

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICENATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Baptist Church in Exeter

AND/OR COMMON

Chestnut Hill Baptist Church

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Ten Rod Road (State Route 102)

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Exeter

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2-Representative Edward Beard

STATE

Rhode Island

__ VICINITY OF
CODE

44

COUNTY

Washington

CODE

009

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

 DISTRICT
 BUILDING(S)
 STRUCTURE
 SITE
 OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

 PUBLIC
 PRIVATE
 BOTH
PUBLIC ACQUISITION
 IN PROCESS
 BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

 OCCUPIED
 UNOCCUPIED
 WORK IN PROGRESS
ACCESSIBLE
 YES: RESTRICTED
 YES: UNRESTRICTED
 NO

PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE
 COMMERCIAL
 EDUCATIONAL
 ENTERTAINMENT
 GOVERNMENT
 INDUSTRIAL
 MILITARY
 MUSEUM
 PARK
 PRIVATE RESIDENCE
 RELIGIOUS
 SCIENTIFIC
 TRANSPORTATION
 OTHER**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Chestnut Hill Baptist Church

STREET & NUMBER

Ten Rod Road

CITY, TOWN

Exeter

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Exeter Town Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

Ten Rod Road

CITY, TOWN

Exeter

STATE

Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE State of Rhode Island Preliminary Survey Report - Town of Exeter

DATE

1976

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Chestnut Hill Baptist Church stands at the crest of a hill on the north side of Ten Rod Road (State Route 102), in the eastern part of the town of Exeter, Rhode Island. The setting is rural and sparsely settled, and consists primarily of second-growth woodland. The Church property is bounded on the west by a gravel parking lot, used by the church and a nearby grange hall, on the east by a large cemetery, and on the north by woods. The church building stands behind a small lawn which is attractively planted with evergreens.

In 1838 the Baptist Church in Exeter erected this meetinghouse about one mile west of the site of its two former homes. Probably modelled after the then recently-refurbished Baptist Church in Wickford, to which it bears a strong stylistic resemblance, the Chestnut Hill Church was built of local materials and by local workmen, of whom Deacon Russel Joslin and his brother Harry V. Joslin, both members of the congregation, were the principals. It was dedicated October 4, 1838.

The church faces south. It is a rectangular, white-painted, wood-frame, end-gable structure of modest size, with a small, square, ridge-mounted belfry above the single front entrance (see Photo 1). Greek Revival in style, the building possesses a pedimented facade fronted by an attached screen of four projecting, panel-fronted, pilaster-like piers. The double-door entrance is surmounted by a Greek-key-pattern fretwork panel. This facade is clad with flush horizontal siding; the side and rear elevations are clapboarded.

The side walls are pierced by large square-head, double-sash windows. The windows are fitted with non-original black-painted, solid-wood exterior shutters, each of which displays a white-painted cross. The plain, windowless rear facade is treated with raking cornices and cornice returns in place of a pediment.

Exterior alterations include the replacement of a decorative anthemion belfry cresting, blown down in the 1938 hurricane, with a similar but less elaborately decorated version (see Photo 4); and the addition in the mid-1950s of a one-story, clapboarded Sunday school/parish house building at the back of the church, extending to the east. The parish house, a low, flank-gable structure, with an end-gable wing at its east end, is designed in a Greek Revival-inspired mode in an effort to harmonize with the church building.

The interior of the church contains a narrow narthex or vestibule extending across the full width of the structure; a staircase at its east end provides access to a gallery at the back of the

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audience room (see Photo 3). Originally, two separate doorways opened from the vestibule to the audience room. These have been closed up and a wide, central double doorway cut through.

The sanctuary is a square, high-ceilinged room, illuminated by three large, square-head, double-hung, 12/12 windows in each side wall. The present ceiling, which arches slightly from side wall to side wall, is finished with fiberboard panels supported by thin wood battens. This ceiling, whose arched design follows the form of the original plaster one, was installed in 1929, at the same time that the church was electrified. The small, three-step-high pulpit platform is located at the back of the building, opposite the entrance to the sanctuary. Two aisles subdivide the level floor of the room into four tiers of pews, two side-by-side in the center of the floor between the aisles, and one on either side between the aisle and side wall.

