rear. On the north and south exposures are eight double-hung windows arranged four-over-four. All windows have stone lintels, plain sills, and simple surrounds. At the rear ground floor are two symmetrical windows and a small, clapboard, flat-roofed, enclosed entrance of undetermined age allowing access to a utility area. At the second floor rear are a door, fire escape and window.

Interior:

The front entrance opens into a foyer extending the width of the facade. To the left is a cloak room, and to the right are steep, enclosed, quarter-turn stairs. (Photograph #5) The stair walls to the landing are paneled with tongue-in-groove, narrow horizontal boards; above the landing, the wood is installed vertically. A beaded trim has been used for decoration.

A door from the entrance foyer opens into a large classroom. An enclosed lavatory is to the left of this main door, and a storage room is to the right. (Photographs #3 and #4) A floor of narrow boards is laid east to west. Chair rails at window sill level separate the horizontal, narrow board wainscotting from the paneled upper-half of the walls. From the paneled wooden ceiling hang several rows of simple porcelain-shaded light fixtures. Heat ducts criss-cross the ceiling.

The second-floor classroom is identical to the first-floor except the end walls are arched, creating a slightly curved wooden ceiling around which is the beaded trim like that on the stair walls. (Photographs #6 and #7) Horizontally installed wainscotting matches the vertical tongue-in-groove boards above the chair-rails, the boards on the ceiling, and the floor. At the east end is a 28' x 5' kitchen with an open counter separating it from the rest of the room. Above the counter is a ceiling door to a small attic storage area. At the west end is the fire escape door on the left and the window on the right.

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Representation in Existing Surveys:

Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency Survey
1980
x State

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Ct.

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
Criteria A and C		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1832 Builder/Architect Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Hill's Academy is architecturally significant because it is an exceptionally well preserved, unaltered example of a two-story school designed in the Greek Revival style. Both the exterior and interior of the structure and the land area are little changed from the time it was constructed in 1832. (Exhibits I and II.) (Criterion C) Hill's Academy is also significant to the educational history of Essex because it provided students in the middle 1800s with an opportunity for instruction beyond that available in the local, one-room school facilities which terminated with the elementary grades. (Criterion A)

Architecture - Criterion C:

Hill's Academy is a good example of Greek Revival architecture. It is typical of a freestanding, temple-fronted building. It resembles the design often utilized for churches of the same period. Above the cut-stone foundation is a two-story brick form that suggests mass and permanence. It displays classical lines including brick pilasters across the facade supporting an entablature and a triangular pediment. Its proportions are solid and broad and its fenestration symmetrical on each elevation. The windows and the entrance door are headed by flat stone lintels. Its self-contained volume is complimented by the one-story belfry and a low-pitched roof.

The interior is characterized by the same pristine and simple order as the exterior. The decoration in the single, rectangular classrooms on each floor is restrained and characteristically simple. Symmetry of windows, trim, and shelves, and the coordination of wood and painted wall areas create the balance and order of Greek Revival. Hill's Academy was committed to "the intellectual improvement and moral culture" of its students through an "English and Classical and Ornamental education."¹ A Greek Revival style was the suitable architectural choice for that educational purpose and the time period.

Education - Criterion A:

In 1832 Joseph Hill, a prominent Essex merchant and property owner, donated land on which was built the structure that today bears his name. Even though careful records have been kept about the financial arrangements for the school, nothing is known about either the builder or further construction history. Funded by a stock company organized 8 May 1831 that issued 75 shares at \$25 a share to establish a school, it was built for \$2,500 and was granted a state charter in 1833.² The members of the corporation who sought "To place the town in the forefront in the education of the young," were among the leading citizens of the Essex community.³ "It seems certain,"⁴ that most if not all of those interested in establishment of this school were Baptists.⁴ Management was delegated to a board of five trustees. Hill's bequest of financial support included a shad fishery that initially yielded \$600 yearly. Captain William Williams' gift of \$2,367.48 kept the school operating for a number of years.⁵

Hill's Academy provided educational opportunities to students from a wide area including some from the southern states and foreign countries.⁶ Up to this time in the area, children had attended one-room schools in the Essex, Centerville, and Ivoryton districts for the duration of the elementary years through grade six. With the establishment of

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .27 acres

Quadrangle name Essex, Connecticut

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

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7	1	8	1	0	0
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Verbal boundary description and justification The verbal boundary description of Hill's Academy may be found in Vol.36, Pg. 568/Quit-Claim Deed, 3 May 1966 in the land records of the Town of Essex, Ct., Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue, Essex, Connecticut.

