National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

code

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

1. Name

historic

Meeting House Hill Historic District and or common

2. Location

street & number	See continuation sheet for Section 4	N/A not for publication
street & number		"' <u>"</u> not for publication

09

Guilford city, town

N/A

N/A vicinity of

Connecticut state

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
X district	public	X occupied	agriculture	museum
building(s)	private	unoccupied	commercial	<u> </u>
structure	<u>X</u> both	work in progress	educational	X private residence
site ii/	A Public Acquisition	Açcessible	entertainment	<u> X religious</u>
object	in process	<u>X</u> yes: restricted	government	scientific
	being considered	yes: unrestricted	industrial	transportation
		`no	military	X other: cemetery

county

New Haven

Owner of Property 4.

name

Multiple ownership - see continuation sheet

street & number

city, t	own		V	vicinity of			state			
5.	Location	of Lega	al Des	crip	tion					
court	nouse, registry of deed	ls, etc. Gu	ilford To	own Hall	(Town	Clerk's	Office)		
street	& number 3	l Park Stree	t							
city, te	own G	uilford					state	Conne	ecticut	
6.	Represer	tation	in Exi	sting	g Sur	veys				
title	State Register (see continuati			has this	property t	een deter	mined eli	gible?	yes	<u>Хпо</u>
date	1987					_ federal	_X state	e c	ounty	local
depos	itory for survey record	is Connect	icut Hist	torical	Commiss	ion, 59	S. Pros	spect S	Street	
city, t	own Hartfo	rd					state	Conne	ecticut	

OMB No. 1024-0018 Expires 10-31-87

For NPS use only NOV 1 3 1987 received date entered DEC 14 10.7

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code

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Meeting House Hill in North Guilford is a commanding site about six miles from town in a still rural part of Guilford (Map 2). Farmed until modern times, North Guilford today is still little developed, and although its farms are disappearing, much of the land is held by the old families, and the memory of an agricultural past is still visible in the open landscape. The historic district is on the crown of the hill and comprises the North Guilford Green and Cemetery, Ledge Hill Road, the Congregational Church, parsonage, and parish hall, and St. John's Episcopal Church and former rectory. The churches and their dependencies stand alone on the height (Map 3).

The buildings lie roughly in line along Ledge Hill Road, and the cemetery is a tilted field sweeping steeply down in front of them. Downhill to the north and east is the North Guilford School, and downhill to the south are woods, a private house, and, at the bottom, the former Episcopal rectory. Wilbur's Lane Extension is only a cart track, barely noticeable to the passer-by. Ledge Hill Road is narrow and shaded, scaled to a rural landscape.

All properties in the historic district are contributing except the two outbuildings in #7.

- The Green and Cemetery (Photo 1). 3.5 acres. Date of Green probably 1705 when North Guilford was surveyed. Cemetery site probably designated in 1719 when land was allotted for first meeting house, which it adjoined; earliest stones 1730s. The oldest section, the "Old Yard," is to the left of the entrance. A fieldstone wall bounds the cemetery. Built in 1927, it replaced a post-and-rail fence. (Note 1, Item 8)
- 2. Ledge Hill Road (Photo 3). Traveled way 12'-14'. Date pre-1719 when the town granted the settlers liberty to build a meeting house "in the highway." Ledge Hill Road was the main road from Guilford until 1876-77 when, amid great controversy, Long Hill Road was extended to join Great Hill, by-passing the hilltop. Later the lower end was closed and the present spur cut through to Long Hill; the bridge was built in the Depression as part of a WPA project that gave North Guilford a distinctive group of "rustic" stone bridges designed to enhance the character of its small country roads. Most are now threatened with replacement.
- 3. <u>North Guilford Congregational Church</u> (Photos 1,2,4,5). 1812-14, Federal style; Architectbuilder, Abraham Coan. Chancel added and interior remodeled 1855, probably using (in part) a plan bought from Henry Austin; builders, Norton and Spencer. Rear addition for parish activities, 1957; Architect, Henry Straub Kelly.