The original flat-topped pews, possessing plain, unpaneled ends and stained rails, survive, although they now lack doors. The present pulpit platform, installed in 1882, replaces the original small, high pulpit entered by staircases on either side (see Photo 2). In the mid-1950s the platform was converted into a chancel. The small, simple Late Victorian paneled desk was moved to one corner, and a Colonial-style altar, with a dossal hanging and built-in seats, installed. The pews, chancel furniture, and all interior trim are now painted white.

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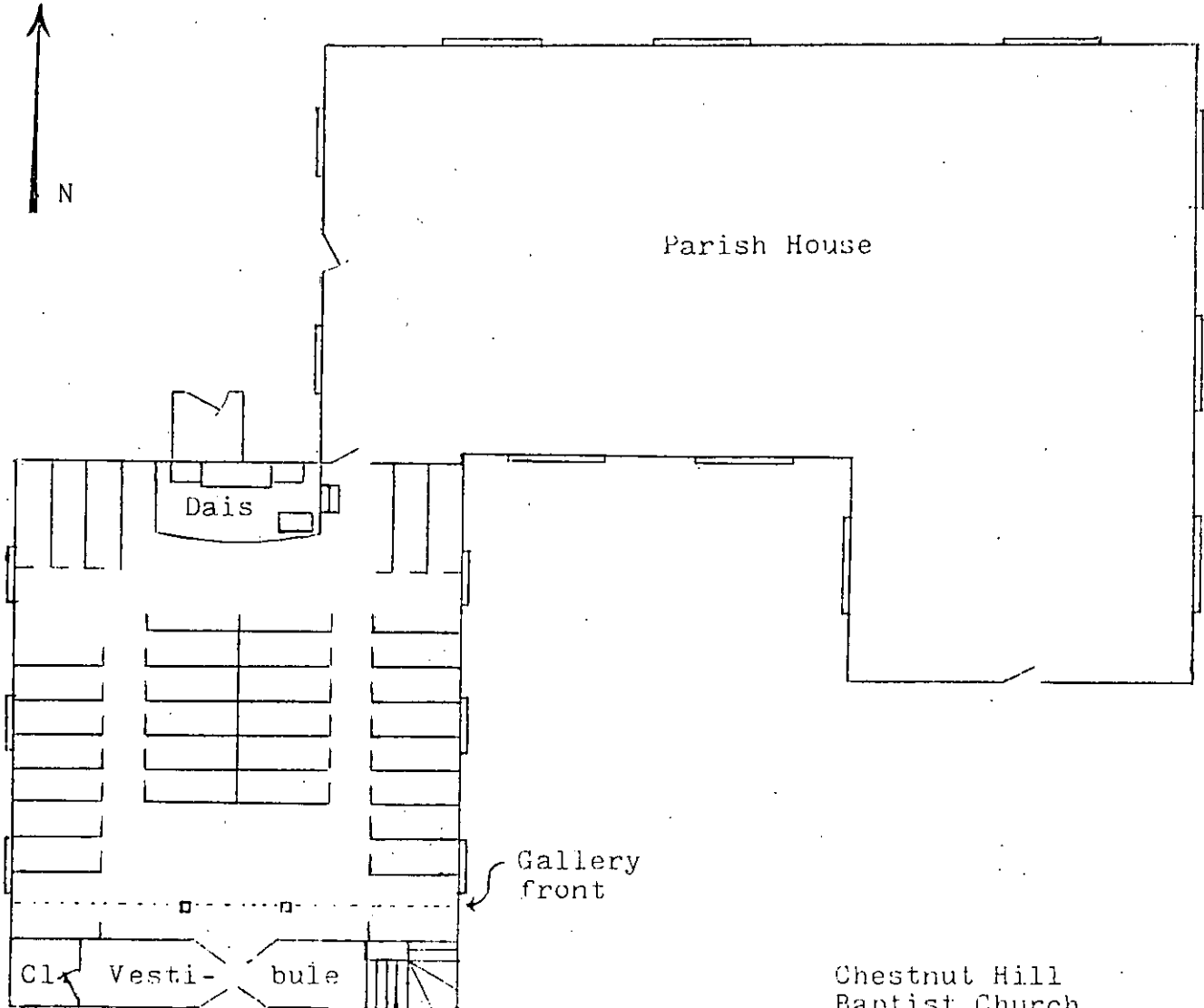
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Chestnut Hill
Baptist Church,
Exeter, R.I.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1838

