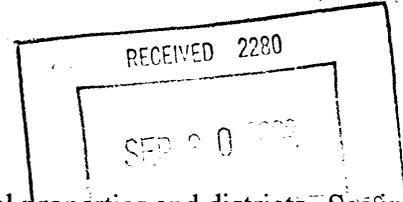


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

1344



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 The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse

other names/site number Church of Christ, The Townshend Church

2. Location

street & number \_\_\_\_\_  
not for publication n/a  
city or town Townshend vicinity n/a  
state Vermont code VT county Windham code 025  
zip code 05353

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

Suzanne Garnite National Register Specialist 9-25-02  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Vermont State Historic Preservation Office  
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/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse, Townshend, Windham Co., VT

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

Elson A Beall 11/15/02

for

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	sites
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	structures
<u>    </u>	<u>    </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)  
Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat:

Sub:

Social  
Religion  
Government

meeting hall  
religious facility  
city hall

**The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse, Townshend, Windham Co., VT**

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Religion Sub: religious facility

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Gothic Revival  
Greek Revival

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation brick  
roof slate  
walls weatherboard  
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 "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 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  
Religion  
Politics/Government

**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse, Townshend, Windham Co., VT**

Period of Significance 1790-1952

Significant Dates 1790

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

n/a

Cultural Affiliation n/a

Architect/Builder n/a

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

=====
9. Major Bibliographical 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 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: \_\_\_\_\_

=====
10. Geographical Data
=====

Acreage of Property less than one acre

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

Zone Easting Northing
18 689828 4768459

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.)

**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse, Townshend, Windham Co., VT**

=====  
11. Form Prepared By  
=====

name/title Paula Sagerman, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization n/a date June 13, 2002

street & number P.O. Box 128 telephone (802) 348-7122

city or town Williamsville state VT zip code 05362

=====  
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 The Townshend Church

street & number P.O. Box 273, 34 Common Road telephone (802) 365-4321

city or town Townshend state VT zip code 05353

=====  
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  
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Section 7 Page 1

**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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**Description**

The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse is located on the Townshend village common in Townshend, Vermont, and is considered the most prominent building in town. This sixty-foot by forty-foot two-and-half-story wood frame edifice was constructed in 1790 as a vernacular Federal-style church and meetinghouse. The front bay was added and the entire church was updated c. 1840 in the Gothic and Greek Revival styles, which it remains to this day. The building has always served as a church, and was also the location of town meetings and the town hall until 1910. It is in very good condition and is well-maintained by its current owner, The Townshend Church. The building retains its integrity of location, setting, design, workmanship, feeling, materials and association, and there are no threats to its integrity.

**Setting**

Townshend is located just north of the geographical center of Windham County and is traversed by the West River, a tributary of the Connecticut River. Generally following the West River is Vermont Route 30, which also forms the southern edge of the common. Branching off from Route 30 at the southeast corner of the common is Route 35, which also forms the eastern edge of the common. Rising above Route 35 and the north side of Route 30 are steep and rocky hills.

The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse (hereinafter called "the church") is located at the northwest corner of the common and faces east. The large grassy flat common is rectangular and has a north-south orientation. There are mature trees scattered across the lawn, as well as a 1987 reproduction gazebo constructed for the movie *Funny Farm*. A town road lines the northern and western edges of the common. Surrounding the common are intact historic resources including nineteenth-century wood frame and brick homes, a turn-of-the-century general store, and the masonry Dutton Gymnasium. The 1837 church parsonage is located just southwest of the church. The Leland & Gray High School and the Townshend Grammar School are the only non-historic resources facing the common and are not overly obtrusive.

