

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED NOV 23 1976

DATE ENTERED AUG 10 1977

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

First Congregational Church

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Hillside Road

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Chester Borough

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

13th

STATE

New Jersey

VICINITY OF

CODE
034

COUNTY

Morris County

CODE

027

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input 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 checked="" 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
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

First Congregational Church of Chester

STREET & NUMBER

Hillside Road

CITY, TOWN

Chester

VICINITY OF

STATE

New Jersey

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER

Court Street

CITY, TOWN

Morristown

STATE

New Jersey

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

New Jersey Historic Sites Inventory (#683.7)

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Historic Sites Section, Dept. of Environmental Protection

CITY, TOWN

P. O. Box 1420

STATE

Trenton

New Jersey

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT
 GOOD
 FAIR

DETERIORATED
 RUINS
 UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The First Congregational Church of Chester, New Jersey is a Greek Revival Temple form church built in 1856. This rectangular church has a full portico with pediment supported by four fluted Doric columns on the front facade.

There are two small windows, side by side, in the center of the pediment.

The entablature beneath the pediment is undecorated.

The church has a front three tier tower with a short modern spire. The tower projects from the main form of the church.

The front facade of the church, beneath the portico, has three bays -- a double entrance door topped by double shuttered windows flanked by a single door on each side. Above the center doorway entrance is a stone inscription dating the structure.

The church has pilasters at its corners and the long linear facade has four bays -- the five feet wide windows of this facade are triple-hung sash form with three panes in each section. The apertures all have segmental arched label moldings.

Originally a frame and clapboard structure, most of the church is currently covered with aluminum siding, but because of the bold character of the Greek Revival style as interpreted in this edifice, the siding does not seriously jeopardize the buildings' exterior integrity.

The overall dimensions of the Congregational Church are approximately 61 feet by 50 feet with an 8'5" projecting full portico.

The rear facade has four evenly spaced pilasters and a pedimented roof. The rear is disrupted by an exterior modern brick chimney to the heating system.

The cellar was dug out in 1949 to provide additional meeting space for the church. The foundation of the church which is concrete scored to resemble stone blocks probably dates from this period.

The interior has had only minor alterations to the original. The interior floor plan is a modified basilica with three aisles and four rows of pews, all of different width. The apse has been incorporated into the nave. The atrium is short and serves as an entry vestibule, flanked on one side by a storage closet and the other by a stairway to the balcony.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" 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)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1856-7, 1873, 1878

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE Architecture

A simple Greek Revival temple form church having a full portico with pediment and four Greek Doric columns, the Congregational Church is one of two Greek Revival churches in Chester; the other having a recessed double Ionic columned porch. The First Congregational Church is characteristic of the type of religious structures built in many of the villages and towns throughout the state and the nation during the mid-19th century. Apparently not built by an architect, the church still evidences highly polished building techniques as practiced by local artisans.

Art

The painted interior decoration, completed between 1857-70 in the tromp l'oeil manner, is unequalled in the county and one of the few churches in New Jersey decorated in this manner with its original interior intact.

Done by an itinerant painter in the custom of mid-19th century interior church decor, the Chester Congregational Church is an exceptional example of American wall painting and reflects the contemporary status of this religious edifice.

The Chandelier, which was presented to the church in 1857 by its sister church in Newark, still hangs in the center of the ceiling and clearly enhances the painted ceiling decor.

Music

Built in 1873 for the Congregational Church in Chester by the J. H. & C. S. Odell firm, this Opus 128 organ, to the right of the pulpit, has a chestnut base with black walnut trimmings and decorated front pipes. This third quarter 19th century organ is one with excellent voicing and chorus and is unsurpassed in the county and, perhaps, in the state.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- History of Morris County, New Jersey, W. W. Munsell, 1882 (p. 211)
- The Chesters, League of Women Voters, 1971
- Chester, New Jersey: A Town's Past, Frances Greenridge, c.1973
- First Congregational Church Trustees Old Parish Records, Chester, N.J.
- First Congregational Church Treasurer's Records: 1873-1903, Chester, NJ
- "The 18th Annual National Convention of the Organ Historical Society", June 26-28, 1973, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.3

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	5,2,5,6,0,0	4,5,1,4,9,6,0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Terry Karschner, Historian-Curator

ORGANIZATION

DATE

Historic Sites Section, Dept. of Env. Prot.

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

P. O. Box 1420

609-292-2023

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Trenton

New Jersey

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

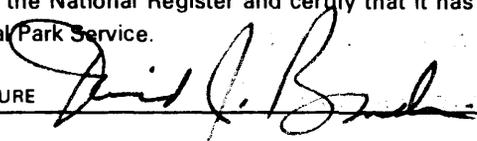
NATIONAL

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

David J. Bardin

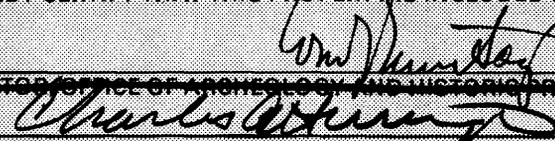
DATE

August 2, 1976

Commissioner, Dept. of Env. Protection

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 ATTEST: 
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE 8/10/77
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
 DATE 8-10-77

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First Congregational Church

Chester Boro

Morris County

New Jersey 034

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The interior walls and ceiling of the church are plastered and painted with classical interior columns, pilasters, architraves, and ceiling decor. All painting is in the tromp l'oeil manner and dates most likely from the period of 1857-70.