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In architectural terms, the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church must be judged to be one of Rhode Island's finest Greek Revival country churches. In local terms, it is significant as the home of Exeter's oldest congregation.

The Chestnut Hill Church was founded in 1750, only eight years after the incorporation of the town, as the "Baptist Church in Exeter." Like many another Rhode Island Baptist church founded in the wake of the Great Awakening of the 1740s, the congregation took at first a liberal position on the question of baptism and church membership. By 1776, however, it had adopted the more typical Calvinistic Baptist practice of admitting as members only those who professed their faith and were baptized anew.

The church, which served the eastern part of Exeter and surrounding areas, experienced a rapid expansion of membership in its early years, probably as a result of the growth of population in this relatively late-settled agricultural district. In 1776 the congregation had 77 members; by 1783 the number stood at 210. In 1825, numerically the peak year, the membership reached 738, and must have included a large proportion of the area residents.

Until 1829 the Baptist Church remained the only church group in the eastern part of Exeter. In that year, however, a controversy regarding the moral character of the pastor, Elder Gershom Palmer, resulted in the expulsion of Palmer and his supporters. This group, although reconciled with the parent church in 1845, continued to meet separately, and in 1856 built the still-standing Liberty Church several miles to the south. By 1858 the Baptist Church in Exeter possessed only 188 members.

The church has never regained its early numerical strength. Its vitality was sapped in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries by the gradual decline of the rural population (a common phenomenon in New England generally and Rhode Island in particular).

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However, the congregation continues to hold weekly services, and looks to a more prosperous future with the gradual suburbanization of the area.

Despite the simplicity of its Greek Revival detailing, the Chestnut Hill Baptist Church is one of the more elaborate Rhode Island country churches of its day. With its paneled pilasters and Greek-key-pattern fretwork panel over the doorway, it is a naive, country exemplification of the southeastern New England regional Greek Revival mode developed by prominent area architects such as Russell Warren and James Bucklin. Discussed by Talbot Hamlin in Greek Revival Architecture in America and pictured by Henry-Russell Hitchcock in Rhode Island Architecture, the Chestnut Hill Church is a local and state landmark.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Arnold, Willet H. Historical Sketch of the Baptist Church in Exeter, R.I. Central Falls, R.I.: E. L. Freeman & Co., 1883
Exeter Baptist Church Records, Mss. 2 vols. and unbound sheets.
 Hamlin, Talbot. Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1944.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1/2 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	19	286680	46106200	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

From the southeast corner the property line runs west along the north side of Ten Rod Road for fifteen rods (247.5 feet), then north for ten rods (165 feet), then east for ten rods, then south for five rods (82.5 feet), then east for five rods, then south for five rods, to the point of beginning. See Exeter Land Evidences, XI, 336.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Robert Osborne Christensen, Survey Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission April, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

401-277-2678

CITY OR TOWN

Providence

STATE

Rhode Island

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation 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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