**Exterior**

The three-bay by six-bay church has a rectangular footprint oriented east-west; a brick foundation reportedly built into ledge; a timber frame structure; clapboard walls; a slate, front-gable boxed-eave roof; an interior front tower, and a square corbeled brick interior chimney near the bottom of the north roof slope between the first and second bays of the north elevation. Architectural trim includes a pedimented front gable over four full-height equidistant pilasters, and at the front (east) and side elevations, block modillions encircle the soffits and gable rake, as well as molded raking and horizontal cornices. The rear (west) gable wall is spare in appearance, with narrow molded gable rakes and cornice returns. The two large front doorways, in the first and third bays of the east gable wall, have fluted casings and corner blocks. The remaining doors and all the windows have flat stock casings, and there are flat-stock corner boards and skirt boards. There are also narrow trim boards between the first and second story of the south elevation, and between the fifth and

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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sixth bay of the first story of the south elevation. The two-tiered thirty-foot steeple has a base, belfry, and spire.

The front gable wall has a window opening in each bay of the second story and one centered in the gable. There are regularly-spaced windows in every bay of the side elevations except the south elevation, which has a doorway in the third bay, and a window opening in the first bay of the first story of the north elevation, which has been blocked with a vertical-board door. The lower third of the window opening in the sixth bay of the first story of the south elevation has been blocked with clapboards. The first story window openings have six-over-six wood windows, the second story window openings at the side elevations have two-over-two wood windows, the second story window openings at the front gable wall have twelve-over-twelve wood windows, and the front gable has a twenty-over-twenty window. All the second story windows and front gable window have pointed-arched louvered fanlights. The two front doorways contain large six-paneled wood doors. The left door has two square lower panels, two vertical single-pane lights, and two horizontal upper panels. The right door has the same panel configuration but is not glazed. Both doors have wrought-iron Norfolk hand pulls. The doorway at the south elevation has a large wood door with three columns of paneling and a ceramic doorknob. There are lower short vertical panels and upper tall vertical panels. Spanning the front (east) gable wall are two granite steps with deep treads.

Each level of the steeple steps back from the level below. The tall square steeple base has clapboard siding, an overhanging molded cornice, and an octagonal opening in each face except the rear. The openings are blocked with flush horizontal boards. The octagonal belfry has a bracketed overhanging cornice, and vertical window openings, each with a pair of closed louvered shutters. The steep octagonal shingled spire has a low, octagonal base with a horizontal inset panel in each face. The spire is topped with a ball finial and a weathervane.

The rear elevation of the church is mostly concealed by an added wing. The only openings in this gable wall are a replacement twelve-over-twelve window in the gable and a doorway at the right end. This doorway has a wood door with three lower horizontal panels, a square single-pane light, and an upper horizontal panel. Over this doorway and also attached to the rear wing is a one-bay by one-bay shed-roofed entry porch supported by a square corner column.

The one-and-a-half-story four-bay wide rear wing has a rectangular footprint oriented east-west, a poured concrete foundation, clapboard siding, and a rear-gable asphalt-shingle boxed-eave roof. The south elevation of the wing is set back from the south elevation of the church, and the north elevation projects from the north elevation of the church. Architectural trim is limited to thin flat-stock window and door casings, corner boards, and cornices and gable rakes. At the right end of the south elevation is a doorway with a wood six-paneled door and full-length single-pane sidelights. Across the rest of this elevation are three regularly-spaced six-over-six wood windows. At the left end of the rear gable wall is a hollow-core metal door. Across the rest of this elevation are three regularly-spaced six-over-six wood windows. At the right end of the north elevation is a six-over-six wood window, and at the left end are two tiny square windows.

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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Greek Revival features of the church include the front gable orientation, pedimented gable, pilasters, fluted door casings with corner blocks, and block modillions. The front-gable orientation is also a Gothic Revival feature, as well as the pointed-arched louvered fanlights, and the tall steeple with octagonal belfry and steep spire. In general, the exterior of the church is in excellent condition, with the exception of the brick foundation, which has many loose and missing bricks, missing mortar, and some improperly repointed areas.

