

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

For NPS use only

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

received MAY 5 1986  
date entered

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

**1. Name**

historic Chester Meeting House  
and/or common CHESTER CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH (preferred)

**2. Location**

street & number 4 Chester Street (at the north corner of the intersection of Rtes. 121 & 102) N/A not for publication  
city, town Chester, N/A vicinity of  
state New Hampshire code 33 county Rockingham code 015

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Chester Congregational Church  
street & number 4 Chester Street  
city, town Chester, N/A vicinity of N/A state New Hampshire 03036

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Rockingham County Courthouse  
Rockingham County Registry of Deeds  
street & number Hampton Road  
city, town Exeter, N/A vicinity of N/A state New Hampshire 03833

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title Cultural Resource Survey/Chester, NH has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no  
date 1984  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records N/A  
city, town N/A state

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## 7. Description

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

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Chester Congregational Church is a rectangular wooden structure with a gable roof, standing on a deep foundation of random, split-faced granite rubble. The building measures forty by seventy-five feet. Its southwest gable end, treated as the facade, has two-story fenestration, while the other three elevations of the building are treated as single stories. A three-stage tower rises from the center of the ridge at the southwest end of the roof. The walls of the building are covered with wooden clapboards or with flush boarding, while the roof is covered with asphalt shingles.

Treated as a temple front, the facade of the building displays strong Greek Revival character. The wall is divided into three bays by four wide but shallow piers sheathed with flush vertical boarding. These piers enclose slightly recessed wall panels filled with horizontal flush boarding. The first story is composed of a wide central doorway in the central bay, with a window in each of the flanking bays. The entrance has a pair of recessed doors, each of which has six flat panels surrounded by wide applied mouldings. Wide, flat door casings rise to support a wooden lintel whose gently sloping top rises to a slightly elevated peak at the center. On each side of the doorway is a window filled with two 1-over-1 sashes separated by a central mullion, and with side and top casings which reflect those of the entrance. On the second floor are three windows which light a gallery at the front of the church; though slightly taller than the first floor windows, these share the same sash and casing styles. All of these front windows are fitted with narrow louvered blinds at their sides.

A wide architrave, extending across the front of the building and returning along both sides, is supported by the four piers of the facade. Above this is a cornice with a bed moulding, a deeply-projecting fascia or corona, and a Grecian ovolo crown moulding. This cornice outlines a triangular pediment on the facade. A triangular window covered with a fanlike louvered blind is placed at the lower center of the flush-boarded tympanum of this pediment.

Each side elevation of the building is clapboarded and has three high windows with casings like those of the windows on the facade. Each of these windows is filled with two 6-over-6 sashes, separated by a central mullion, and has two-part louvered blinds. The architrave and cornice of the facade return along each side elevation.

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7. Description, continued:

The rear elevation of the church is clapboarded and lacks the projecting cornice of the other three elevations. Projecting from the lower portion of this elevation is a narrow shed-roofed extension which houses the pipes of an organ and which has an arched window, with 4-over-4 sashes, on each of its sides. Above this extension is a single 12-over-12 attic window.

The roof of the church appears to retain the trusses of the 1773 meeting house from which the present building was remodelled. Within the length of the building are four queen-post trusses placed beneath each pair of rafters and utilizing the rafter ties as their lower chords. Each queen post rises above the top chord of its truss to support a rafter at the mid-point. The diagonal end members of the trusses run beneath and parallel to the lower halves of the rafters; short struts connect the diagonal end members of the trusses to the rafters and, in effect, provide double rafters at the lower half of the roof. The trusses are linked laterally through the building by horizontal beams which extend from queen post to queen post and are further tied to the queen posts by diagonal braces. Long, unhewn needle beams extend nearly the full length of the building and tie the tower to the main frame.

The building's tower is composed of three stages. The lowest is a plain square story with a clock dial on its front and two sides, and with a 9-over-6 window in its rear elevation. This stage houses a weight-driven tower clock made by the E. Howard Clock Company of Boston and installed in 1881. The second stage is a belfry containing a bell cast in 1829 by George Handel Holbrook of Medway, Massachusetts. This stage stands upon a plain, low plinth and has flat corner piers which rise to support low-pitched pediments on all four elevations. Between the piers are recessed panels which are pierced by louvered rectangular openings. The third stage is a four-sided spire which is placed diagonally on a low, battered die with recessed horizontal panels. The spire is topped by a weathervane decorated with elaborate wrought iron scrollwork.

The interior of the church is characterized by simple detailing typical of the Greek Revival style. The central doorway of the facade provides access to a vestibule measuring fifteen by forty feet. Two doors in the inner (northeast) wall of this vestibule provide access to the auditorium, which measures forty by sixty feet. The auditorium walls and ceiling are plastered and painted, and the ceiling is coved to an elliptical contour. The pews are wooden "slip" seats without doors

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7. Description, continued:

at their ends. These are arranged in two connected central tiers (each having twelve nine-foot pews) separated from two wall tiers (each having fourteen nine-foot pews) by two longitudinal aisles leading from the vestibule doors. At the front (northeast) wall of the auditorium is a raised dais built in 1890, at the time when the present organ was installed in the building. At the front of the dais is a mahogany veneered reading desk in the Empire style. Behind the desk is an enclosed area containing the choir pews and the organ console. The wall behind the dais is ornamented with a pedimented aedicule in the Tuscan style, containing the organ pipes.

