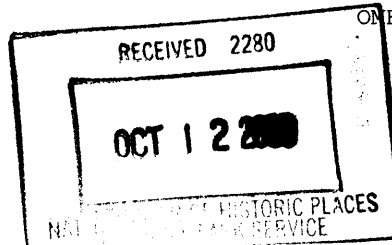


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



1327

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 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. 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 Uncasville School

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 310 Norwich-New London Turnpike not for publication  
city or town Montville vicinity \_\_\_\_\_  
state Connecticut code CT county New London code 011 zip code 06382

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x 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 x meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally x statewide x locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

John W. Shannahan September 19, 2000  
Signature of certifying official Date  
John W. Shannahan  
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission  
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 commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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

John G. Savage 2/23/01

other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

John G. Savage Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

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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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> sites
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> structures
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> objects
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/> Total

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

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

N/A

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6. Function or Use

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Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: EDUCATION Sub: school  
SOCIAL civic  
RECREATION AND CULTURE auditorium

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: GOVERNMENT Sub: government office

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Renaissance Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE  
roof ASPHALT  
walls BRICK  
other LINTELS, WATER TABLE, KEYSTONES: CONCRETE (CAST STONE)

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 "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 pattern 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 a grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or 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)

ARCHITECTURE  
EDUCATION  
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance 1917-1945

Significant Dates N/A

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)  
Grace Palmer Melcer

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Wilson Potter/H. R. Douglas

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

(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 Buildings 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: Montville Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.75

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>18</u>	<u>741329</u>	<u>459080</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

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 Dale S. Plummer, National Register Nominations Consultant

organization Montville Historical Society date March 31, 2000

street & number P. O. Box 51 telephone (860) 848-9981

city or town Montville state CT zip code 06353

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 the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name Town of Montville

street & number 310 Norwich-New London Turnpike telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Uncasville state CT zip code 06382

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 the 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 Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

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name of property  
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Description

The Uncasville School is a two-story brick building originally constructed in 1917-1918 in the Renaissance Revival style (Photograph 1). A substantial addition was made in 1925, and another one-story addition in 1953. The school is sited on a hill set back from Route 32, or the Norwich-New London Turnpike, and faces east. On either side are the 1928 United Methodist Church and the 1938-1939 Montville Town Hall (Photographs 2, 3). The original school building and the 1925 addition have a raised basement defined by a cast-stone water table, which also forms the lintels of the basement windows. The brick is laid in Flemish bond with darker headers. Mortar joints are recessed.

The façade of the school building consists of a five-bay recessed central block, representing the original structure, flanked on north and south by projecting wings, added in 1925. Basement windows have 3-over-3 double-hung sash. A central entrance has Roman Doric columns supporting an entablature and pediment, all of cast stone (Photograph 4). First-floor windows have splayed lintels and keystones, both of cast stone. Second-floor windows have splayed brick lintels with cast-stone keystones. Above the entrance is a triple window. First- and second-floor windows throughout the original building and the 1925 addition have double-hung 6-over-6 sash. A cast-stone belt course unites the sills of the first-floor windows and continues around the building. A wooden molding above the second-floor windows also continues around the building. The wooden cornice features modillions.

The south wing extends farther to the east than the north wing. On the north, inner side, there is a basement-level covered entrance. The first and second floor walls on this side have no window openings. The east side, corresponding to the façade, is also blank above the basement level. This side features a rectangular panel outlined in brick with cast-stone blocks at the corners. The north wing has two windows on each floor of the south, or inner, side with brick lintels and keystones matching those of the central block. Quoins in brickwork mark the intersection of the wings with the central block. The east side of the north wing has a single first-story window. Above this is a panel similar to that on the south wing (Photograph 5). At the northeast corner, the one-story 1953 addition begins, with an entrance serving both the earlier building and the addition.

The south elevation has a recessed central bay with quoins at its corners and a single window on each floor lighting an interior hallway (Photograph 6). To either side of the central bay both first and second floors have five sash each; London, CT with elongated stepped lintels above. Keystones are of cast stone. The first-floor lintels are of cast stone, the second floor of brick. Wooden separators between the window sash have grooved brackets under the lintels.