Interior

The church has a hand-hewn timber frame structure that is visible in the attic. This includes kingpost trusses, and unfinished half-log rafters at the common rafter roof. The interior floor plan includes a one-and-a-half story stairhall in the front bay and two stories elsewhere. In the stairhall, there are two staircases that start at the front doorways and meet at a central landing. From the central landing, there is a doorway to the church sanctuary one-half story below the sanctuary at the second story. There is an added partial partition wall at the landing at the north front door, just north of the door. This door and landing are no longer in use. There is an enclosed staircase between the south front door and the south elevation, and a room to the left of (west of) the south staircase. The ceiling of the stairhall intersects the bottom sash of the front second-story windows. The first story of the main block of the church also has several rooms that serve as the church vestry and kitchen. Spanning the west wall of the front stairhall is a narrow classroom. Behind this is a large gathering space that is at a slightly lower level than the above-mentioned rooms. In the northwest corner of the main block of the church, behind the gathering space, is a large kitchen. In the rear wing there is a dining room, bathrooms, an office, and a small gathering room.

The second story has the church sanctuary, and a choir loft at the front (east end) of the church. The choir loft is separated from the sanctuary with a half-wall, and is one-half story above the sanctuary and directly above the front stairhall. The main entry to the sanctuary is in the choir loft wall. From a landing in front of (west of) the doorway, there are two diverging staircases along the choir loft wall that lead to the floor of the sanctuary. In the northeast corner of the sanctuary, off the choir loft, is an enclosed stairway to the attic. At the southwest corner of the sanctuary is an open stairway to the first story doorway at the rear gable wall of the main block of the church. At the southeast corner of the sanctuary there is an open stairway to the first story of the front stairhall.

The front stairhall has plaster walls and ceiling and carpeted flooring and stairs. The partition at the bottom of the north staircase is made of vertical boards. All of the doors and windows have Greek Revival casings with an ovolo center flanked by fluting, and plain corner blocks. The door to the staircase next to the south front door is a Georgian-style six-panel door with an iron Norfolk door pull, the door to the room next to the south staircase is a Greek Revival four-panel door with an iron thumb latch, the door at the bottom of the north staircase that leads to the rear of the church is a Federal-style four-panel door with an iron thumb latch and an iron rim lock, the doors to the sanctuary are double-leaf Federal-style four-panel doors, and the door between the stairhall and the classroom, which is opposite the south front door, is a Federal-style four-panel door with a wood knob. The south front door and door to the enclosed staircase have iron Norfolk door pulls, and

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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the south front door has an iron sliding bolt. The doors next to the main staircases have iron thumb latches, and the door next to the north staircase has an iron rim lock.

The classroom behind (west of) the front stairhall has carpeted floors and a plaster ceiling. The east and south walls are plastered and have beadboard wainscoting, and the west and north walls have full-height beadboard paneling. There are two window openings in the west wall. The doors and window have flat-stock window and door casings. The door between the classroom and gathering space is a varnished five cross-panel door with wood knobs.

The gathering space has linoleum flooring and a plaster ceiling, and plaster walls with beadboard wainscoting except for the east wall which has full-height beadboard paneling. The doors and windows have flat-stock casings. The kitchen has linoleum flooring, plaster walls and ceiling, and flat-stock window and door casings. The rest of the first story, which is within the rear wing, has modern finishes such as carpeting, sheetrock, and acoustical-tile ceilings. On an interior wall in the dining room is a round-arched stained glass window salvaged from the 1894 Baptist Church, which stood across Route 35 from the subject church and was demolished in 1969.

