

1247

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name UNION SOCIETY OF PHOENIXVILLE HOUSE
other names/site number Community House

2. Location

street & number 4 Hartford Turnpike not for publication
city or town Eastford vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county Windham code 015 zip code 06242

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 10-25-07
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
Karen Senich, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Comm. on Culture & Tourism
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

- I hereby certify that the property is:
- entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined eligible for the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.
 - determined not eligible for the National Register.
 - removed from the National Register.
 - other, (explain): _____

[Signature] 12.11.07
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action
Edson H. Beall

Union Society of Phoenixville House
Name of Property

Windham County, CT
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

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	
2	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
2	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION: church school

SOCIAL: meeting hall

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Wood

roof Asphalt

other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark an "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.)

Property is:

- 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, structure
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

RELIGION
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

ca.1880 - ca.1950

Significant Dates

1907

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 Building Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Union Society of Phoenixville House
Name of Property

Windham County, CT
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.2 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18	741750	4640020	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2				4			
					<input type="checkbox"/>	See continuation sheet	

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette, Historian

organization _____ date July 25, 2007

street & number 483 Woodland Road telephone 860-429-0046

city or town Storrs state CT zip code 06268

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of Eastford, Connecticut

street & number 16 Westford Road telephone 860-974-0133

city or town Eastford state CT zip code 06242

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. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Description:

The building that formerly served as the Sunday school of the Union Society of Phoenixville is located at the intersection of Routes 44 and 98 in Eastford, Connecticut. It is a 2 ½-story, clapboarded building, 26 feet by 30 feet in plan, with its broad side facing east (Photographs 1-3). There is a small vestibule, six feet square, sheltering a side entrance on the south end of the building, facing Route 44. Because of the sharp rise in topography west of the intersection, the Union Society house looks out over the small cluster of buildings that make up the village of Phoenixville and the surrounding fields and woods. The building has a post-and-beam frame of hewn timbers and plank walls, to which is attached the exterior siding. The building rests on a fieldstone foundation, the top course of which consists of cut granite blocks. A brick chimney formerly emerged near the center of the rear (west) slope of the building's gable roof, but the top part of it was recently removed. The roof is now covered with protective plastic.

The three-bay east elevation has a Greek Revival-style entrance in the center, with plain pilasters supporting a simple entablature (Photograph 4). The door itself is of the panel-and-glass type and dates from around 1900. Other Greek Revival detailing includes the side-entrance gable, which is treated as a pediment (Photograph 5) and a partial return of the simple cornice moldings at the gable ends (Photograph 6). Windows have plain board surrounds and are fitted with ca. 1900 two-over-two sash. There is, however, one opening on the west (rear) elevation that has much older nine-over-six sash (Photograph 3).

The interior plan features, on the first floor, a large east room, a smaller room at the northwest corner, and an enclosed stairway against the west wall. Ceiling plaster on the first story has been removed, but ca. 1900 yellow-pine narrow matched-board wainscoting remains as the wall covering (Photograph 7). Second-story walls retain their plaster and wallpaper, except for the north wall, which was reconstructed (Photograph 8). Remnants of furnishings from the Sunday-school period include a cast-iron wood stove, numerous spindle-back chairs, and a long bench.

A small outhouse is located a short distance north of the Sunday-school building (Photographs 2 and 3). It is divided down the middle into two one-hole privies, each with its own door. It was rebuilt, modeled on an earlier privy, in the late 20th-century.

The building originally stood about 100 feet closer to the intersection. In 1927, the Connecticut State Highway Department purchased about one-half acre from the Union Society in order to re-align the east-west route along the course of present-day Route 44. This necessitated the relocation of the building.