The rear of the school has a one-story auditorium which projects from the main block (Photograph 7). Flanking the auditorium are round-arched entrances with semi-circular transoms. A window above each of these is set between the floor levels and lights the interior stairwells. The auditorium has four round-arched window openings with semicircular transoms on each wide. Windows have 8-over-8 double-hung sash. One has been converted to a door. At the west end, there are two smaller windows lighting the back of the stage area and a covered wooden accessible entrance into the former gymnasium in the basement. The molded wooden cornice does not have modillions.

The north elevation of the building has five window sash under a single lintel in the same design as the south elevation (Photograph 8). Brick quoins set in the wall mark where the original building ended. The addition has two single windows on the second floor and one small window with 3-over-3 double-hung sash on the second floor. The 1953 extension begins on this side and projects to the north (Photograph 9). The extension has a poured-concrete foundation stepped as the ground level falls away to the north. Classroom windows feature steel casement sash. A basement entry is at ground level near the north end. Integral to the classroom portion is a brick gymnasium set at a right angle. Due to the ground slope, the floor level of the gymnasium is at the basement level of the classroom addition. Locker rooms are below the classrooms. The gymnasium entrance, with a double door flanked by single doors and a triple-light transom above, is on the east end of the gymnasium. Large steel casement sash are set into the north wall.

The interior of the school is accessed from the front entrance and from the two rear entrances. The back entrances lead to stairwells to all floors (Photograph 10). The front entrance allows access to both the basement and the first floor. Interior hallways are paved in red tile. The walls feature a tile baseboard and a brick dado which extends to the height of the doorways. The dado is topped with a molded brick course supporting a flat brick course (Photograph 11). Above the dado, the walls are plastered. Ceilings are coved throughout the building, both in hallways and classrooms. Main classroom entrances have a single wooden window in each door. On either side, fixed windows with four lights each have a panel beneath (Photograph 12). Three transoms are above each classroom entrance. Secondary entrances have a single door. The

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Description (continued)

classrooms feature a low brick dado with a molded upper course similar to the hallways. Chalkboards circle each room in a continuous band except where interrupted by windows and doors. Most rooms have a small cupboard with a door consisting of six glass panes (Photograph 13). The auditorium has a stage opening raised above the floor level. This proscenium is flanked by Ionic pilasters. The ceiling features large beams with cornice moldings over half the space (Photograph 14). The remainder of the auditorium has the coved ceiling typical of the classrooms and hallway. The auditorium was apparently expanded in 1925 by opening up the wall between a classroom and the auditorium.

Statement of Significance

The Uncasville School was built in the Renaissance Revival style in 1917-1918, with a major addition in 1925. Wilson Potter, the architect, was a well-known specialist in school design. Constructed of brick in Flemish bond by local contractor H. R. Douglas, the Uncasville School exhibits a high standard in design, workmanship, and materials. Grace Palmer Melcer, daughter of a local industrialist, had the Uncasville School built, a philanthropic gesture with overtones of 19th-century paternalism and the social gospel. The school quickly became a focus of community activities. The curriculum emphasized acculturation, or Americanization, through the 1920s and 1930s. Here, children of immigrants from Eastern Europe and elsewhere played and studied with the children of New England farmers and millworkers and with Native Americans of the Mohegan tribe. School activities for children and their parents emphasized the contributions of immigrants and Native Americans to American life and culture. In this integration of a diverse population into the community, the Uncasville School played an important role in shaping the response of Montville to the Great Depression and World War II.

The Uncasville School was the product of an architect with extensive experience in school design, Wilson Potter of New York City. Potter received commissions for schools throughout the Northeast. Locally, he had designed both the Broad Street School and the Laurel Hill School in Norwich, Connecticut, using the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The Uncasville School reveals his mastery of the Renaissance Revival style. The dramatic siting, on a hill overlooking the main route between New London and Norwich, together with the massing of the building (two wings flanking a impart a monumental presence. Although the current appearance is the result of the 1925 addition, Potter undoubtedly designed both the original buildings and the addition. The new work was skillfully done and is difficult to distinguish from the original.

The sense of the school's monumentality is emphasized by the raised basement. While the building seems higher than it actually is, the water table and horizontal belt courses provide both contrast and unification. The Flemish bond is of high-quality brick, the headers being darker than the stretchers. The mortar joints are recessed and remarkably even, emphasizing the brickwork. The decorative details- brick and cast-stone lintels and keystones, the Roman Doric entry, quoins, and cornice- are subordinate to the massing of the building. The quality and workmanship of these details reveal the concern of both the architect and the donor for excellence.