The church sanctuary has carpeted floors, plaster walls with horizontal plank wainscoting, a coved plaster ceiling, and Greek Revival window and door casings with an ovolo center flanked by fluting, and plain corner blocks. Centered on the west wall is a blocked window. The pews face west and are of paneled painted wood with varnished caps and varnished scrolled armrests. The choir loft wall is faced with painted paneling composed of several rows of horizontal panels. The varnished railing above the double staircase to the sanctuary has a a molded handrail, square balusters, and round newel posts with finials. The secondary staircases (to the south end of the front stairhall and rear exterior first story door) have Eastlake-style railings with a molded handrail, turned balusters, and incised newel posts. The balusters rest on a horizontal strip of paneling. There are two varnished wood organs; one is centered in the choir loft, and the other is in the northwest corner of the sanctuary. The latter is eight feet wide, thirteen feet high, and five feet deep, except for the keyboard projection. The exterior is comprised of symmetrical groups of decorated pipes and oak casings. Colonial Revival-style lamps with marble bases, fluted shafts, and gold filigree supporting round globes, sit atop the choir loft wall. Two cast iron columns are located between the first and second bay of the church (under the steeple).

Construction Chronology

Five of the six bays (all but the front bay) of the church were constructed in 1790, although church records indicate the exterior was not "completed" (this probably means sided with clapboards) until 1795. The church most likely originally resembled the 1792 West Wardsboro Church, which is located ten miles west in the adjacent town of Wardsboro, and is considered a typical late eighteenth-century Vermont meetinghouse/church. The vernacular Federal-style West Wardsboro church remains fairly intact, except for its tower addition. It is spare in appearance, with a centered eaves-front doorway, dry-stone foundation, clapboard siding, three windows at each of the stories of the eaves-front elevation, and flat-stock window and door casings, cornerboard and cornices, gable rakes and cornice returns. This original eaves-front entry explains why the Townshend church

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
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does not face the common today. Evidence that the subject church was originally five bays wide can be seen in the seam in the clapboard on the north elevation and in the attic structure, which has a summer beam that ends at the fifth bay, and other interlocked members from the addition of the front bay. The Townshend church records indicate that early on, the addition of a front porch was voted down. However, the horizontal trim board between the first and second stories of the south elevation suggest that a porch may have once existed there. Three rows of clapboards of the West Wardsboro church have been replaced in the same location, suggesting that a porch may have once existed there also. Church records indicate that the church was originally one story, with box pews and narrow galleries on three sides, and a high, raised pulpit centered on the north wall (across from what would have been the main entrance). The south door may be original, but the ceramic knob probably dates to the early twentieth-century.

It is unknown when the sixth (east) bay was added, when the church was divided into two stories, or when the church was updated with Greek Revival and Gothic Revival features. It was probably in the 1830s or 1840s, which is when both styles were common and also when church membership increased after several decades of slow growth. It is possible the changes all occurred at the same time, and include the addition of the front bay and the reorientation of the front of the church from the south to the east, the addition of the steeple, new fenestration (the original church probably did not have as many windows), and the addition of Greek Revival ornamentation such as pilasters, modillions, fluted exterior door casings with corner blocks, interior door and window casings, and the Gothic Revival feature of pointed-arched fanlights. It is also possible the church was divided into two stories early in the nineteenth century to accommodate the separation of church and state, and the other changes took place c. 1840.

The front doors are probably original to the c. 1840 construction of the front bay, and the interior doors in the front stairhall are either original to the construction of the church (and were reinstalled in these locations after the church was expanded), or date to when the front bay was added. The staircase in the southeast corner of the front stairhall was the original staircase to the sanctuary. The six-over-six windows probably date to when the church was enlarged c. 1840, and the two-over-two windows appear to date to the late nineteenth-century. The twelve-over-twelve windows appear to be Colonial Revival replacements, dating to about the turn of the twentieth-century. However, it is not out of the question that they date to 1790.

In 1863, a church bell was installed in the belfry for the first time. Within a year it had cracked and was replaced with a new bell. The extant bell dates to 1881. The choir loft was constructed in 1883. Its original appearance is unclear as it was reportedly enlarged in 1962. The main central staircases to the sanctuary were also probably constructed in 1883, as well as the Eastlake-style railings at the other staircases to the sanctuary. In 1886, part of the first story was lowered (what is now the lower level), the chimney was constructed, and the brick foundation replaced what was probably a dry stone foundation. The east organ was probably installed when the second story was added, and the west organ was installed in 1899. The opening behind the altar at the west elevation historically had a stained glass window. It is possible this window survives behind the panel that now blocks the opening.