Frederick Williams

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE June 21, 1978

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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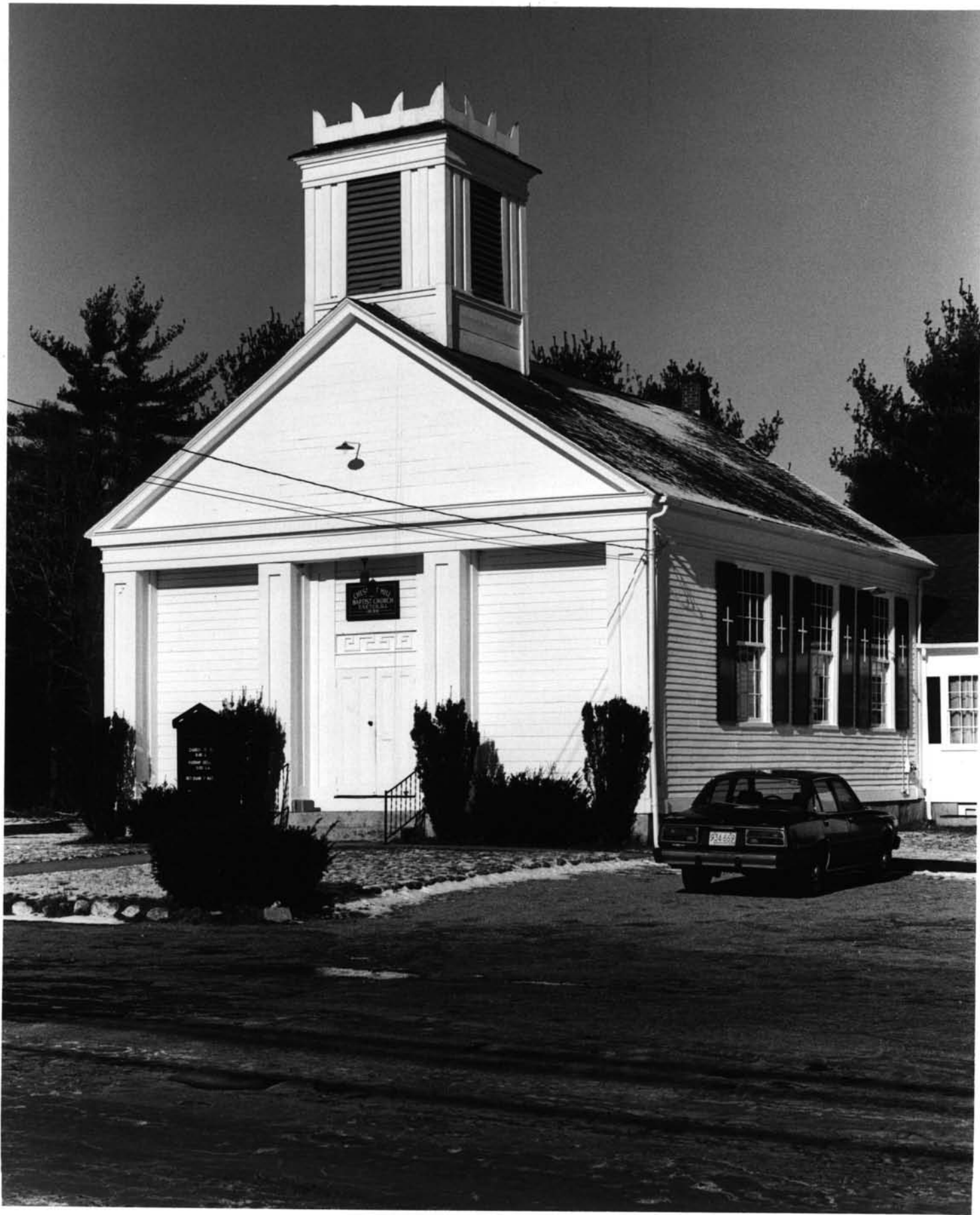
9

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2

Hitchcock, Henry - Russell. Rhode Island Architecture. New York:
Da Capo Press, 1968.

Huling, Mary Kenyon. Historical Sketch of the Baptist Church in
Exeter, Rhode Island (Chestnut Hill). Private printing, 1938.