Traditional square Congregational plan (see Item 8, last page). Pitched roof, gable to street; base of steeple broadened to form a shallow pavilion in the Bulfinch-Benjamin manner. Tower (balustrade now missing) topped by a cupola, again following Bulfinch. Notable ornamental features are the Palladian window, main cornice with mutules, paneled corner pilasters, and triple doors, the central one carved with triglyphs and rosettes more Bostonian than Greek. Vinyl siding on side walls. Windows original but with aluminum sash added in 1964.

Interior, while dominated by chancel arch of 1855 (probably Austin's design), retains much early work as well as the clear, evenly lit, open space characteristic of Congregational worship. Stamped tin ceiling, slightly bowed, covers original plaster vault.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Meeting House Hill Historic District, Guilford, CT

Section number ____4 Page ___1

Owner of Property Continued

Property Address	Assessor's Map/Lot #	Owner and Mailing Address
50 Ledge Hill Road	108/28	Jameson S. & Katherine N. Lwebuga-Mukasa 50 Ledge Hill Road Guilford, CT 06437
129 Ledge Hill Road	109/13	St. John's Episcopal Church 129 Ledge Hill Road Guilford, CT 06437
145 Ledge Hill Road	109/12	North Guilford Congregational Church 159 Ledge Hill Road Guilford, CT 06437
159 Ledge Hill Road	109/12	North Guilford Congregational Church Guilford, CT 06437
169 Ledge Hill Road	109/12	North Guilford Congregational Church 159 Ledge Hill Road Guilford, CT 06437
Ledge Hill Road (North Guilford Cemetery)	109/15	North Guilford Cemetery Association c/o Oliver Scranton, Jr., Sexton 3120 Durham Road Guilford, CT 06437
Ledge Hill Road	108; 109/NA	Town of Guilford, CT Guilford Town Hall 31 Park Street Guilford, CT 06437

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Meeting House Hill Historic District

Section number <u>6</u> Page <u>1</u>

Survey of the Historic Architecture of Guilford, Connecticut, Guilford Preservation Alliance, 1981-82.

Depository: Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, CT.

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Meeting House Hill Historic District

Section number ____7 Page ___1

4. <u>St. John's Episcopal Church</u> (Photos 2,3,9,10). 1812-14, Federal style, mixing classical and Gothic Revival details. Interior remodeled and chancel, sacristy, and vestry added 1870. Belfry replaced, c1920. Rear addition for parish activities, 1972; Architect, E. Carleton Granbery.

Narrow longitudinal plan with pitched roof, gable to street. Deeply projecting tower rising straight from ground, and deep chancel at east end (see plan, Item 8, last page). Single entrance with paneled pilasters and broken pediment. Delicate cornices with dentils and, on the tower, drilled holes in a running design of festoons, all typical of Federal pattern-book work. Tall Gothic windows, the gothicized Palladian window and lunette in the tower being unusual touches. Mullions of side windows 1870, others original. Unobtrusive storm panels of plexiglass.

Inside, much original work remains, including plaster barrel vault with level ceilings over the aisles supported on full-height columns of solid oak showing plane marks and extended into the roof space to support the purlins. A second pair, now removed, stood between these and the chancel, supporting side galleries.

- 5. <u>Congregational Parsonage</u> (Photos 7,8). 1823, Federal style. Two stories with pitched roof, gable facing street with elliptical window; 3-bay facade, windows asymmetrically spaced; main cornice forming a pediment, with mutules emulating the church. Entry porch with unfluted columns and broken pediment, cornice with mutules like those above, and leaded fanlight. 6/6 sash. Wing to south with 12/12 sash. Vinyl siding and aluminum storms. Inside, in a very small front parlor, an oversized mantelpiece, cornice, and door and window heads of astonishing sumptuousness, the rest of the house perfectly plain. Barn out back, 19th century.
- 6. Congregational Parish Hall, now a nursery school (Photo 6). 1887-88, Victorian Gothic; builder, Eugene Hill. One story with high roof. Entrance pavilion forming cross-gable with ornamental bracing; a smaller pavilion on the south, originally housing a stage. Powerful doorway with pilasters on pedestals and diamond bosses on the entablature blocks which support a thin, sharp pediment. On the roof, curvaceous turret with finial and elaborate brackets; composition roofing. 6/6 sash; aluminum storms. Clapboards appear original. Interior remodeled.
- 7. Episcopal Rectory, now a private house (Photo 11). 1851, Greek Revival. Two stories, pitched roof, gable to street; 4-bay facade with cornice forming a pediment. Rectangular gable window and substantial Doric doorway distinguished by deeply channeled pilasters with central groove. Woodshed and small cabin at rear of lot, post-World War II (non-contributing).