Each corner of the church is accentuated by a painting of a corinthian pilaster which extends from the floor to the ceiling. The ceiling also has a painted border decor and the center of the ceiling is highlighted with a painted medallion from which is hung a 19th century chandelier, original to the church.

The most imposing aspect of the church interior, however, is the tromp l'oeil behind the altar. This illusionary painting, with 12 columns representing the 12 apostles, not only appears to extend the length of the church, but also provides a classical background from which the minister beckons his congregation. According to Mrs. Leon J. Beiser, Congregational Church Historian, in the fall of 1935, an artisan from New York removed seven layers of paint and wallpaper restoring the church to its original decor.

On a platform to the right of the pulpit is a magnificent pipe organ, built in 1873 and installed at that time. This organ has a chestnut base with black walnut trimmings and decorated front pipes which are in three simple flats, arranged 7-7-7, of which 17 are open Diapason Bass pipes. The upper part of the sides of the case show the Bourdon pipes. The front console is covered by two large sliding doors; the flat, round-shanked knobs are lettered in Italics and script. The mechanical and pedal knobs are of a light colored wood; the foot rest folds down; the wooden swell pedal operates a very effective set of vertical shades; the diamond-shaped red-stained ivory nameplate is above the elaborate, fretworked music desk. The organ is in good condition, having been renovated by the Odell firm a few years ago.

Over the entrance chamber is a small gallery with a slanted floor. Aiding the support of this balcony are two cast-iron columns with corinthian capitals. Original to the church, these two columns are the only iron elements in evidence in the structure. While generally the balcony was provided for the least affluent persons in the congregation the view from the gallery is most imposing.

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The Chapel, situated alongside the church, was built in 1878 and is a 1½ story clapboard structure which is the same length as the church, but substantially narrower. The front facade has three bays and a side double door entrance. The first floor windows are all 2/2 sash with label modlings. The shuttered window in the attic on the gable end has a Tudor label molding. The roof of the Chapel is gable and has a return. The foundation is stone.

The Chapel has a side entrance hall at its front while a storage room is situated alongside. The hall opens into a large multi-purpose room which covers nearly two-thirds of the building. There is a small service room in the rear.

The rooms all have narrow batten board wainscoating.

Behind the Chapel is a long narrow carriage barn, circa 1910, probably provided for parishioners to use during inclement weather.

The Chester Cemetery Association is adjacent to the church property.

A map is attached.

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Morris County
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Religion

The first Christian Endeavor Society in New Jersey was formed in the First Congregational Church Chapel in Chester, New Jersey in 1882 by Reverend F. A. Johnson.

Begun by Francis E. Clark in Portland, Maine in 1881, the Society, a youth organization which strives to unite its members for greater Christian growth and service, spread rapidly to other parts of the nation and soon to the rest of the world.

Narrative Statement

The First Congregational Church of Chester, New Jersey was organized in 1740 and its first house of worship was erected in 1747.

The second religious edifice was built in 1803, but some fifty years later lay in a state of disrepair.

In 1856 the Congregation resolved to raise \$5,000 for the erection of a new House of Worship.

Trustees of the Church: Jacob H. Crammer, Charles Ming, Charles J. Skellenger, Stephen Budd, Elias Wortman, James Vandervier, William C. Leek, Daniel Budd, Samuel C. Leek, and Levic Hervey -- were appointed to the building committee which was responsible for erecting the present church.

In less than a month plans and drawings for the edifice were prepared and presented to the Congregation Trustees. So that the cost for the church would remain below the approved \$5,000 the building was scaled down to its present size.

A little over a year later the Church was completed to the "general satisfaction of the Parish". (Trustees Records)

Two gifts of note were presented to the congregation at the time of completion -- a chandelier from the 1st Congregational Church of Newark and the communion table from the Ladies of Morristown. Both gifts still adorn the church.

In 1878 the Chapel was erected at a cost of \$218.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

First Congregational Church
Chester Boro
Morris County
New Jersey 081

CONTINUATION SHEET

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1

9. Bibliography

- "Report of my visit to the Chester Congregational Church on June 11, 1908 with Lyman C. Douglas of Westfield, New Jersey", MSS. Frances Greenidge, 1975

Other information supplied by:

- Mrs. Leon J. Beiser, Church Historian, Maple Avenue, Chester, NJ
- Mr. Leonard Taylor, Chester Historical Society, Chester, NJ
- Mr. Carmen H. Smith, Chester Historical Society, 34 Oakdale Road, Chester, NJ
- Mrs. Bessie Johnson