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

N/A

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gail Gene Nettles, Consultant

Edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Connecticut Historical Commission

date October 30, 1984

street & number 56 South Prospect Street

telephone 203-566-3005

city or town Hartford

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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

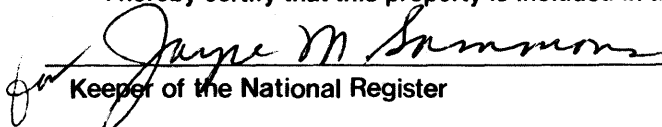


title Director: Connecticut Historical Commission

date July 2, 1985

For NPS use only

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



Entered in the National Register

date 8/23/85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Hill's Academy, youngsters could continue their education through the equivalent of today's junior high school. "It [Hill's Academy] was one of the earlier schools in the area to teach the higher branches of learning." Instructors, usually numbering four, were exempt from military duty as provided for in the school charter. Enrollment varied over the years between all male and co-educational, day and boarding. About 100 students were usually in attendance during a school year organized around three terms. The boarding students were housed in a nearby building called the Essex Seminary. Courses of study included chemistry, philosophy, and astronomy. Tuition was scaled to the difficulty of courses; the more complicated the subjects such as Latin, Greek, and advanced math, the more it cost. As such, it was run by the corporation for about 15 years.

In 1848 Hill's Academy was leased for ten years by an instructor, Lucius Lyon, who constructed a seminary building next door for boarding students. He agreed to adhere to the laws and purposes as established by the Academy corporation and to receive all income from the property. Subsequently, prior to the expiration of his lease, he sold out to James L. Newell. The Reverend Mark A. Cummings who took over from Newell was in charge until the facilities became public and were used by Essex for lower elementary grades until about 1910. Education at the public high school level had earlier been established in Essex with the construction of Pratt High School in 1892. This new school came into existence because of a stipulation in the will of Essex resident Captain Isaiah Pratt, who died in 1879, that directed "the residue of rents, profits, and income" from his estate be spent to support and maintain a school in Essex for the use of the members of the First Congregational Church. This was to occur after the death of Pratt's sister. She died in 1889. When there was trustee opposition to building and managing a school in accordance with the will and solely for the benefit of children of members of the Essex Congregational Church community, direction was sought by the local court from the state. That court's opinion was that the purpose of Captain Pratt's donation had been intended to provide an education for Congregational children who would benefit by being educated with other youths. It was ruled that other children be admitted to the school. On this basis, Pratt School became public. At that time advanced work of the academy was discontinued. It was on the second floor of the new high school that the upper elementary grades held classes. However, the fourth, fifth, and sixth grades held classes from 1908-1910 at Hill's Academy. In 1909, a new elementary school was built behind Hill's Academy, consolidating all levels. For a time Hill's Academy was used as a high school department of its system of public instruction. Essex had purchased the Academy after the corporation trustees petitioned the Legislature in December 1902 to dissolve the Academy, which, as a chartered institution, had for the previous 25 years been inactive.

At an Essex town meeting in May 1909, it was voted to sell the land and tear down Hill's Academy, a decision which caused considerable agitation among residents. Proponents of preservation agreed that the building, referred to at the time as one of the oldest in town, should be used as a town hall since the then dilapidated municipal facilities were over 100 years old. It was felt that Hill's Academy could, for a few hundred dollars, be remodeled and rehabilitated to serve as a town hall. There was no opportunity to pursue that option because a fire at Pratt High School in the fall of 1910 required the school to move into Hill's Academy for a few months until repairs were completed at the high school. After that, for about five years Hill's Academy stood vacant.

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In about 1915 a fraternal group of the Menuntesuch Tribe called the Indian Order of Red Men (IORM) leased Hill's Academy for one dollar a year from the town with the stipulation that if needed for a school facility, it could be had within one year for such purposes.²⁰ A sign was erected between the center pilasters identifying the structure as "Red Men's Hall."²¹ In 1921 it was again used for classes when Pratt High School was rebuilt. The Red Men continued to use the building as a meeting place until their numbers were depleted after World War II and the lease expired in 1954. In 1955, Essex residents voted to establish an historical society which would occupy Hill's Academy and serve as a repository for a valuable collection of local memorabilia. Today the structure is owned by the Essex Historical Society.²²

1
Kimberly Potter, "Essex Historical Society Building: Once a Private Academy in Town", The Gazette, 1 May 1984, pg. 17.

2
State of Connecticut, Resolves and Private Laws, 1789-1836, (Hartford, Ct., 1837), Vol. I, pg.17-18.

3
"Want to Wind up Affairs," Hartford Times, 29 December 1902, n. pag. Essex Historical Society collections.