Chestnut Hill Baptist Church

Ten Rod Road, Exeter, Rhode Island

Robert O. Christensen

January, 1978

Negative filed: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

Front of audience room from the south

2



Chestnut Hill Baptist Church

Ten Rod Road, Exeter, Rhode Island

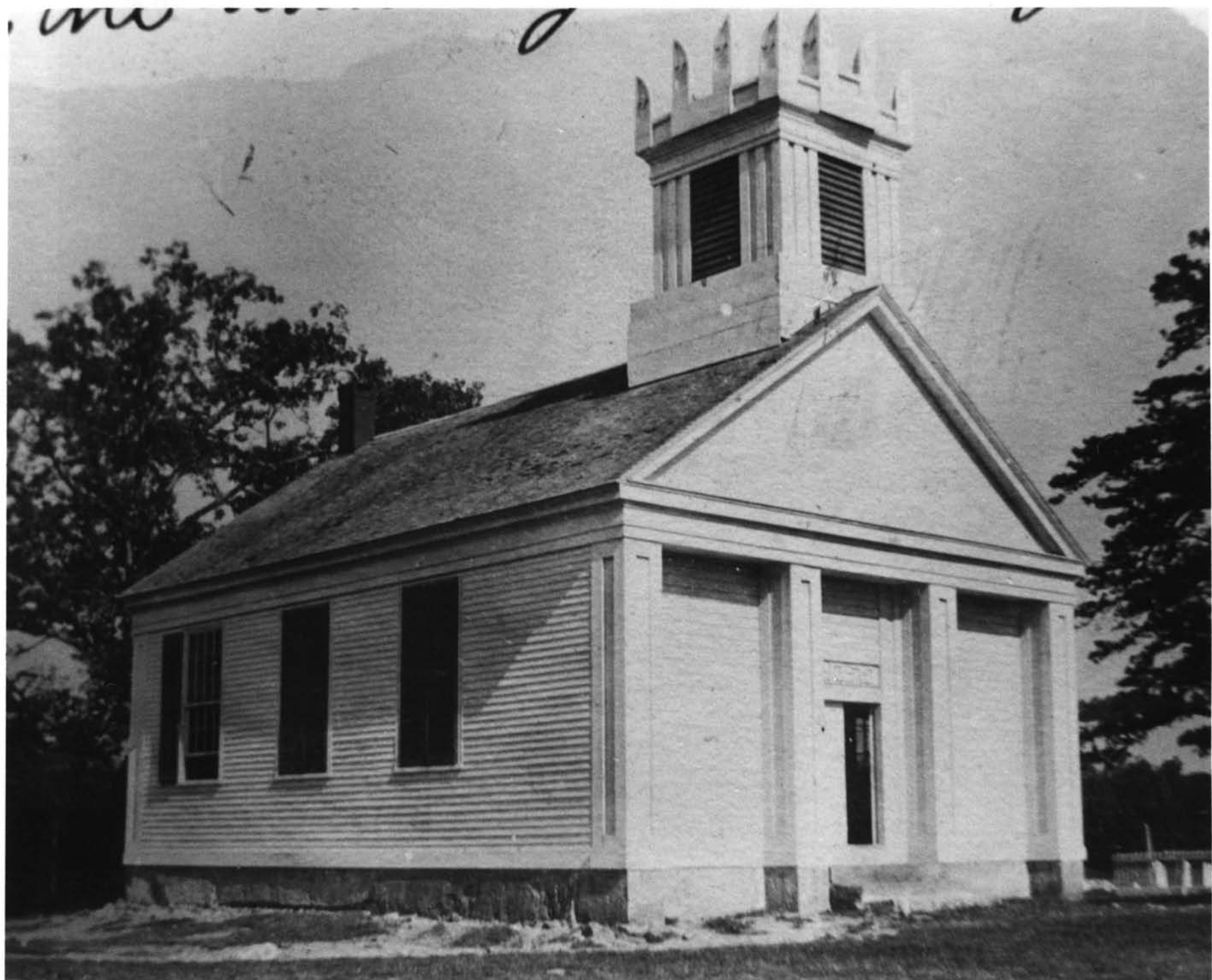
Robert O. Christensen

January, 1978

Negative filed: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

