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Connecticut Historical Commission

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name ASHFORD ACADEMY

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number Fitts Road not for publication N/A

city, town Ashford vicinity N/A

state Connecticut code CT county Windham code 015 zip code 06278

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
[X] public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

- [X] building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total.

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official Date October 5, 1988

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.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- [X] 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 of the Keeper entered in the National Register Date 12/29/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Not in use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls wood

roof wood shingle

other brick

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Ashford Academy is a 2 1/2-story clapboarded structure built about 1825 (Photograph 1). It faces south on Fitts Road and is separated from the main road, U.S. Route 44, by a small triangle of open land which was once the village green of Ashford Center. The nominated property is part of a larger town-owned parcel containing a bandstand and a cemetery dating back to the 18th century. In addition to the Academy building itself, the nominated property includes a deteriorated privy (Photograph 2) standing near the lot's northeast rear corner; the construction details of the western half -- wide reciprocally sawn boards and cut nails -- indicate it was built around the same time as the main building. Both are counted as contributing buildings.

The south gable end of the Academy, facing the road, is the principal elevation. It is three bays wide with a window between two entrances, each of which has a door of four recessed panels and is outlined by simple pilasters and a narrow molded cornice. Side elevations (Photographs 2 and 3) have three windows on the first story and four on the second; on the east elevation, small windows have been cut in to light washrooms located just inside the east entry. All window openings have board frames and are fitted with modern 12-over-12 sash, replacements for the 6-over-6 sash (probably dating from about 1850) shown in old photographs. The building's molded cornice forms a complete return across the gable, within which is a full-sized attic-story window. Except for the rear elevation (Photograph 3), all corners are finished with quoins (Photograph 4). Straddling the ridge of the wood-shingled roof, at the south end, is a hip-roofed belfry with rectangular louvered openings. Its simple paneled corner pilasters suggest it is a c.1850 replacement for the original open belfry with bell-curved dome shown in an old engraving (Photograph 5). The small bronze bell within is not marked. Emerging from the ridge at the rear of building is a small brick chimney.

¹The pilasters are a typical detail from the Greek Revival period (c.1840-1860).

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Continuation Sheet**

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Ashford, CT

Description (continued):

The interior is plainly detailed and largely intact, although the original plaster ceilings and much of the walls have been finished with gypsum board; the joists of the first-floor ceiling are exposed (Photograph 6). Within the entrances is a small hall or vestibule (Photograph 7), with the rest of the interior consisting of a single large classroom on each floor. A stairway along the west wall of the hall leads to the upper classroom (Photograph 8). Original interior fabric includes wide-board floors, plain window and door surrounds, a simple dado around the walls of the first-floor classroom, one four-panel door, and beaded casings on structural members, some of which have been exposed. Furnishings include seats and school desks from the early 20th century. The building is presently used for storage.

Each half of the gable-roofed, clapboarded privy (Photograph 2) contains a bank of three lidded seats. The eastern half of the privy appears to have been added about 1900. The doors and much of the roof of the privy are missing, and as a result it is extremely decayed.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Education
Architecture

Period of Significance

1800-1875

Significant Dates

1825

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

not known

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Ashford Academy is significant as one of the community's landmark buildings and as an example of a rural academy, an important development in the educational history of Connecticut (Criterion A). Built about 1825, the Academy stands on what was once a village green serving as the town's center. Originally there were taverns and a Congregational church nearby (Photograph 5), but today only the Academy and a cemetery remain to suggest the former importance of the site. With its two-story height, belfry, and prominent quoins, the Academy is among the town's most striking historic buildings; it also appears to be the oldest public building in town and one of few old Ashford schools not substantially altered for other uses. Architecturally, the Academy embodies the distinctive characteristics of country Federal-style architecture (Criterion C). Although extremely simple, the building's details, particularly the quoins, entrance pilasters, and full cornice return, illustrate typically Federal interpretations of Georgian and Classical precedents. Despite some later modifications, the building retains its historical appearance and much of its original materials.