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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On the first story (except for the rear wing), the floor plan (including the kitchen), beadboard finishes, and varnished door date to 1910. The floor was lowered to its extant height at this time also. The door at the rear gable wall of the main block of the church probably dates to this time. The lamps on the choir loft railing may date to 1916, when the building was electrified. In 1930, the church was completely redecorated for the 140th anniversary celebration of the construction of the church. It is unclear what was undertaken, but the work reportedly restored the church to its c. 1840 appearance.

In 1960, the spire was struck by lightning. It was too damaged to repair and was replaced with a matching spire by the Racine & Tower Construction Co. of Brandon, Vermont. The historic weathervane survived and still sits atop the spire. In 1971, the rear wing to the church, called the Christian Education Wing, was constructed and the kitchen was renovated. The concrete handicap access ramp in front of the wing was constructed in 1988.

A horse shed was probably constructed in the location of the 1837 parsonage, not long after the construction of the church. These were removed to make way for the construction of the parsonage and were replaced with a long shed that stood directly behind and perpendicular to the church. This shed was replaced (or expanded) with an L-shaped shed that survived until the 1930s.

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Section 8 Page 1

**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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**Statement of Significance**

The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse is significant as an intact example of a late eighteenth-century church and meeting house. It was constructed in 1790, and updated c. 1840, and is an excellent example of a Federal-style building updated in the Greek Revival and Gothic Revival styles. The structure retains its historic integrity and is one of the oldest meetinghouses and churches in Vermont. It is also one of the oldest churches in continuous use in Vermont, and was the location of Townshend town meetings for over one hundred years. Also, its setting on the Townshend village common remains intact, and it is the most prominent landmark in town. The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse meets National Register Criterion A for its contribution to Townshend's and Vermont's governmental and religious history and meets National Register Criterion C for its architectural merit as an intact historic meetinghouse and church. It is being nominated under the Multiple Property Listing for "Religious Buildings, Sites, and Structures in Vermont," and meets the registration requirements for the church property type. The church relates to statewide themes of Historic Architecture and Patterns of Town Development, and Culture and Government. The period of significance of the First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse is 1790 - 1952, which spans the years between its construction date and the fifty-year limit for National Register eligibility.

Townshend, Vermont, is located slightly north of the geographical center of Windham County. The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse (hereinafter called "the church") is located in Townshend village at the northwest corner of the town common. Vermont Routes 30 and 35 meet at the southeast corner of the common and form the east and south borders of the common. The West River flows a few hundred yards west of the common, but is not visible from the common. Townshend has four villages: Townshend village, West Townshend village, Harmonyville, and Simpsonville. Townshend village is listed on the Vermont State Register of Historic Places.

Townshend was chartered on June 20, 1753, and was the seventh New Hampshire grant between the Green Mountains and the Connecticut River. The first proprietors, upon seeing the town, did not want to settle in such a rocky and mountainous area, but New Hampshire would not revoke the charter. The town was probably named for Charles Townshend, a member of the British ministry who was later responsible for the Townshend Act (tax on tea and other imports) which led to the Boston Tea Party.

As in many other Vermont towns, the town charter required renewal after the French and Indian War, and Townshend's was renewed in 1762. The 1762 proprietors were from Sutton, Upton and Uxbridge, Massachusetts, and settlers started to arrive around 1761, but did not settle permanently until 1764, when Joseph Tyler arrived. He became the first town clerk. The first meetings of the proprietors were held in Massachusetts until 1771, the first year that town meeting was held in Townshend. Townshend was the only town on the east side of the Green Mountains to be represented at the Dorset convention of 1776, which was convened to discuss the possibility of Vermont becoming an independent republic. West Townshend, which is located about four miles west of Townshend village, was actually settled first. After the church was constructed in 1790,

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**First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont**

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settlement concentrated around the common. Townshend village became the economic, political, religious and social center of town by the early nineteenth-century.