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 X1800–1899 1900–1927	agriculture	 _ community planning _ conservation _ economics _ education 	Iandscape architectur Iaw Iterature	re X. religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1812-1888	Builder/Architect G	ee Item 7	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

<u>Criterion A.</u> Meeting House Hill is significant as the center for over 250 years of the religious, civic, and cultural life of a small farming community in the rural backwaters of New England. The building of the two churches side by side on the common green in 1812 reflects a critical moment in Connecticut history, when the ancient hostility between Nonconformists and Anglicans was moving toward toleration, soon to be formalized in the state constitution of 1818.

<u>Criterion C.</u> Architecturally the complex is significant as: 1) An example of the movement toward designed layouts and civic architectural statements that bloomed in America after the Revolution. North Guilford is interesting in showing how these urban concepts were carried out in a rural context. 2) Individually each of the churches is among the twenty-five or so outstanding Federal churches now remaining in Connecticut; each is also an advanced design of its time, the Congregational church being among the first to take up the new Bulfinch-Benjamin meeting house formula, and St. John's being among the first to take up the Gothic arch, which soon would become the trademark of Episcopalianism. 3) Both buildings may be associated with Guilford's first known architect and builder, Abraham Coan, and they provide valuable glimpses of the exposure a country builder might have had to new architectural ideas in the Federal period. In addition, the remodeling of the Congregational church in 1855 provides an example of what was probably a substantial part of the bread-and-butter practice of Henry Austin and other provincial architects, namely the sale of plans (often site unseen) for execution by rural builders.

History

North Guilford was not settled until long after Guilford. It was first divided in 1705, and, as the Guilford historian Bernard Steiner records, "Soon after this, men were accustomed to go up from the First Society on Monday of each week to clear their lands and to return on Saturday. From the circumstance of their dwelling together through the week, the place began to be called Cohabit, a name which it long retained." Farms were widely scattered and the population thin, as they have remained to this day. Nevertheless, barely ten years later the "North farmers of Guilford" petitioned for a minister, and in 1717 land was allotted to them for a meeting house. A green had been reserved as common land from the start, and in 1728-29 the town voted that "the land left for a green in Cohabitation shall not be lessened nor the highway or square where the North Guilford Church is." This was unusually farsighted for the time. (Note 1)

The green served many purposes. It was both a common on which cattle grazed and a burying ground. It was also not only the religious center of community life but its civic and cultural center. Four years after the meeting house was built, a school was built beside it; a public library is mentioned by 1760 in a nearby house; and in 1831 an "academy" was established across the street from the present church. The meeting house, the academy, and later the parish hall provided space for many

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

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Chief of Registration

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Meeting House Hill Historic District

Section number ____8 Page ___1

civic activities, including by the end of the 19th century that key organization in a rural society, the Grange. They also gave space for social events (barring dancing and cards) and political meetings. The latter, however, became so heated and unseemly in the abolitionist period that in 1844 the Society forbade future political gatherings in the meeting house.

In 1747 a group of families separated from the North Guilford Society and "declared for the Church" (i.e., the Church of England), and within three years it appears that they had built a building, the first St. John's Church, its location south of Meeting House Hill being remembered today in the name of Church Road. The distinction between the words "meeting house" and "church," so loaded with meaning to the 17th and 18th centuries, is clearly stated here.

It seems surprising that an Anglican congregation, then still an aberration in Puritan Connecticut, should materialize in such an out-of-the way place, but Steiner suggests what is probably the right answer. Samuel Johnson, leader and early organizer of the Church of England in New England, was Guilford-born and Guilford-raised. He had family ties in town and kept in touch with Guilford affairs, his brother Nathaniel becoming the center of a Church of England nucleus in Guilford. In North Guilford it was Samuel's brother-in-law, George Bartlett, who seems to have been the prime mover.

