

State of Connecticut
CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford 06106

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY:
Buildings & Structures

SURVEY OF GUILFORD, NEW HAVEN COUNTY, 06437
June-December 1981

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY	
Town No.:	Site No. 72
UTM	
QUAD:	
DISTRICT	IF NR SPECIFY
<input type="checkbox"/> S <input type="checkbox"/> NR	<input type="checkbox"/> Actual <input type="checkbox"/> Potential

IDENTIFICATION

1. ADDRESS 110 Broad Street
(map 39, lot 47)
2. NAME
(historic) First Congregational Church
NAME
(common) First Congregational Church
3. USE
(historic) church
USE
(present) church
4. IF MOVED, WHEN AND FROM WHERE:



DESCRIPTION

5. ARCHITECT
6. DATE 1829, cornerstone June 5
- BUILDER Ira Atwater
STYLE Federal
7. ALTERATIONS Exterior scarcely altered at all. Spire blew down in 1938 hurricane and was rebuilt as before. Brick rear addition for offices and school, 1954-55. Basement windows added and, in 1982, ramped side entrance. Basement remodeled as church parlors and kitchen, 1933. Interior altered 1861 and later: see #9 below.
8. NOTABLE FEATURES A mature example of the Congregational meeting house style that flowered in Connecticut in the Federal period. Splendidly sited at the head of the Green, this is Guilford's architectural masterpiece.
9. ARCHITECTURAL-HISTORICAL
See Continuation Sheet

SIGNIFICANCE

SOURCES

10. SOURCES Kelly, Early Connecticut Meetinghouses; Donnelly; Elizabeth Mills Brown, MS Notes; Connecticut Historical Commission '72. Listed, Tercentenary Committee; Dorothy Whitfield Society '76. Photographs: Guilford Library and Guilford Keeping Society, Pictorial Guilford.

In all categories below, check more than one box if applicable.

If you have not actually made certain of the answer to a given question, either leave it blank or write "inferred" after the checked box; or, if drawn from a previous investigator, give source.

11. MATERIALS

- ☒ Clapboard ☐ Brick ☐ Stucco ☐ Asbestos Shingle
☒ Wood Shingle ☐ Fieldstone ☐ Concrete ☐ Asphalt Siding
☐ Board & Batten ☐ Cut Stone ☐ Cobblestone ☐ Aluminum/Vinyl

☒ Other: *flush boards on front*

12. STRUCTURE

- ☐ Wood Frame: ☐ Masonry ☐ Iron or Steel ☐ Concrete ☐ Other:
☐ Post & Beam
☐ Balloon

13. ROOF

- a. ☐ Pitched ☒ Gable-front ☐ Hip ☐ Shed ☐ Other:
☐ Saltbox ☐ Cross-gable ☐ Flat Hip ☐ False Dormer
☐ Gambrel ☐ Mansard ☐ Flat ☐ Sawtooth
b. ☒ Tower(s) ☐ Monitor ☐ Cupola ☐ Dormered Gable ☐ Dome
c. ☐ Wood Shingle ☒ Asphalt Shingle ☐ Slate ☐ Metal ☐ Other:

14. NUMBER OF STORIES: *1 plus*

APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS:

LOT SIZE: *3/4 acre approx.*

15. CONDITION: Exterior

- ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐ Bad

16. CONDITION: Structure

- ☒ Excellent ☐ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Poor ☐ Bad

17. OUTBUILDINGS (visible from public road)

- ☐ Barn(s) ☐ Carriage House ☐ Garage ☐ Shed(s) ☐ Shop(s)
Other (well, stand, greenhouse, gazebo, privy, etc.):

18. LANDSCAPING (visible from public road)

- ☒ Planted Grounds ☐ Garden ☐ Terracing ☐ Plaza ☐ Court
☐ Stone Wall(s) ☐ Pickett Fence ☐ Iron Fence ☐ Post & Rail ☐ Other:

19. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT

- a. ☒ Town Street ☐ Rural ☐ Semi-rural ☐ Clustered Growth ☐ Development
b. ☒ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☐ Agricultural ☐ Residential ☐ Vacation, now or originally
c. ☒ Open ☐ Wooded ☐ Lakefront ☐ Coastal ☐ Salt marsh
d. ☒ Of outstanding scenic/architectural value
☐ Of scenic/architectural value
☐ Of supportive value to contiguous scenic/architectural area
☐ Neutral
☐ Other:

20. ROLE OF BUILDING IN ENHANCING QUALITY OF ENVIRONMENT

- ☒ Vital ☐ Important ☐ Supportive ☐ Neutral ☐ Other:

21. OWNERSHIP

- ☐ Public ☒ Private ☒ Interior accessible

22. Name

D. Penar

Photographer

D. Penar

Organization:

Guilford Preservation Alliance
P.O. Box 199, Guilford, Conn. 06437

Index No 72

Date *7/22/81*

Date *7/22/81*

Negative *Roll 16:9A*

GLFA Neg. 16:10

23. THREATS TO BUILDING

- ☐ None Known ☐ Highways ☐ Vandalism ☐ Developers ☐ Zoning
☐ Renewal ☐ Private Owner ☐ Deterioration ☐ Other:

24. SUBSEQUENT EVALUATIONS

DESCRIPTION

COMPILED BY

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#9 Architectural-Historical

The imposing presence of this building, placed in precisely the right spot to command the entire Green, shows a faultless sense of urban design on its owners' part. It was not achieved without obstacles. A substantial house, still in good condition, already stood on the site--not the sort of thing that Yankees generally disposed of lightly. Cheaper locations should have been had. However, an agreement was evidently reached in the interest of the high purpose, and the church bought the land then sold the house to someone willing to move it. The house went off in a grand procession, drawn by 70 yoke of oxen down the entire length of Whitfield Street (see 485 Whitfield Street where it still is).