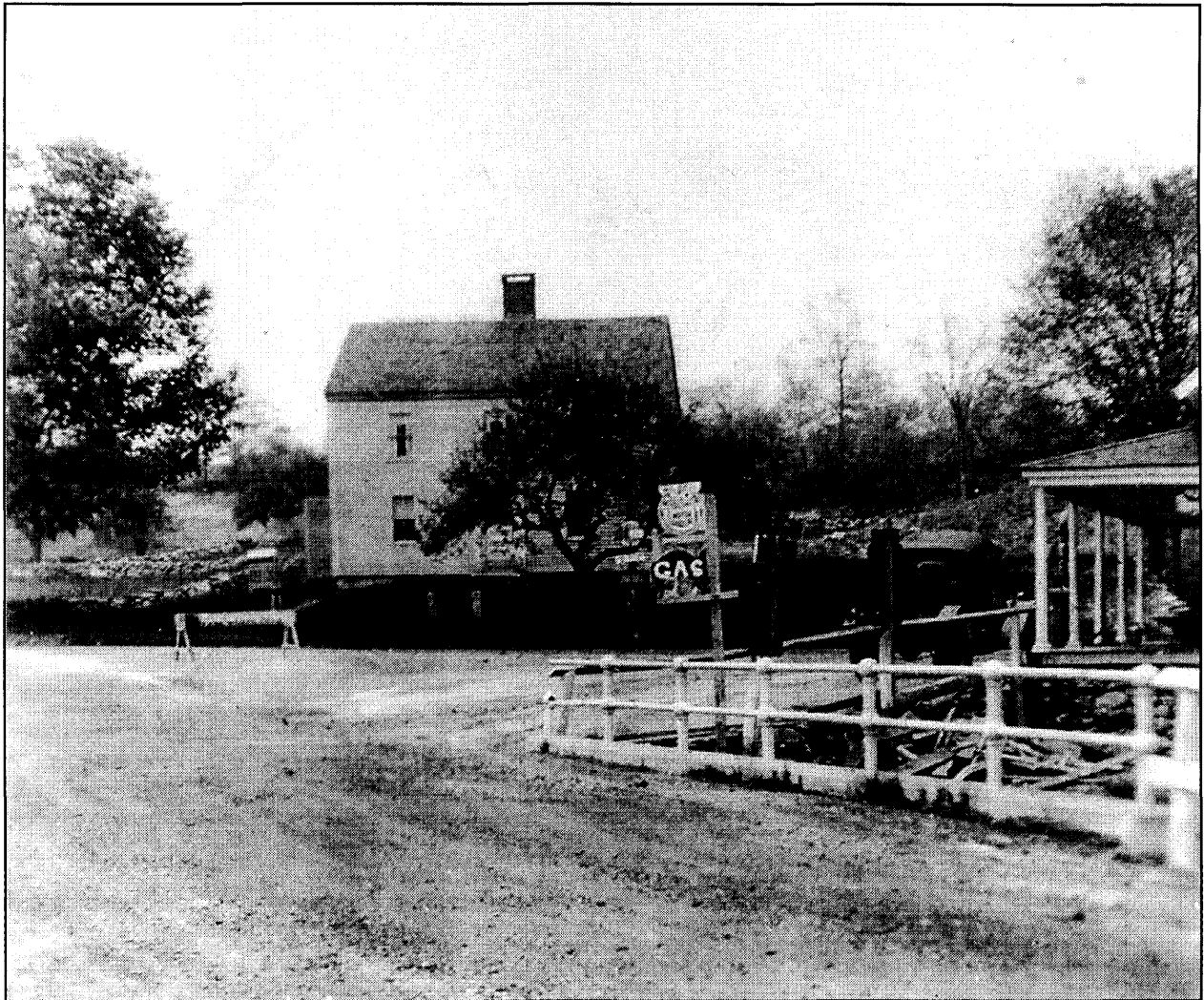
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Figure 1: The Union Society House in its original location somewhat closer to the intersection of Routes 44 and 98, ca. 1920. In 1927 the Connecticut State Highway Department acquired about a half-acre of the society's property in order to construct the current alignment of Route 44, necessitating relocating the building.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 3

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Figure 2: Interior of Union Society House, 1957, showing a 4H Club exhibit. The matched-board interior finish and the Sunday school furnishings (of which a similar bench and several chairs remain) are visible.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Statement of Significance:

Summary

The Union Society of Phoenixville House has local historical significance for its role in sustaining the social life of this small rural community during the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (National Register Criterion A). In addition to serving as a nonsectarian Sunday school, the building provided a place for a wide range of social activities, including meetings of associations such as the Scouts and the 4-H Club, community suppers, and games of croquet. In the 1940s, the building was known as the "Community House," and this name well sums up its meaning for local residents.