Historic Context

Beginning in the 1790s, people in Connecticut (and throughout America) perceived the need for greater educational opportunities than could be had in rural district schools, which typically limited themselves to teaching basic reading and calculation. The only advanced instruction previously available was tutoring in the classics from clergymen or other educated townspeople. But in the early years of the 19th century, academies were founded throughout the state, usually with a combination of public support and private subscription, to teach older children literature, science, classics, and other higher subjects. Although preparation for college was one function of the academies, it is clear from the numbers of students (often both boys and girls) that general enrichment was also an important goal. After the Civil War, small-town academies atrophied, reflecting the economic decline of rural Connecticut society. To some extent, their role was

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

- Barber, John W. Connecticut Historical Collections, New Haven, 1836.
- Lester, William. Map of New London and Windham Counties, New Haven, 1833.
- Lincoln, Allen B. A Modern History of Windham County. Chicago, 1920.
- Town of Ashford 250th Anniversary Celebration. Ashford, 1964.
- Works Progress Administration. Census of Old Buildings. Ashford folder. Manuscript, Connecticut State Library, c.1935.

See continuation sheet

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

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property Approx. 1

UTM References

A

1	8
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7	3	8	7	1	0
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4	6	3	9	4	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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Zone Easting Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description The boundary includes the Academy, privy and a small portion of the 4+ acre parcel shown as Lot 20E, Map 31, Ashford Assessor's records. The east and south boundaries are those of the parcel, the north boundary is parallel to the Academy's north wall at a distance of 25', and the west boundary is parallel to the west wall at a distance of 50'.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification The boundary includes all historic buildings and only enough land to form an appropriate setting.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Bruce Clouette, Senior Historian

organization Historic Resource Consultants date March 10, 1988

street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone 547-0268

city or town Hartford state Connecticut zip code 06106

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Statement of Significance (continued):

assumed by high schools, which by the third quarter of the 19th century were in operation in many larger towns and were available to nearby rural areas. In fact, many of the state's surviving academy buildings are part of institutions which became their town's high schools. Ashford Academy is an important representative of the development of rural academies because relatively few of its type have survived, and even more rarely, the building retains its original form, proportions, and architectural integrity.

Ashford Academy was founded about 1825 when a group of citizens raised funds toward adding a second story to a schoolhouse then under construction in the town's Fifth School District. Shares in the academy association were offered at \$25.00, later reduced to \$10.00. Only one teacher was hired per term, and some years there were no academy classes at all. The last academy session was held in 1875, though the building continued in use as a district school until 1949.

Quoins, pilasters, and formal cornices were extremely uncommon for public schools of the period, which were usually entirely utilitarian in appearance. While simple compared with the ornament on Ashford's large Federal-period houses, the Academy's architectural details indicate the building's exceptional educational purpose.

The deteriorated privy represents a humble yet significant part of the site: very few original outhouses for institutional buildings of this age are known.

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Section number _____ Photographs _____ Ashford Academy
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All photographs:

1. Ashford Academy
2. Ashford, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. Date of Photograph: February 1988
5. Negatives filed with the Connecticut Historical Commission, Hartford, CT

South and west elevation, camera facing northeast.
Photograph 1 of 8.

South and east elevations, privy at right, camera facing northwest.
Photograph 2 of 8.

West and north elevations, camera facing east.
Photograph 3 of 8.

Detail of quoins, southwest corner, camera facing northeast.
Photograph 4 of 8.

View of Ashford Green, Academy in center, facing east, from J. W. Barber, Connecticut Historical Collections, New Haven, 1836, p. 418.
Photograph 5 of 8.

Interior, first-floor classroom, camera facing south.
Photograph 6 of 8.

Interior, stairs to second floor, camera facing west.
Photograph 7 of 8.

Interior, second-floor classroom, camera facing northeast.
Photograph 8 of 8.