Hostility between the two religious organizations developed almost at once, as revealed in 1751 by the Congregationalists' vote to "make application to the General Assembly ... for their help and assistance under our present difficulties, that we are under, with regard to our neighbors that call themselves Conformists to the Church of England, from whom we have begun to distrain rates, which hath been attended with the effusion of so much blood, that we cannot find any Collectors that will undertake to gather any more." Evidently the North Guilford Conformists were already out front in the struggle to free their church from the burden of supporting Congregationalism as the state religion of Connecticut, a struggle not finally resolved until the early 19th century.

Hostility reached a climax during the Revolution when Anglicans were generally suspected of Loyalist sympathies, but with remarkable speed after the war and after the Anglicans' break with the Mother church in England in order to form the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States, peace seems to have been restored. In 1812 both North Guilford congregations decided almost simultaneously to build new buildings, and the Episcopalians voted "to have a paper to carry to the inhabitants of the old Society in North Guilford to See if they are willing that we Should build a Church on their Meeting house hill."

The exchange is revealing, both request and consent suggesting that a plan had already germinated and that a conception of a common center of public life had been envisioned, and both are indicative of a new civic consciousness, a new drive to pool common energies in order to make a statement celebrating the identity of the community. Such concerted action by separate bodies, and especially by rival churches, was not common in the young Republic. That it was achieved here, despite former hostility and slim resources, should be read as an indication of its seriousness of purpose. Meeting House Hill is more than mere outdoor decoration, it is a community affirmation.

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Architecture

Possibly the precedent was the nearby building of the churches at New Haven and the admission there by the Congregationalists of the Episcopalians to "their" green for the sake of achieving a major architectural design, but this is problematical as both projects took place at the same time. Accordingly, we must probably see the North Guilford composition as the product of shared ideas and as a rural echo of the wave of civic aspiration and creative urban planning that swept New Haven and other American cities in the Federal period. Among the country hamlets of Connecticut it is outstanding, the adroit use of the site, in lieu of dollars, to obtain a dramatic effect being noteworthy. As noted in the Guilford Survey: "Standing high on their hilltop overlooking the steep fields and long distances of the North Guilford countryside, these two small buildings achieve a miniature monumentality that is moving and impressive."

Individually the two churches are distinguished by the delicately linear ornament characteristic of the Federal style, and although unmistakably "country," they are enhanced with deft touches (cornices, Palladian windows, door surrounds) that give them elegance. Such work was expensive and it offers still another sign of the importance attached to this community gesture.

Both buildings also show a surprising awareness of the new architectural currents of their time:

<u>The Congregational Church</u> is one of the progeny of Bulfinch's revolutionary meeting house design built c1790 and popularized by Asher Benjamin. Although by 1812, when the North Guilford buildings were begun, it had already made its way into Connecticut, it was still rare. North Guilford, in fact, is one of the first six or eight known to have appeared in the state, and it anticipates the great architectural flowering of the Congregational style in Connecticut that would mark the next three decades.

The architect and builder was named Abraham Coan (locally pronounced Coe-ann), who is the earliest Guilford builder known today and also Guilford's only known architect until modern times. His existence has been virtually unknown to writers about Guilford architecture, and research is still in progress. (Note 1)

Abraham Coan was a substantial citizen-a justice, a burgess of the Borough, a warden of Christ Church, and a captain in the militia. His works include the North Branford Episcopal church, a number of houses in town, and possibly Christ Church. He operated a joiner's shop, and many a doorway or window head visible today in Clinton, Madison, and Guilford may show his hand. His own house, which is still standing at 29 Broad Street, shows an awareness (surprising in provincial Guilford) of the most advanced work then going on in New Haven, its flushboarding and blind arcades clearly derived from the house designed only a few years earlier by the English architect Peter Banner for Yale's president, Timothy Dwight. Such unexpected sophistication suggests that Coan's horizon may have been wider than that of the usual country carpenter of the period.

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Working as an itinerant builder, as was the custom, he may have had firsthand knowledge of the important Connecticut buildings of his day and may have learned his trade from such men as Banner and David Hoadley. Unfortunately, in the stiffly conservative climate of the shoreline towns, he had little opportunity to use what he had learned, but his own house shows what he might have bequeathed to the future had Guilford patronage been less inhospitable to innovation. North Guilford luckily was more liberal than its parent.