The building also has historical significance because it recalls the importance of Sunday schools as an important facet of religious life. The Sunday school movement, which from the beginning espoused nonsectarianism as a goal if not always in practice, swept the country in the second half of the nineteenth century. Sunday schools reflected a greater appreciation of children as different from adults, faith in the efficacy of education, and a growing belief in the role of nurture as a factor leading to spiritual salvation. By 1900, most churches operated Sunday schools for instruction in the basics of Christian doctrine, usually in a separate building or in a part of the church not used for services. In some Connecticut communities, such as Phoenixville, residents created common or "union" Sunday schools to serve children from all Christian denominations.

Historical Background of the Union Society House

The Union Society House was originally a single-family residence, owned and occupied by Smith Snow (1784-1842). An issue of the *Connecticut Gazette* newspaper from 1806 was discovered during repairs to the clapboards on the southwest corner of the house, and this date accords well with documentary evidence from the Ashford land records (Eastford was part of the town of Ashford until 1847). In 1805 and 1806, Smith Snow purchased land on both sides of the Natchaug River from his father, Bilarkey Snow, and his neighbor, Zwinglius Bullard (Ashford Land Records, Vol. 15, pages 39 and 178). He must have built his house that year or shortly thereafter, since a survey of the north-south road (corresponding to present-day General Lyon Road and Route 98) in 1814 described the three-rod highway as running from Zwinglius Bullard past "Smith Snow's land near his dwelling house," then on to the Providence Turnpike and land of Bilarkey Snow (Ashford Land Records, Vol. 16, page 528).

Smith Snow's father, Bilarkey Snow, had operated saw and grist mills in this vicinity since the late 18th century, and the son carried on the family's manufacturing tradition. Smith Snow was one of the principals in the Phoenixville Manufacturing Company, which built a stone cotton mill in 1831

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

**Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT**

on a site of an earlier cotton mill run by George and Rufus Sprague since 1812. The mills prospered for a time, but then declined, and were later used for the manufacture of twine; by the time of Bayles's history of Windham county (1889), they were no longer in operation.

The Union Society House's architectural detailing suggests that it was updated with Greek Revival elements sometime in the 1830-1860 period; even so, the details were of the simplest sort needed to convey the allusions to Classical columns and lintels that were the crux of the style. Either as built or as modified, the house seems to be rather too small and plain to be the home of a mill owner. However, Smith Snow is remembered in Eastford history as "a decided business man [who] gave but little time to the social conventionalities of life." According to Bayles, Snow changed his clothes the morning of his wedding to Sarah Hyde and simply went back to work in the mill, returning that evening only to eat his supper and then go to bed, as was his habit, thereby consternating the house full of wedding guests. Snow left an estate of \$2,373.00, consisting mostly of small parcels of real estate, a few animals and farming implements, and 12 shares of turnpike stock (an asset of dubious value). Except for owning a few silver spoons, Smith's lifestyle could not have set him apart much from his neighbors in Phoenixville.

Smith Snow's heirs conveyed the house to Lydia Clark, the wife of his nephew, Albert B. Clark, in 1858 (Eastford Land Records, Vol. 3, pages 151 and 153), though an 1856 map suggests that Albert and Lydia Clark were living there prior to the transaction. Albert B. Clark (1825-1903) was a shoemaker, but probably not the traditional small-shop custom craftsman usually associated with that term. Albert Clark more likely was one of the several dozen young men in the vicinity who made shoes from pre-cut soles and uppers provided by them by entrepreneurs who then collected the shoes and marketed them. Northeastern Connecticut made millions of pairs of shoes in the years around 1850 using this method. Shoemaking was one of a few mass-production enterprises that actually preceded mechanization; another was palm-leaf bonnet-making, carried out in the same way. Later, when industrialization superceded this cottage industry, Albert Clark worked as a teamster and as a farmer.

Although his grandparents had been married in the Congregational Church, Albert Clark and his family were Methodists; his father, Weeden Clark, had been a trustee of the Methodist parsonage, which local residents bought for the use of traveling preachers. According to Edith Wheaton Smith, Albert Clark made this building available for Methodist worship services around 1880, and since the Methodists in Eastford had established a Sunday school as early as 1871, it can be assumed that the building was used as a Sunday school as well (the principal Methodist place of worship was in Eastford center, some two miles to the north). It may well be that the conversion of the building from a house to a religious meeting facility began even earlier: Albert Clark's father, Weeden, died in 1872, leaving him the family farm, which was located a short distance away on the north side of the turnpike road.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 3

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

When Albert B. Clark died in 1904, he left a modest estate of \$1,400, which included a farm of about 75 acres, farming tools, lumber, and his old shoemaker's kit. His estate also included the "Sunday School House & Lot," confirming that the Sunday-school use preceded the actual formation of the Union Society, which occurred in 1907. In that year, Monroe F. Latham, Caro P. Latham, Nettie Lyon, Ward G. Holman and others incorporated the society to

maintain and conduct occasional undenominational public religious worship and Sunday School in the village of Phoenixville as opportunity may offer and any other unsectarian religious or social endeavor conducive to spiritual life, to good morals, and the best interests of society.