4
"An Early Essex Institution," The New Era, 25 September 1947, pg. 16.

5
J.B. Beers, History of Middlesex County, Ct. (New York: J.B. Beers & Co., 1884), p. 353.

6
"Wind up Affairs."

7
Ernest M. Libby, "History of Hill's Academy is Reviewed," The New Era, 2 September 1954, col. 2.

8
"Hill's Academy Building," Hartford Courant, 11 November 1901, n. pag.

9
"Hill's Academy & Essex Seminary," Essex, Ct., November 1848. From a wood-engraving advertisement. Essex Historical Society collections.

10
Potter.

11
"Wigwam Once Was a School," The New Era, 18 December 1947, n. pag.

12
Ibid.

13
"History of Pratt School Recalled," The New Era, 1 September 1949.

14
Ibid.

15
"An Early Essex Institution."

16
"Historical Society Site to be Sought at Essex," New Haven Register, ---1955, pg. 12.

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17

"Want to Wind up Affairs."

18

"The Old Hill's Academy," 27 January 1903. (Unlabeled clipping at Essex Historical Society.)

19

Libby, col. 3.

20

"Wigwam." [No further information available on Red Men.]

21

"Hill's Academy," The New Era, 18 November 1954.

22

Ibid.

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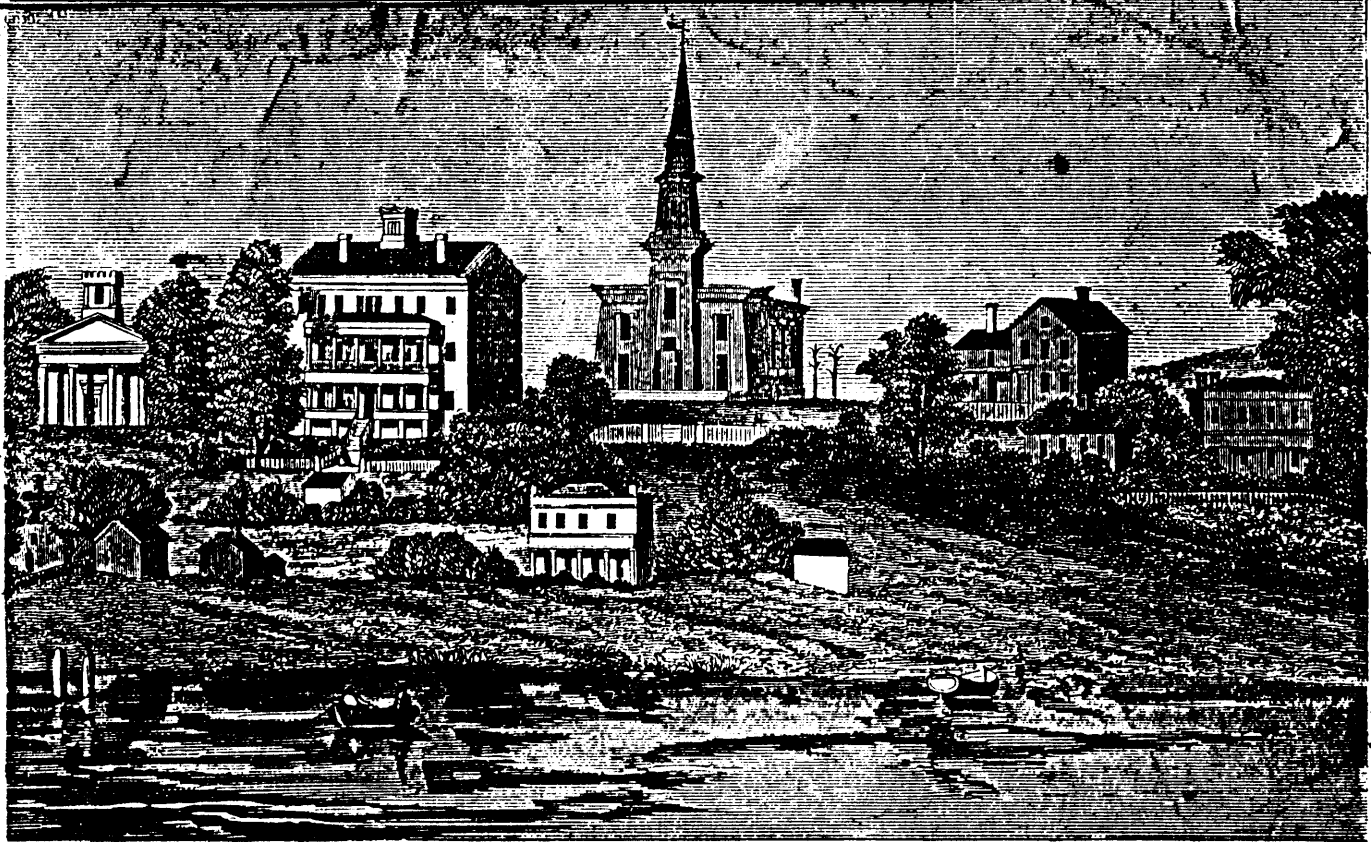
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HILL'S ACADEMY AND ESSEX SEMINARY.

