

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: New Hampshire	
COUNTY: Rockingham	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 71.9.33.0006	DATE 9/10/71

**1. NAME**

COMMON:  
The Congregational Church (United Church of Christ)

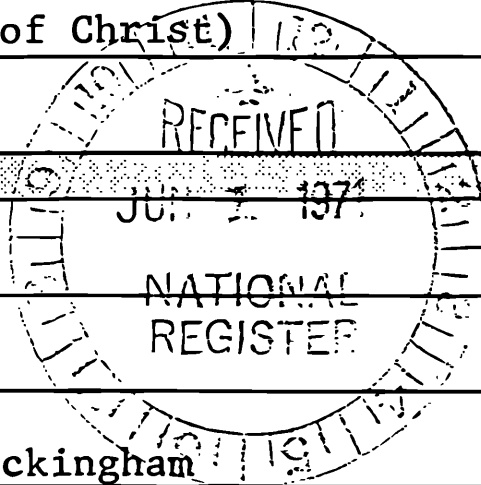
AND/OR HISTORIC:  
The First Church

**2. LOCATION**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
21 Front Street

CITY OR TOWN:  
Exeter

STATE: New Hampshire      CODE: 33      COUNTY: Rockingham      CODE: 015



**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress
PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)			
<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ <input type="checkbox"/> Comments _____

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
The Congregational Church (United Church of Christ) in Exeter, N. H.

STREET AND NUMBER:  
21 Front Street

CITY OR TOWN: Exeter      STATE: New Hampshire      CODE: 33

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
Rockingham County Registry of Deeds

STREET AND NUMBER:  
Hampton Road

CITY OR TOWN: Exeter      STATE: New Hampshire      CODE: 33

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:

DATE OF SURVEY:       Federal     State     County     Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:      STATE:      CODE:

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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ENTRY NUMBER: 71.9.33.0006  
DATE: 9/10/71

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The present Congregational Church is the fifth meetinghouse built by the townspeople, the third on this site. It was started in 1798 and took three years to complete at a cost exceeding 10,000 pounds. Ebenezer Clifford, probably with the help of Bradbury Johnson, was the architect. Unfortunately, the church records for building this structure are sketchy. There is a record that Ebenezer Clifford was paid 30 pounds, 15 shillings, 6 pence.

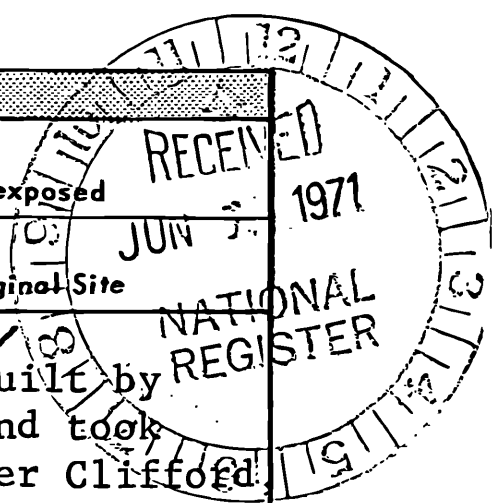
Except for a two-story addition to the rear of the church in 1930 and the addition of an elevator in 1961, the exterior of the church remains much the same. It probably was not painted at first except around the windows. Later it received a coat of white paint in the 1830's, followed by two shades of tan. It was not until 1940 that it again became white.

Mr. Clifford, independent of others, began to change the meetinghouse design to that of a church. The long axis is parallel to the street, as in a typical meetinghouse. The entrance, still on the long side, is much more elaborate than that of the earlier ones. There is a projecting two-story bay with three doors below and three windows above, and windows on either side. Over this rises the tower, with an octagonal belfry, lantern and dome.

Another unusual feature is the hip roof, which dates back to the days of the square meetinghouse. There is a cornice between the upper and lower tiers of windows like that at the eaves, across the front and rear of the building. Pilasters adorn the porch and corners of the building. The one Palladian window is the pulpit window at the rear of the building--still opposite the main entrance as it used to be, but now raised to the second floor of the addition.

The town placed a clock with four faces in the tower in 1848. The face of this clock was large and was changed in 1950 when William Dudley redesigned it. In 1956 a new electric clock was installed. In 1962 the false face of the clock on the rear of the tower was removed.

Dr. William G. Perry's Exeter in 1830 gives a vivid picture of the interior of the building. "The outside entrance of the building was the same as now. Two doors led from the vestibule directly into the audience room. From each door an aisle ran to the side of the pulpit, which faces the double row of slips that occupied the middle of the room. From the main aisle two other aisles branched off at right angles, then turned parallel, running between the square wall pews and an inner row. These square pews (of the inner row) were extra large.... Square pews often had extra chairs in them. A good, broad gallery extended along three sides. It was reached by flights of stairs leading from the vestibule. The pulpit was high. The room was very high, and consequently cold, and the windows rattled well on windy days. There were two not very large cast iron box-stoves near the pulpit; the funnels ran above the aisle, turned near the singer's gallery, and united in a large smokepipe that connected with the outside air.... The pews in the meetinghouse were made of perfectly clear pine and panelled. I think they were unpainted. The gallery, pulpit



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

## Continuation Sheet

### 7. Description (cont.)

and the window casings were painted white. The room with its correct proportions, its fine panelling, and its lofty ceiling was worth seeing...."