The Congregational Church was established in Vermont in Bennington in 1762, and the first Congregational meetinghouse was constructed there in 1766. The Congregational Church was founded in Townshend in 1777, under the name Church of Christ. It is possible it was founded this year because it was the same year that Vermont became an independent republic, and when a new law was enacted that allowed towns to tax its citizens to support the church of the first settled minister. It was the seventeenth Congregational Church society established in Vermont. The first Congregational Church edifice in Townshend was a 1777 log building on the Joy Brook about three-quarters of a mile from the common on the West River road (now Route 30), and the first minister was Rev. Nicholas Dudley.

At a town meeting in 1788, it was voted "to build a meeting house." The building committee was Samuel Fletcher, Samuel Wiswall, Joshua Wood, Joseph Tyler, Josiah Fish, Harry Chase, and Ebenezer Taft. The meeting house was to be fifty feet by forty feet and built in the "crotch" in the road (this probably means at the southeast corner of the common where Routes 30 and 35 diverge). Construction began in 1790, and it is likely the church was in use by this year. The church was built to these dimensions but was located at the northwest corner of the common instead of the southeast corner. This church remains in the same location. It was large for an eighteenth-century Vermont meetinghouse, but as the population of Townshend was 676 in 1791, this is not so unusual. Lumber would have come from the local sawmill, which was established in 1782.

The church was probably originally a spare vernacular Federal-style church similar to the West Wardsboro Church, ten miles to the west in Wardsboro. They were both originally one story (the subject church was always the extant height though) and had a sanctuary at grade surrounded on three sides by galleries. They both originally had eaves-front orientations with centered doorways. The subject church also originally did not have what is now the front (east) bay or the steeple; the original entrance is probably what is now the south entrance. The church originally had box pews, which was common for a church of this time period. Pew No. 1 was town property and served as the "ministerial pew." Later, one tier of pews was added to the gallery. A high, raised pulpit, similar to the one at the Rockingham Meetinghouse (a National Historic Landmark), was located on the center of the north wall.

The appearance and layout of the 1791 version of the First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse, the West Wardsboro church, and the Rockingham Meetinghouse was the common church/meetinghouse type in Vermont until the turn of the nineteenth-century. These buildings were modeled on churches and meetinghouses of Massachusetts and Connecticut, which were the home states of the early settlers of southeastern Vermont. The one-story plan accommodated both secular and religious purposes.

Although use of the church began in 1790 or 1791, it is possible that the exterior of the church was not sided for a few more years due to lack of funds. The church was reorganized in 1792, but at this point there were only twenty members. Growth remained slow and few members joined over

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the next decade. In 1795, the pews were sold to the highest bidders to raise funds to pay to "complete" the exterior of the church.

Starting in 1801, a Vermont law was passed allowing townspeople to be excused from paying the church tax by declaring under oath, "I do not agree in religious opinion with the majority of the inhabitants of the town." In 1807, a law was passed prohibiting the local church tax. This essentially was the separation of church and state.

Starting in 1803, Ephraim Wheelock began leasing the common to the town, under the agreement that for "as long as the town shall maintain the church which stands thereon." At this point, the common was described as "a rough, rocky piece of wild land that an ox cart could not be drawn across it without being capsized." According to Childs in 1883, the common had been transformed into a "beautiful level green, shaded by handsome maples."

In the early nineteenth-century, the church fell on difficult times, without a regular minister and few parishioners. According to Rev. Philetus Clark in 1821, there were only forty-two members of the congregation and "the religious community was composed of the good, the bad, and the indifferent." However, Sunday school began at the meetinghouse in 1822 after four years of being held in private homes.