HILL'S ACADEMY was incorporated in 1833. To increase its facilities, much has been expended the present season. The unique and beautiful brick building known as Hill's Academy has been thoroughly repaired and newly furnished, and valuable additions made to the well-selected Chemical, Philosophical, Astronomical, and Surveying Apparatus.

Also, at a suitable distance from the Academy, there has been erected a large building called ESSEX SEMINARY—a noble and substantial edifice. Its apartments are ample and well furnished, and in every respect adapted to the purposes for which it was designed. Pupils entering the Seminary are intimately associated with their respective teachers in one family, and thus, while away from home, have still secured to them the social and moral influences of a well-regulated household.

There are three terms in a year. The first, or Fall term, begins on the last Wednesday in August, and continues eleven weeks. After a recess of one week, the Winter term commences, and continues a quarter and a half, or 16½ weeks; at the close of which, there is a vacation of three weeks, when the Summer term begins, and continues the same length of the Winter term.

Terms, for Boarding, Washing, Fuel, Lights, Supervision and Tuition in English branches and Latin and Greek—the Fall term, \$30; the Winter and Summer terms, each, \$75—payable quarterly in advance. Music, Drawing, Painting, French, Spanish, German, and Italian, extra.

DAY TUITION, \$3, \$4, and \$5 per quarter, according to age and branches pursued. Extras the same as for Boarding Scholars. Payment in every case to be made quarterly in advance.

This Institution is located in the fertile valley of the Connecticut, six miles from its mouth, in the healthy and thriving village of Essex. Few towns in New England furnish so eligible a location for a well-endowed BOARDING SCHOOL. Retired from the temptations of our larger towns—a little removed from the sea-board—on a gentle elevation, overlooking the village below, and commanding a river prospect of between five and six miles—is unsurpassed in salubrity of climate, beauty and magnificence of its scenery, and purity of its moral atmosphere. And being within a few minutes' walk of the steamboat landing, can be easily reached by the steamboats which ply between New-York and Hartford daily, and between Hartford and Norwich every other day.

The method of instruction in this Institution is thorough, systematic, and practical. At the close of every term, a faithful report of each student's scholarship and deportment is transmitted to their parents or guardian; and it is the design of the Corporation to spare neither pains nor expense to render this Institution, in all its attractions and accommodations, a desirable resort for both sexes, for obtaining a thorough ENGLISH, CLASSICAL, and ORNAMENTAL EDUCATION.

LUCIUS LYON, A. M.

PRINCIPAL.

PROMOTIONAL ADVERTISEMENT PRINTED NOVEMBER 1848 FOR HILL'S ACADEMY
(On file at Essex Historical Society, Essex, Ct.)
EXHIBIT I

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From a Photograph Hill's Academy, c late 1800's
On file at Essex Historical Society, Essex, Ct.
EXHIBIT II

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Beers, J.B. History of Middlesex County, Ct. New York:J.B. Beers & Co., 1884.
Libby, Ernest M. "History of Hill's Academy is Reviewed," The New Era, 2 Sept. 1954.
Potter, Kimberly, "Essex Historical Society Building: Once a Private Academy in Town, The Gazette, 1 May 1984, pg.17.
State of Connecticut.Resolves and Private Laws, 1789-1836. Vol. I.

Additional newspaper articles, unsigned:

"An Early Essex Institution." The New Era, 25 September 1947, p.16.
"Hill's Academy." The New Era, 18 November 1954.
"Hill's Academy Building." Hartford Courant, 11 November 1901.
"History of Pratt School Recalled." The New Era, 1 September 1949.
"Historical Society Site to be Sought at Essex." New Haven Register, ----1955,p.12.
"The Old Hill's Academy." No paper named, 27 January 1903.
"Want to Wind up Affairs." Hartford Times, 29 December 1902.
"Wigwam Once was a School." The New Era, 18 December 1947.

Wood engraving advertisement:

"Hill's Academy & Essex Seminary." Essex, Ct., November 1848.