The interior details of the school are simple but effective, in recognition of the need for practicality in an elementary school. All interior corners, even windows and doorways are of rounded brick. The brick-lined halls have a simple molded course at the top of the doors, with plaster above, a design both attractive and easy to clean. The coved ceilings in the halls and classrooms are simple but extremely attractive. The auditorium, meant for school and public assemblies, has Ionic pilasters flanking the stage, and impressive plaster beams with cornices. Round-arched window openings with semi-circular transoms lend the room a formal appearance.

The population of Montville increased from about 2400 in 1900, to 3400 in 1920, and to 4000 in 1930. The growth was primarily in the industrial villages. Uncasville, a manufacturing village at the southeastern corner of the town, experienced rapid expansion in the early 20th century. Trolley service, established in 1900, enabled workers there to commute to jobs in the urban centers of New London and Norwich. Road improvements and increased use of automobiles also influenced this trend. With the onset of World War I in Europe, expanded industrialization added to growth. Another factor in the increase of the school population was consolidation, which closed district schools, in rural, outlying areas of town, and sent students to larger facilities in Uncasville and Palmertown.

Grace Palmer Melcer, daughter of Edward A. Palmer and Isabel Mitchell Palmer, had the Uncasville School built at her own expense in 1917-1918 as a memorial to her mother, who died in 1916. Mrs. Melcer's family had built the Palmer Memorial School 20 years earlier to service the village of Palmertown. Such generosity was characteristic of many 19th-century millowners, who saw schools as a means of social

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Statement of Significance (continued)

improvement, instilling children with values such as hard work and obedience to superiors. As her family had with the Palmer Memorial School, Grace Palmer Melcer retained ownership of the Uncasville School. Her husband, Ralph H. Melcer, an officer of the Palmer Brothers Co., was chairman of the school board until his death in 1929.

Although Grace Palmer Melcer never held public office, she was very influential in town affairs. She served a president of several local civic groups through the 1920s and 1930s, including the Montville Visiting Nurse Association, the local Red Cross, the League of Women Voters, and the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Uncasville Methodist Episcopal Church. Meetings of these groups were usually held at her home overlooking the Thames River. Education was often the topic at meetings, and speakers included the superintendent of schools, who at a meeting in 1935 explained that the schools' main objective was producing good citizens.

The new Uncasville School featured six rooms, with a manual training department for boys and a culinary department for girls. One unused classroom was converted to an apartment for a resident caretaking couple. The school soon became overcrowded, with changing educational expectations as well as population growth and school consolidation being contributing factors. Earlier, many children completed their formal education prior to eighth grade, thereafter going to work in local mills. In the 1890s, the Connecticut General Assembly established a minimum age of 14 for factory work. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, state reimbursement for tuition and transportation to high schools in New London and Norwich encouraged more students to graduate eighth grade and continue on to high school.

By 1925, overcrowding at the Uncasville School was serious enough to require a substantial addition to the original building. The school board appointed a delegation to negotiate with Grace Palmer Melcer. Mrs. Melcer agreed to transfer ownership to the town on several conditions, including that "all extensions to the present building hereafter built to be in keeping with the existing school building in design and quality."

In 1920, just over one-fourth of the residents of Montville were foreign-born. Another one-third had one or both parents of foreign birth. Of 774 non-English speaking, foreign-born residents, 310 spoke Polish as their native tongue. Other languages spoken included Yiddish, French, Russian, German, Italian, and Swedish. Many children attending school in Uncasville came from households in which English was not the primary language. The Americanization of these students and their families was a major concern.

The first class graduated from the Uncasville School in May 1919. Ceremonies included patriotic addresses by students, a pattern consistently repeated in the next three decades. Andrea Meloni delivered an address titled "My School Life in America," and Frederick Eldridge spoke on "America, the Land of Opportunity." Patriotic observances were also held on Columbus Day, Constitution Day, Flag Day, Armistice Day, Washington's Birthday, Lincoln's Birthday, and Memorial Day. Speeches, songs, and playlets marked these special occasions, involving the entire student body.