A stairway at the northwest end of the entrance vestibule leads to a gallery which extends across the rear (southwest) end of the auditorium. This gallery contains additional slip pews, and has an enclosed stairway at the northwest end leading to the attic of the building.

The basement of the church, remodelled in 1963, contains Sunday school rooms and a vestry.

Original appearance: The Chester Congregational Church is a greatly remodelled meeting house built in 1773. The original structure is documented as having measured forty-five by sixty feet, with two stories and with an entrance in one of the long elevations. On one of the narrow elevations of the building was a stairtower with a belfry and a steeple more than a hundred feet high, while on the other end was an enclosed stair "porch" providing access to the second-floor galleries. The interior was typical of the eighteenth-century New England meeting house, with square, enclosed, privately owned pews and with a high pulpit surmounted by a panelled sounding board. Little remains of the interior, but a pew door believed to have come from the meeting house is preserved at the New Hampshire Historical Society.

The frame of the old meeting house is believed to have been preserved relatively intact during the extensive 1840 remodellings which produced the present structure. This is borne out by the roof trusses, which appear typical of those of an eighteenth-century meeting house.

Following its remodelling in 1840, the Chester Congregational Church has remained relatively unchanged. The only changes which have affected the appearance of the structure have been the installation of a tower clock, with dials on three faces of the tower, in 1881; and the introduction of the present organ, with corresponding changes to the dais and the northeast wall of the auditorium, in 1890. In other respects, the Chester Congregational Church remains an unaltered religious building from the 1840 era.

The nominated property consists of one (1) contributing building.

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

**Specific dates** 1773, 1840 **Builder/Architect** John W. Noyes

**Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)**

The Chester Congregational Church is a well-designed and well-preserved New Hampshire church in the Greek Revival style. Although the building incorporates the frame of an eighteenth-century structure, its greatest importance lies in its being a well-proportioned example of nineteenth-century church design while reflecting both a local interpretation of the Greek Revival style and a local movement to build or remodel religious buildings in that style during the 1840s.

**Architecture:** The Chester Congregational Church is significant as an example of the construction or design of two periods. The building retains much of the frame of a meeting house of 1773, and is especially important in preserving the roof framing of the meeting house. Although the neighboring New Hampshire towns of Sandown, Fremont and Danville have unaltered eighteenth-century meeting houses, these towns were smaller than Chester and had smaller public buildings. The massive queen-post trusses of the Chester church represent the largest and most elaborate eighteenth-century roof system in the region.

The Chester Congregational Church is further significant as one of the major examples of the Greek Revival style in southeastern New Hampshire. The building reflects a type of church first seen in the region a year earlier (1839), when the Congregational Church in the nearby town of Candia erected a structure that served as a clear prototype for the Chester building. The characteristics of the local Greek Revival church building include the expression of a temple facade through pilasters, the use of a central doorway in lieu of the locally familiar double doorway, placement of the tower wholly on the main roof of the structure with no projecting pavilion on the facade, and the restrained use of such Greek Revival mouldings and other ornamentation as might be derived from Asher Benjamin's The Practical House Carpenter (1830) or a comparable sourcebook.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

Early Town Records; Early Church records; Chase, Benjamin; History of Chester, NH 1717-1869.

Diaries of Mary B. Noyes and Stephen Chase; Chester Historical Society, Chester, NH

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Manchester, NH

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	9	3	1	5	8	7	0	4	7	5	8	3	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Boundaries of the nominated property are highlighted in yellow on the attached sketch map. They encompass the church and the lot upon which it has stood since its construction. (Tax Map #16, lot #22)

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

state	N/A	code	county	code
state	N/A	code	county	code

state	N/A	code	county	code
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## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Joan Watts, Chester Historian

organization Chester Historical Society date December 15, 1986

street & number 115 Hanson Road telephone (603) 895-4418

city or town Chester, state New Hampshire

## 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  D.S. U.P.C.

title New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Officer date 4/28/86

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

 date 6/5/86  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_  
Chief of Registration

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8. Significance, continued:

The practice of remodelling eighteenth-century meeting houses in the Greek Revival style, as seen in Chester, was commonplace in New Hampshire during the 1840s. Among the other towns in the southern part of the state that undertook such extensive alterations were Hopkinton (1789; 1839) and Boscawen (1799; 1839). The tendency to retain the original roof frames in these alterations produced frontal pediments with a considerably greater pitch than would be accurate for a Greek temple, but the heavy snow loads of the region require steep roofs regardless of the style of ornamentation employed. Thus, the visual effect of these remodelled churches is virtually identical to that of new church buildings constructed at the same period in the same region of New Hampshire.

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