In 1832, the name of the church was changed from Church of Christ to First Congregationalist Society. The difficult times the church experienced ended in 1833, when Rev. Horatio Graves began his fifteen-year pastorate. He attracted numerous new members, and it was decided to build a parsonage behind the church. This parsonage was built in the location of horse sheds and was finished in 1837. For several decades, the parsonage was also used as a chapel. Eventually the parsonage required extensive repairs to maintain both purposes. Instead of undertaking the repairs, in 1887, the church chose to move the Stoddard law office to a location just south of the parsonage and convert it to a chapel. The parsonage remains in this location and appears to be individually eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Other churches that were established in Townshend include the First Baptist Church, the First Restorationist Church, the Second Baptist Church, and the Universalist Church. The Universalist Church reportedly held services at the subject church for forty years, but it is not known when that time span occurred. It probably began in 1790, as the Congregational Church was the only church building in town until 1817, which is when the West Townshend Meetinghouse was constructed in 1817, also as the First Baptist Church. This church was replaced by the Second Baptist Church, which was established in 1827. The Baptists built a church on the east side of the common in 1837 next to the 1835 Baptist Seminary, also known as the Leland Classical and English School. These buildings both burned in a fire in 1894 and were replaced in 1895.

The church was enlarged and updated in the Greek Revival and Gothic Revival styles around 1840. The front bay was added, reorienting the church from the south to the east, the steeple was added, and the intermediary story was added on the interior. Greek Revival features such as a pedimented gable, pilasters, block modillions, and fluted door casings with corner blocks, were added, as well as

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the Gothic Revival feature of pointed-arched louvered fanlights. The first story was used mostly as a town hall, and the second story became the sanctuary. After 1807, when the church tax was abolished, many other early one-story meetinghouses in Vermont had intermediary stories installed at the gallery level to conform with the separation of church and state. The c. 1840 version of the First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse incorporated the typical features of Vermont churches constructed after the turn of the nineteenth-century: front-gable orientation, front interior tower, and second-story sanctuary with pews facing the rear gable wall where the pulpit is located.

It is unknown exactly why the church was enlarged and updated c. 1840, but it was probably due to a combination of factors. The church was improved during a period of great religious fervor in Vermont, the 1820s to the 1840s. The Rev. Horatio Graves clearly attracted numerous new members during his pastorate (1833-1848). Either the new version of the building attracted the new members, or the new members were able to raise the funds to improve the building. Also, the 1820s and 1830s were a prosperous era for Townshend due to the sheep raising period of Vermont's agricultural history, and Townshend's highest population occurred in 1820 and 1830. The mills in Townshend were also very productive at this time.

In 1849, the church protested slavery by passing a resolution "to go down to future generations as a protest against this crying evil." In 1856, the name of the church was changed to "First Orthodox Congregational Church of Townshend," and a new constitution and bylaws were enacted. In 1898, the Dorcas Guild was formed, which was a ladies group that raised money for improvements to the church and church supplies. In 1948, the Dorcas Guild united with the Hadassah League of the Baptist Church to form the "Ladies Church Circle."

The church appears to have prospered since the building was enlarged c. 1840, as several improvements have been undertaken in addition to regular maintenance of the building. In 1863, a church bell was installed for the first time. Within a year it had cracked and was replaced with a new bell, and the extant bell dates to 1881. In 1883, the extant choir loft was constructed, and was enlarged in 1962. In 1886, the chimney was built, and the original foundation (probably dry stone) was replaced with the extant brick foundation. In 1899, the c. 1840 organ was supplemented with a larger organ; both survive. Townshend's continued agricultural and industrial prosperity, in addition to the 1880 establishment of a local railroad depot, ensured that members could raise the funds to maintain and improve the church. In 1930, the church was completely redecorated for the 140th anniversary celebration of the construction of the church. It is unclear what was undertaken, but the work reportedly restored the exterior and sanctuary of the church to its c. 1840s appearance.