In November 1932, a group of Ukrainian, Polish, and Russian women petitioned the school board to hold a night school for non-English speaking adults. The women were already enrolled in an English language and citizenship class at the Uncasville Methodist Episcopal Church, adjacent to the school ground and built in 1928 through the generosity of Grace Palmer Melcer, a long-standing member. The request was granted, and the night school began in January 1933 and the Uncasville School. Classes met for two hours a night, four nights a week. State enabling statutes called for 75 sessions. In May 1933, the first night school class graduated 31 women and three men. The graduation ceremony set the standard for future classes. More than 300 attended to hear the class sing "America," followed by the Polish national song. Recitations on patriotic American themes such as George Washington were interspersed with a polka sung by Polish women, a patriotic song by French women, the "Volga Boatman" sung by Russian women, and even a song from a minstrel show, "Old Black Joe." The local chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, of which Mrs. Melcer was a member, gave attendance and scholarship awards, and presented each student with a copy of the Constitution in their native language. The evening ended with a salute to the flag and the singing of "The Star Spangled Banner." The following year, "Americanization" was one of the topics of night school graduation.

The new Uncasville School was used for numerous community activities. The Knights of Columbus performed minstrel shows in the



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Statement of Significance (continued)

auditorium. The Montville Fire Company, organized in 1935, held meetings and fundraisers at the school before building a firehouse. Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings, church bazaars, and many other events took place there. In March 1933, 800 gathered at the Uncasville School auditorium as Montville Democrats celebrated the inauguration of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt with speeches, an inaugural ball, and an automobile parade.

During the Great Depression, the Montville Visiting Nurse Association and the Montville Chapter of the American Red Cross were responsible for much of the relief effort. The schools and local church groups were enlisted, helping to identify those in need. At the Uncasville School, teachers collected broken toys from townspeople. Students would repair them under the direction of teachers. The visiting nurse would then distribute the repaired toys to needy families. Other activities included the packing of food baskets. The National Youth Administration hired local youth one summer to refinish 300 desks at the Uncasville School. W. P. A. projects in town included road improvements, which accelerated the process of school consolidation, and the construction of the Montville Town Hall, 1838-1839. The location of the new town hall next to the Uncasville School was symbolic of the primacy of Uncasville in town affairs.

When selective service registration was required just prior to the United States' entry into World War II, Montville men were enrolled at the Uncasville School, with teachers and other volunteers assisting. Throughout the war, children participated in scrap-metal drives and other war-related activities. Contests were held for the best scrapbooks on Americanism and National Defense. A 1935 graduate of the Uncasville School, George Howard, became the first Montville casualty of World War II in 1942. A prize in his memory was established at the school. From the time of its construction during World War I through World War II, the Uncasville School played a critical role in the community's response to a changing society and to the great events of economic depression and international conflict.

Major Bibliographical References

Melcer, Grace Palmer, "Warranty Deed to Town of Montville," Volume 39, pages 370-371, May 13, 1925, Montville Land Records, Office of Town Clerk, 310 Norwich-New London Turnpike, Uncasville, CT 06382.

Potter, Wilson, "Specifications for School Building at Uncasville, Conn. for Mrs. R. H. Melcer," March 25, 1916, typewritten manuscript in Montville Town Hall, 310 Norwich-New London Turnpike, Uncasville, CT 06382.

Rogers, Frank H., Scrapbook of News Clippings from The New London Day, 1930s and 1940s, Montville Historical Society, P. O. Box 51, Montville, CT 06353.

Rogers, Gertrude, Interview, tape recording at Montville Historical Society, P. O. Box 51, Montville, CT 06353.

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is a portion of the 6.5 acres of town-owned property describing a rough 'T' with the longer leg ending at Norwich-New London Turnpike and the north leg ending at Maple Avenue. This property is shown as lot 68, map 69 in the Assessor's Office, Town of Montville, 310 Norwich-New London Turnpike, Uncasville, CT 06382. Beginning at a point approximately 294' west of the southeastern corner of lot 68, continuing west about 230' to land of St. John Church, then north about 333' then east about 230' then south about 333' to the first mentioned bound.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes most of the original two acre tract deeded by Mrs. Melcer to the town in 1925, except for the portion adjoining Maple Avenue where a new Senior Citizen Center has been built. The remainder of lot 68 was not associated directly with the Uncasville School.