A notice was placed in the New Haven Register in December 1828 inviting bids on a meeting house, and the contract was duly awarded to Ira Atwater of New Haven. The records make no mention of architectural plans, and it is possible that Atwater supplied his own. As the leading builder in New Haven--builder of the Yale Chapel and other churches and a man who had worked in the circle of Ithiel Town and David Hoadley--he was qualified to do so. The building committee had specified that the design should be "nearly in the same style with the churches in Milford and Cheshire" (both of which are still standing and can be readily compared), and indeed the parti is the same: a tetrastyle Ionic portico with triple doors and windows on a projecting central pavilion which supports a steeple of four stages. But in Guilford all this has been handled with quite a different touch from the earlier churches. The Ionic order is more robust, and arched doors give way to level lintels with simple horizontal lights over them in place of elaborately ornamented fans. In these and other details (guttae and Greek key motifs over the doors, square blocks at the corners of the surrounds, acroteria on the roof of the belfry), there are intimations of the on-coming Greek Revival, and the Guilford church can probably be called the last of the great Federal churches of Connecticut, built just at the moment of transition. A year later the meeting house at Meriden was built with a full Doric portico in the Greek style.

On June 10 the raising was begun. The town had been organized into districts, and on each day men came from a different district to help, the ladies meanwhile (so the historian Steiner reports) furnishing "a good supply of cake". In many another town the records speak of rum at the raising. But not in Guilford! The building was finished in May 1830, and horse sheds were immediately built out back. Stoves were introduced in 1838, and in 1855 a melodeon.

The interior was extensively remodeled in 1860, as was almost universally done in Congregational churches at this time. The plans were made by Nelson Hotchkiss and the work done by him also (for Nelson Hotchkiss see 96 Broad Street). Galleries were lowered, and the audience room shortened in order to enlarge the vestibule and make a lecture room over it. The high pulpit with its slim curving stairs, so characteristic of Federal design, was replaced by a

GUILFORD SURVEY

NAME(S) First Congregational Church

#9 Architectural-Historical

lower one, and although the records make no specific mention of the surrounding wall, it is possible that the present triumphal arch belongs to this period, for it is very similar to the alterations that were sweeping the state in the mid-Victorian reaction against the light and delicate style of Federal church interiors. The curved recess however, the records report, belongs to 1898, and so the surrounding decor perhaps does too. The church was wired for electricity in 1895.

In 1868 an organ replaced the melodeon, the gift of Mrs. Mary Griffing Chittenden; in 1908 with was replaced by another one, the gift of Clara Sage (for Clara Sage see 88 Broad Street); and this past year, 1982, this in turn has been replaced by still another one. The present clock was given in 1892 by Anna Hart Chittenden (for Anna Chittenden see 29 Broad Street), replacing one built by Ebenezer Parmelee in 1727 which had served on both this and the previous meeting house for 166 years (for Ebenezer Parmelee see 88 Boston Street): this clock is in the Henry Whitfield House (see 248 Whitfield Street).

The first bell was acquired in 1724, for the previous building, and was specified by vote of the Society to be like the bell in the Brattle Street Church in Boston--a prestigious model indeed. It is referred to in the records as "the Great Bell," and a steeple was built specially for it and attached to the building. The anchorage however was not sufficiently firm, for we read soon after "that the Bell frame shall be Turned so as to have the Bell Swing east and West; the better to prevent the rocking of the Meeting House." The Great Bell has been recase four times and still hangs in the belfry.

It was voted before the building was built that "the stones under the old house be used for underpinning the new." These stones are presumably the grey granite of the present side walls. Across the front the foundation is of fine-grained sandstone, laid in the form of coursed ashlar with tooled surfaces.

* * *

The church was first gathered in Guilford in 1643, and a meeting house was built c1645. It stood in the Green, at the north end. It was replaced in 1711-13 by a second meeting house, slightly north of the middle of the Green. The present meeting house is the Church's third building. In the records at the time of its construction it is still referred to as a "meeting house," but the word gave way to "church" not long afterward.

This was the only Congregational society until 1707, when the Parish of East Guilford (now Madison) was established. In 1720 came the North Guilford Society; in 1731 the Fourth Society, which was the result of a schism in the First Society and which disbanded in 1811; in 1753 came the Parish of North Bristol (now North Madison); and in 1843 came the last of the series, which, though actually the sixth, was named the Third Church because by the time of its founding the North Guilford and Madison churches were independent of Guilford and the Fourth Church had ceased to exist. The Third Church disbanded in 1919 (see 49 Park Street), leaving only the First Church and the North Guilford Church today.

Add to Sources: Steiner,