In 1838, the parishioners decided to remodel. All the square box pews were removed and the room was partitioned into two floors. The upper floor became the sanctuary with the pulpit at the west end. The original pulpit window was covered over on the inside. The lower floor was to be used as "lecture rooms." Today you may still note on the panelling on the first floor where the pews were attached. The sounding board which hung over the pulpit now hangs in the first floor hallway. The pulpit window was carefully raised to the second floor level when the addition was built to the rear of the church in 1930. This serves as a kitchen downstairs and a small meeting room above. In 1961 an elevator was installed on the eastern side of this addition.

**SIGNIFICANCE**

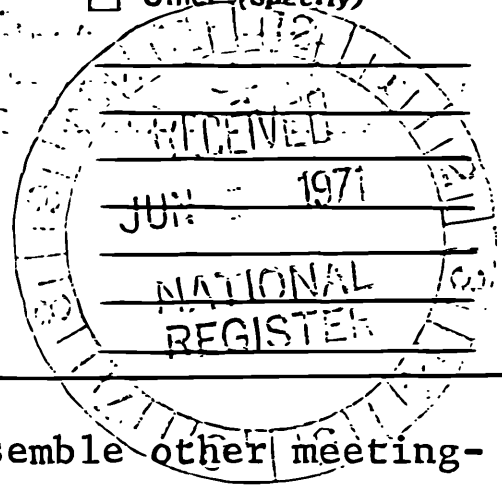
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Pre-Columbian	<input type="checkbox"/> 16th Century	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 18th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 20th Century
<input type="checkbox"/> 15th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 17th Century	<input type="checkbox"/> 19th Century	

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

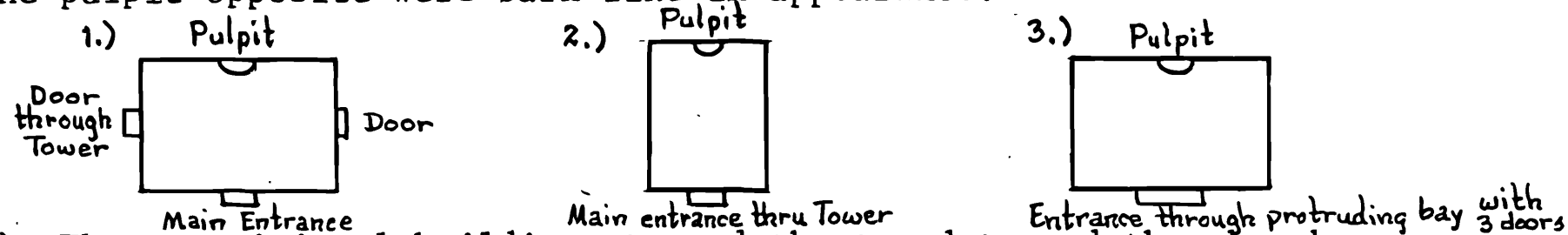
<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Political	<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning
<input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian	
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater	
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Music		
<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation			



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

This building is unusual because it does not resemble other meetinghouses built during this transitional period.

1) The early meetinghouses with their long axis parallel to the street, tower if present at one end, main door in the middle of the long side with the pulpit opposite were barn-like in appearance.



2) The transitional building started the trend toward the church as we know it today, with the main entrance through the tower.

3) Mr. Clifford designed his meetinghouse with the only entrance on the long side, through a protruding bay which was surmounted by a tower, belfry, lantern and dome. No meetinghouse in New Hampshire before 1798 possessed a hip roof. The source of Clifford's ideas is not known, but he was the first master-builder to apply Georgian patterns to a New Hampshire meetinghouse. Another interesting difference is that the only entrance was through the three doors in the bay.

The meetinghouse was a place for secular as well as religious gatherings. In the 1830's, the building was host to important trials, the most famous being the Cilley will case when Daniel Webster and Jeremiah Mason were opposing counsel. For its last great secular gathering, Daniel Webster was again present, presiding over the 50th anniversary celebration of Dr. Benjamin Abbot's service as principal of the Academy. There was a great crowd (the meetinghouse was built to hold 800 people) as well as notables of the day. The meetinghouse, whose pulpit and pews had just been removed, was the only place large enough to contain such a gathering.

The 1798 meetinghouse is the present-day representative of the church organized in 1639 by John Wheelwright who founded the town.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Bell, Charles H. History of Exeter. Boston: J.E. Farwell & Co. 1888.  
 Hazlett, Charles A. History of Rockingham County. Chicago, Ill.: Richmond-Arnold Publishing Co., 1915.  
 Perry, John T. The First Church in Exeter, N.H. Exeter, N.H.: The News Letter Press, 1898.  
 Perry, William G. Exeter in 1830. Exeter, N.H.: The News Letter Press, 1913.  
 Sinnott, Edmund W. Meetinghouse and Church in Early New England. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1963.  
 Speare, Eva A. Colonial Meeting Houses of New Hampshire. Littleton, N.H.: Courier Printing Co., 1938.

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	0 ' "	0 ' "		42 ° 58 ' 47 "	70 ° 56 ' 49 "	
NE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SE	0 ' "	0 ' "				
SW	0 ' "	0 ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY:

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
 Nancy C. Merrill, Church Historian

ORGANIZATION: The Congregational Church      DATE: 1/21/71

STREET AND NUMBER:  
 21 Front Street

CITY OR TOWN: Exeter      STATE: New Hampshire      CODE: 33

**12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National  State  Local

Name: George Gilman  
 Title: Commissioner  
 Date: 4/30/71

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

Walter A. Conrath  
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
 SEP 10 1971  
 Date: \_\_\_\_\_

ATTEST:  
William J. [Signature]  
 Keeper of The National Register  
 Date: JUN 23 1971

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1971 JUN 23 10 17 AM '71