By 1905, the church determined that the chapel (former law office) no longer suited its purposes. In 1908, the church purchased the "town hall" section of the building (most of the first story) in order to move chapel and vestry uses into the church building, but the town continued using the space until 1910. The purchase was funded by the sale of the chapel and money raised by the Dorcas Guild and Hadassah League. It is unknown what became of the chapel. In 1910, the first Townshend town hall was constructed near the southeast corner of the common.

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In 1924, the "Federated Church" was formed between the Townshend Congregationalists and Baptists. Both church buildings remained in use and services alternated between the churches, with the same minister. The first minister of the Federated Church was Rev. Henry P. Simpson. In 1950, the church was renamed "The Townshend Church." In 1969, the Baptist Church and Seminary were demolished to make way for the Leland and Gray Union High School.

More recent events and changes to the church include the replacement of the spire in 1960, after it was struck by lightning. It was immediately replaced with a reproduction of the original and was constructed and installed by the Racine & Tower Construction Co. of Brandon, Vermont. In 1971, the rear section of the church, the Christian Education Wing, was constructed. A stained glass window salvaged from the Baptist Church was installed on an interior wall of the addition. In 1987, the first story of the church was used by the crew and cast of the movie *Funny Farm*.

The church is an excellent example of an early Vermont meeting house and church and retains all of its significant historic features. Significant exterior architectural features of the church include the front-gable orientation, clapboard siding, slate roof, pilasters, pointed-arched louvered fanlights, regularly-spaced historic windows, modillioned cornices, fluted door casings with corner blocks, paneled doors, and two-tiered tower with octagonal cupola and steep spire. Significant interior features include the intact sanctuary and front stairhall, Greek Revival door and window casings, early nineteenth-century iron door hardware, paneled choir loft, organs, historic pews, plaster walls and ceilings, and beadboard wall finishes at the first story.

In 1940, Mrs. Clifford Smith, wife of a former pastor, wrote, "I have just been looking at a picture of the church building. I think it well represents the character of the Vermont natives in its rugged simplicity and stability and its position in the heart of the town and yet standing by itself in quiet dignity. It is a symbol of what a religious shrine should be." This description is still applicable to this day. The church has no potential threats to its integrity and should remain a significant Townshend landmark into the distant future.

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**Personal interviews**

Chamberlin, Virginia. June 11, 2002.

Holt, Marge. June 11, 2002.

McCarthy, Frank. March 6, 2002.

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**Boundary Description**

The First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse is located within Townshend tax parcel 09-113 (Sheet 9, Parcel 113), but the boundary is smaller than the parcel boundary because there is another structure on the property that is not included in this National Register nomination. The church setting includes the lawns to the east, north and west, and a strip of lawn to the south. The church setting is bounded on the south by the town road that traverses the common, on the east by Vermont Route 35, and on the north and west by the edge of woods.

Beginning at a point where the town road that runs south of and parallel to the church meets Route 35, proceed west along the north edge of the town road for 200'. Then proceed north 120' to the edge of the woods north of the church. Then proceed east 200' along the edge of the woods until the west edge of Route 35. Then proceed south along the west edge of Route 35 to the point of origin.

**Boundary Justification**

The extant boundaries are also the historic boundaries of the church and its setting. The lawns to the east, north and west of the church, and town road south of the church, are its current and historic setting. This boundary is sufficient to convey the historic significance of the First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse.

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The following is the same for all photographs:  
First Congregational Church and Meetinghouse  
Townshend, Windham County, Vermont  
Photographs by Paula Sagerman, May 2002  
Negatives on file at the Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Photograph #1  
Facing north across Townshend village common toward church

Photograph #2  
Facing northwest toward church

Photograph #3  
Facing southwest toward church

Photograph #4  
Facing west toward front gable wall of church

Photograph #5  
Facing northwest toward steeple

Photograph #6  
Facing southeast toward rear wing

Photograph #7  
Facing southeast in sanctuary