<u>St. John's</u> is an equally advanced design and a more significant building than its modest appearance suggests, for it is an early example of the beginnings of an Episcopalian style in Connecticut, marked by the verticality of the tower and the pointed windows (notice especially the Gothicizing of the Palladian window). So far no record has been found of the builder or designer, but the dainty ornament of the doorway recalls the work of Abraham Coan, and the fact that Coan belonged to a large North Guilford family and was an influential Episcopalian in Guilford suggests that this design may be his. A comparison of St. John's with Coan's known design of the Episcopal church in North Branford seems to put the matter beyond doubt.

<u>The Congregational Parsonage</u> is another innovation, a pioneering example in Guilford of the radical new Federal house-type with gable-end facing the street. This novelty, although already familiar in New Haven, was stoutly resisted in Guilford for many years, and the North Guilford parsonage was probably a bolder gesture than its prim aspect now suggests.

<u>The Congregational Parish Hall</u> is virtually the only building in Guilford that ever tackled the complexities of the Victorian Gothic style. The project was ambitious enough to suggest that once again a New Haven architect was somewhere in the background.

<u>Ledge Hill Road</u> (Photo 3), narrow and supple, flows naturally down the contours of the hill and provides the unifying theme that holds the buildings of Meeting House Hill together—the theme of a small country road. This in fact gives a clue to the special quality of the whole complex: they are country buildings in a country landscape, and the role of the road in preserving a setting in which the architecture can come to full expression is as crucial as that of the woods and fields. Today such historic survivals are disappearing, and Ledge Hill is one of a dwindling number that illustrates the long tradition of road design before the advent of post-World War II technology in roadbuilding and maintenance.

Note 1. Most of the information in Sections 7 and 8 about the cemetery, schools, and the Congregational Society is from Lane's invaluable compilation of the church records. Direct quotations are from Steiner. Fully detailed descriptions of the two church structures are given by Kelly. Material on Abraham Coan is from research by Elizabeth Mills Brown, in possession of the author pending publication.

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Compare the traditional Congregational "square body" and triple doors (left), designed for a preaching church and compulsory attendance, with the processional nave and deep chancel of St. John's. Side by side the two buildings are a good illustration of the difference between a meeting house and a church. (Plans from Kelly)

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Bibliography

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- Lane, Rena. <u>A history of the North Guilford Congregational Church, United Church of</u> Christ, 1970, privately printed. Copy in the Guilford Library.
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Geographical Data Continued

UTM References

Point	Zone	Easting	Northing
A	18	690080	4581940
В	18	690080	4581870
С	18	690120	4581880
D	18	690100	4581780
E	18	690020	4581780
F	18	689960	4581510
G	18	689880	4581510
Н	18	689830	4581640
I	18	689850	4581740
J	18	690010	4581940

Acreage: Approximately 16 acres

Verbal Boundary Description

North: From the northwest corner of the North Guilford Cemetery (Lot 15 of Map 109 - Guilford Town Assessor's Map), proceed east across Ledge Hill Road and along the northern boundary of 169 Ledge Hill Road (Lot 12 of Map 109).

East: From the northeast corner of the lot of 169 Ledge Hill Road, proceed south following the eastern boundary of said lot and 129 Ledge Hill Road (Lot 13 of Map 109) to the northern boundary of 105 Ledge Hill Road (Lot 14 of Map 109), then west approximately 281 feet to the eastern line of Ledge Hill Road, then south along the eastern line of Ledge Hill Road to the southernmost point of Ledge Hill Road.

South: From the southeast corner of Ledge Hill Road, proceed west along the lot line of Lot 29 of Map 108 to the junction of Long Hill Road.

West: From the northwest corner of Lot 29 of Map 108, proceed north across Ledge Hill Road and continue north along the western boundary of 50 Ledge Hill Road (Lot 28 of Map 108) and the North Guilford Cemetery (Lot 15 of Map 109) across Wilbur's Lane to the point of origin.

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Geographical Data Continued

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the Meeting House Hill Historic District were delineated on the basis of the thematic criterion of the district's historical development as the religious locus of North Guilford. All sites and structures included in the district are historically associated with the North Guilford Congregational Church and Saint John's Episcopal Church, either currently or in the past.

Meeting House Hill Map 2



LONG ISLAND SOUND