With funds provided by John McNair, a seasonal resident of Phoenixville, the society bought the building from the Clark estate (Eastford Land Records, Vol 8, page 466.). It remained the property of the Union Society until 2002, when it was purchased by the Town of Eastford.

The Sunday school operated by the society was open to all Christians, including Catholic families of Eastern European heritage. The curriculum emphasized basic Christian values such as the Ten Commandments and so was not perceived as promoting the distinctive doctrines of any particular denomination. Games, singing, and prizes made the instruction interesting to the youngsters. According to statistics gathered by the Connecticut Sunday School Teachers Association for 1921, the Phoenixville Sunday school's five teachers and twenty-two scholars met for an hour each Sunday at 2:30p.m.

The importance of the institution to the local community was apparent during its 25th-anniversary celebration in 1932. More than 140 persons attended the festivities, coming from as far away as New York and Florida. Special recognition was given to one attendee: Nettie Lyon, who had joined the original Methodist Sunday School in 1871.

In addition to the Sunday School, the building served as a general-purpose meeting facility for the village of Phoenixville and the surrounding countryside, as was envisioned by the society's founders. Bean suppers and other socials at first required people to bring in the food, tables, and chairs, because the second-floor was rented out to a family to help defray the costs of repairing and maintaining the building; later, the upstairs was made into a kitchen and dining area equipped with furniture, crockery, a stove, and cooking utensils. A wild-game supper was tried once, but did not prove popular enough to continue. The local public school, a one-room schoolhouse, also used the building for its Halloween and Christmas parties and other programs. Outside, the Union Society House (or Community House, as it later came to be called) had a croquet court that was open from late spring to early fall. With electric lights powered by the nearby mill, area children and adults could play croquet even past dark. Local organizations known to have used the building for their

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

meetings include the Boy Scouts, the Parent-Teacher Association, Eastford Fire Company No. 1, and the 4-H Club. Although the facility primarily served the Phoenixville neighborhood, people came from nearby Ashford and Eastford center as well. Rummage sales, picnics, fund-raising card parties, and even funerals rounded out the schedule. For years, the building was the site of a community Christmas tree and Christmas party.

By the 1960s, the upstairs had become unsafe and the building was proving difficult to maintain. Fewer and fewer events were held, and eventually the society's chief function became the struggle to preserve the building.

The Sunday School Movement in Connecticut

The Sunday School movement in Connecticut began in the 1830s and quickly involved hundreds of churches and thousands of teachers and students. Sunday schools in part reflected a different understanding of children in the early 19th century. Instead of inherently depraved beings cursed by Original Sin, children were increasingly viewed as little innocents who could benefit from instruction and grow in understanding. The Rev. Horace Bushnell's seminal work *Christian Nurture* (1847) provided an important theological underpinning for the movement: Bushnell¹ argued that the conversion experience essential to Christian salvation could be gradual, the result of a long process of moral development that began in childhood. While a few religious leaders continued to oppose Sunday schools on the grounds that they undercut the traditional Protestant understanding of sin and conversion, most churches moved with the times, and by the 1870s multiple Sunday schools could be found in every Connecticut town. Eastford, for example, had four in 1871: one each for Congregationalists, Methodists, regular Baptists, and Free-Will Baptists. The Sunday School movement received the support of many of the state's industrialists, especially textile manufacturers, who were interested in improving public morals.