Detail of gallery front

3



Chestnut Hill Baptist Church

Ten Rod Road, Exeter, Rhode Island

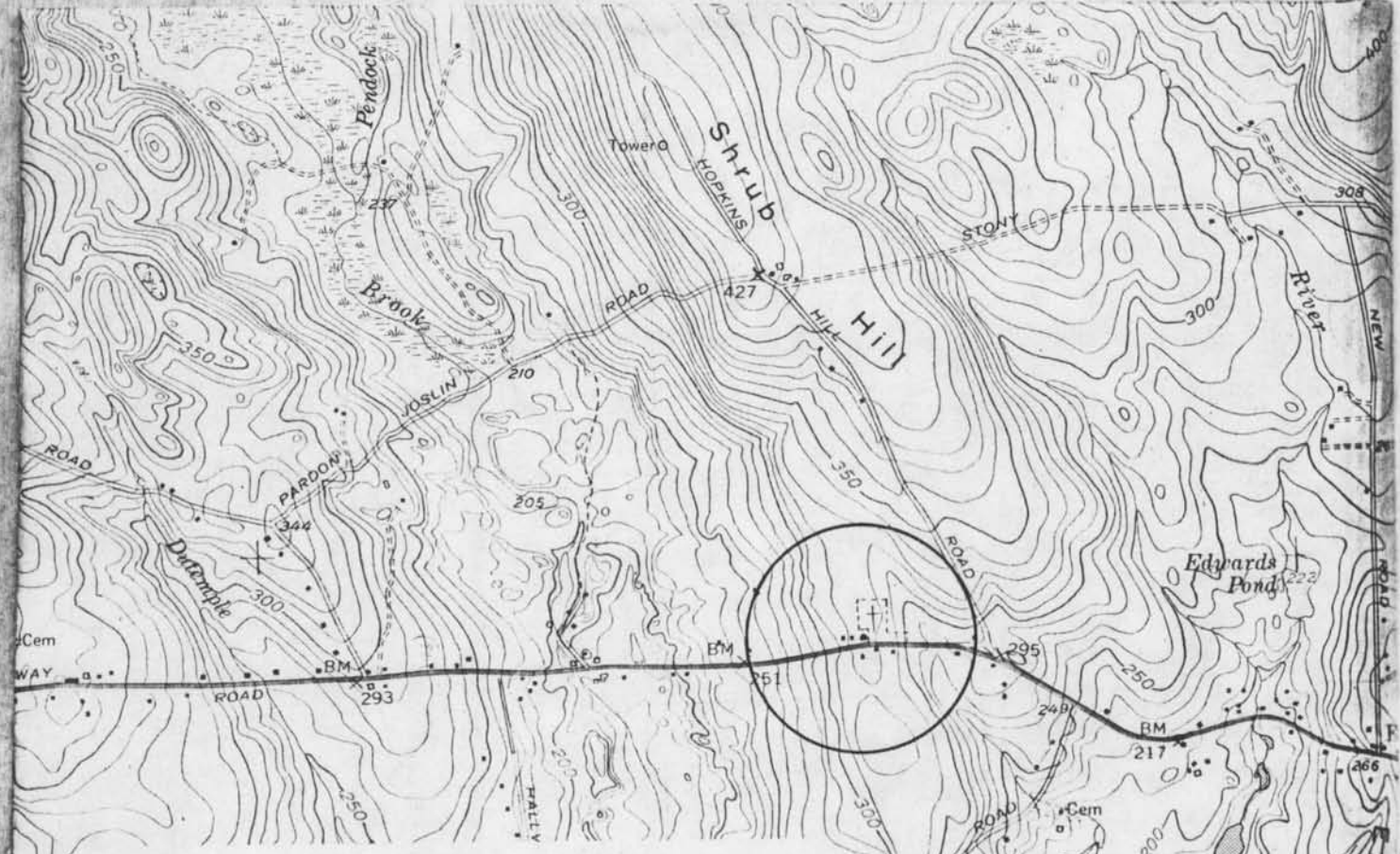
Robert O. Christensen

January, 1978

Negative filed: Rhode Island Historical
Preservation Commission

Exterior from the southwest
(Post card view c. 1910)

4



Baptist Church in Exeter
 Chestnut Hill Baptist Church
 Exeter, Rhode Island

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