Typically these Sunday schools met for an hour or two on Sunday afternoons under the supervision of lay teachers. Singing, recitations, and even games brought religious instruction to the level of the children's understanding. Lesson plans, teacher-training materials, religious-themed prizes, and entire Sunday school libraries were available at nominal cost from state and national Sunday-school organizations, so there was no economic impediment even for small, rural congregations. The state and national organizations also provided a way for Sunday-school teachers to meet and discuss common issues. In Connecticut, the first state-wide convention of Sunday-school teachers was held

¹Bushnell was a Connecticut Congregationalist minister who pioneered an understanding of Christianity that valued human emotion and intuition, along with reason. His writings had a major influence in creating modern American Protestant theology.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8

Page 5

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

in Hartford in 1857. Although primarily supported by evangelical Protestant denominations, the Connecticut conventions also included representatives from more liturgically oriented groups such as Lutherans, Episcopalian and Catholics. In addition to the state-wide conventions, which continued well into the 20th century, there were regional and county conventions as well.

In reconstituting itself as a nonsectarian Sunday school, the Eastford Union Society was not unique in Connecticut, but rather reflected the inter-denominational approach to children's religious education that characterized the entire Sunday-school movement. In New Milford, a Union Society was established in the 1850s to maintain an abandoned Methodist Church as a place of worship and a Sunday school for any Christian denomination wishing to use it, and in 1897 the Union Chapel of Ansonia was founded to provide for a non-sectarian Christian Sunday school and worship services.

Integrity

Although the physical condition of the building is currently no better than fair, the building retains the appearance it had during the period of significance, as can be seen by comparing Photograph 1 with the ca. 1920 photograph reproduced as Figure 1. Except for the ceilings, the interior surfaces are also mostly in place, and even some of the Sunday school furnishings remain.

National Register Criteria Exception

The National Register excludes from listing any building that has been "removed from its original location" (Criteria Exception B). Because the Union Society Sunday school was moved only a short distance to the west to accommodate highway improvements, it can said to have been shifted somewhat on its original lot, but not removed from its original location. The building retains its original orientation, and the current foundation materials appear to have been re-used from the original. Moreover, because the move occurred ca.1930, the building was in its current location during much of the period of significance. For these reasons, Criteria Exception B does not apply.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Bibliography:

- Anderson, Janet. "A Brief History of the Union Society of Phoenixville, Eastford, Connecticut." Manuscript, Eastford Historical Society, 2005.
- Bayles, Richard M. *History of Windham County, Connecticut*. New York: W. W. Preston, 1889.
- Boylan, Anne M. *Sunday School: The Formation of an American Institution, 1790-1880*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988.
- "The Community House." *Eastford Historical Society Quarterly* 24, no.2 (June 2002).
- Connecticut Sunday School Teachers Association. Records, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.
- Curtis, John O. "The Union Society House, Phoenixville, Connecticut." Manuscript, Eastford Historical Society, 2005.
- DeJohn, Thomas. "Union Society House of Phoenixville." Measured drawings, Eastford Historical Society, 2005.
- Smith, Edith Wheaton, "The Phoenixville Sunday School," in *Town of Eastford Centennial, 1847-1947*, edited by Eleanor Keith Lewis and Catherine Tatem French (Eastford: Eastford Centennial Committee, 1947), 21-24.
- Stewart, George Jr. *A History of Religious Education in Connecticut to the Middle of the Nineteenth Century*. New Haven, 1924.
- Tanajes, Carolyn Pieck. Oral history, July 2006, Eastford Historical Society.
- Union Society of Phoenixville. Minutes of meetings, 1906-1988, Eastford Historical Society.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Union Society of Phoenixville House (Community House)

Section number 10 Page 1

Eastford, Windham County, CT

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property, known as 4 Hartford Turnpike, has the Map ID of 126A/23/6 in the records of the Eastford Assessor; it is described in a deed recorded in the Eastford Land Records, Volume 44, page 889 (July 2, 2002).

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the lot that has been associated with the building at least since 1858, less the portion that was taken for state highway purposes in 1927.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Union Society of Phoenixville House
(Community House)
Eastford, Windham County, CT

Section number Photographs

Page 1

All Photographs:

1. Union Society of Phoenixville
2. Eastford, Windham County, CT
3. B. Clouette Photo
4. June 2006
5. Digital photographs (.tifs) submitted to NPS

Captions:

- 1: East elevation, camera facing northwest.
- 2: East elevation, camera facing southwest, privy at right.
- 3: West elevation, camera facing northeast, privy at left.
- 4: Detail of entrance, south elevation, camera facing north.
- 5: Detail of south entrance, camera facing northwest.
- 6: Detail of cornice return, northwest corner, camera facing northeast.
- 7: Interior, first floor, showing bench and cast-iron stove, ca. 1900.
- 8: Interior, second floor, camera facing northwest.