

**United States Department of the Interior  
 National Park Service**

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

**1. Name of Property**

Historic name: Shepherd of the Sea Chapel

Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**2. Location**

Street & number: 231 Gungywamp Road

City or town: Groton State: CT County: New London

Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this \_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_ statewide      \_\_\_ local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

\_\_\_A      \_\_\_B      \_\_\_C      \_\_\_D

_____ <b>Signature of certifying official/Title:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
_____ <b>Signature of commenting official:</b>	_____ <b>Date</b>
_____ <b>Title :</b>	
_____ <b>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</b>	

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#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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#### 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

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**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register           

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**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

RELIGION/Religious  
Facility/Church

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

VACANT

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: WOOD/laminated wood, GLASS,  
CONCRETE/poured concrete, Brick

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Shepherd of the Sea Chapel is a Modern A-frame-type church designed in 1966 by New Haven architect Carl R. Blanchard, Jr. (1912-1996) to serve as a multi-denominational chapel for the United States Naval Submarine Base (SUBASENLON) at Groton in New London County, Connecticut. The simple, but towering form was constructed of glued and laminated wood members, steel, brick, and glass by the Norwich firm of Alexander Schnip & Sons (Photograph 1). It is one of the best examples of A-frame architecture, which was popularized in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, to be constructed at this scale in the state of Connecticut. Despite recent issues with vandalism and some loss of interior elements, it remains architecturally significant as an example of a type of construction. The property also incorporates the attached ell or religious education building (1966), and a religious education addition (1995). A separate building, known as the Community Center, was constructed in 1975 and is located southeast of the building across the large, paved parking lot. The Community Center is counted as non-contributing.

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## Narrative Description

### Setting

The former Navy Shepherd of the Sea Chapel and Housing Community Center property consists of approximately 13 acres located adjacent to the residential area known as Nautilus Park III, on the south side of Gungywamp Road in Groton, New London County, Connecticut (Figure 1). The parcel slopes toward the south-southwest and ranges from approximately 90 to 120 feet above sea level (Figure 2). A paved curvilinear driveway leads to a parking lot at the southeast end of the building. A second paved parking area is located at the height of the roadway along the south side of Gungywamp Road between the road and the Chapel. A set of wooden steps lead from this lot down to the level of the education wing (Photograph 2). This lot is accessed by a short driveway on its north side. A brick sign for the Chapel consisting of aluminum letters affixed to a brick slab topped by an A-frame mimics the building and marks the location of the lot. It is missing several of the letters which are meant to spell out “Shepherd of the Sea” (Photograph 3). Paving covers 3.5 acres of the parcel while the remaining ten acres is undeveloped, partially wooded land and wetland.

The parcel is bordered on the north by Gungywamp Road and the Barnum School, the east by residential housing, the west by the Navy Exchange Dolphin Mart, and the south by undeveloped woodland and Beaverdam Brook. Beaverdam Brook wetland is located to the south of the parcel and another wetland is located to the east. Formerly part of the Navy’s facilities, Shepherd of the Sea Chapel is located adjacent to the Navy’s Nautilus Park development and approximately one mile southeast of the Naval Submarine Base in New London. The property was deaccessioned in 2019.

### Chapel and Religious Education Building (Contributing Building, 1966, with Religious Education Addition, 1995)

The Chapel’s A-frame is assembled from thirteen single-hinged arches of glued and laminated “glulam” Douglas Fir timbers forming a massive, steeply pitched, asphalt shingled, gabled roof that rises approximately 75 feet above grade.<sup>1</sup> The laminated wood rafters, begin on concrete footings outside of the building and are secured by metal bolted collars. The base of each arch was originally wrapped in sheet copper between the soffits and the arch footings, but the copper is currently missing. The building rests on a concrete slab foundation. The concrete footings are braced against the brick walls by a lateral buttress set flush with the

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<sup>1</sup> Public Archaeology Laboratory completed the Historic Resources Inventory form for the Chapel (Building 1001) as part of an *Architectural Resources Survey Cold War-Era Resources U.S. Naval Submarine Base New London* in 2011-2012. Much of the information in this nomination was taken from that inventory form and enhanced with current research. The plans noted in the footnotes no longer reside in the archives of the Department of Public Works at SUBASENLON as per email correspondence with Christopher Koproski R CIV USN (MIDATL NOR) and Miguel Arroyo-Green A LTJG USN.

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ground (Photograph 4). The arches extend through the roof soffits into the building and terminate at their apex in a truss that forms a slightly truncated triangle or “A”. The top of the truss supports a continuous skylight along the entire length of the ridge. This was added shortly after the buildings were constructed.

Continuous bands of outward-sloping windows are hidden in the soffit between the north and south side walls and roof deck. These originally provided additional light into the space, although most are now boarded shut. The side walls are constructed of red brick set in a stretcher bond and topped with a soldier course. They are set inboard of the A-frames and continue outside the building's envelope at its west and east ends.

The façade (east elevation) has a glass curtain wall with 24 windows above the first story. The central window in the gable end has been replaced with movable louvered vents. The entrance level is partially shielded by a flat canopy with a deep plywood fascia (altered from its original plywood-and-batten appearance) topped by squared metal coping. It is supported by two slender brick piers. The brick side walls flank and enclose the entry terrace and its tripartite entry doors (Photograph 5). The north wall displays the remnants of the attached aluminum letters spelling out the building's name in a sans serif font (Photograph 6). The central doors are framed with metal and are accessed by a set of low concrete steps that connect the parking lot to the terrace. Most of the openings on the façade, including the doors and large windows on the first story, have either been broken or have been boarded shut.

The west elevation is identical to the facade, except that at the west end of the Chapel, the walls continue along the exterior to enclose a small garden and form a visual screen behind the altar (Photographs 7 and 8).

The north and south (side) elevations are dominated by the expanse of the asphalt shingled roof. Brick walls are visible beneath the wide soffits. The exposed bases of the arches form the main character defining features of these elevations. Since these were not meant to be exposed continually, some of the members have begun to deteriorate (Photograph 9).

The Religious Education Building (1966) is attached to the northwest corner of the Chapel via a short, low hyphen (Photograph 10).<sup>2</sup> It has a flat roof with a deep plywood-and-batten fascia, load-bearing brick and glass curtain walls and a poured concrete slab foundation. The roof is framed with laminated timbers. The Religious Education Addition (1995) is connected to the west end of the religious education building via a gable-roofed, glass-enclosed hyphen. The Addition is built on an irregular rectilinear plan measuring 120 by 90 feet. It has a flat roof lined with a copper coping, polychrome brick walls set in a Flemish bond, and a concrete slab foundation. A wooden deck extends from the southwest corner of the addition. Metal doors lead from each classroom onto the deck area (Photograph 11).

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<sup>2</sup> These buildings were generally not accessible during the field visit in February 2024.

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### Interior

The rectangular plan of the Chapel measures 168 feet by 58 feet. The interior is organized (east to west) into a narthex, nave, and chancel and once accommodated over 600 people. A balcony level is set above the narthex, while the nave and chancel are clear-span spaces open to the tops of the A-frames. These “arches” formed by the rafters are 67 feet wide between the footings and measure 11 inches wide and 32 inches deep in section. The crown of each arch is flat, with metal collars joining the timbers at the hinge.

The narthex is a fairly dark and simple space with low ceilings, and partitions formed by the interior doors and simple unadorned walls. Once inside the chapel, the space retains its largely original, restrained Modern-style treatment, despite the condition being poor. The ceiling and walls on the interior of the gable consist of exposed wood set between the rafters (Photograph 12). The floors, which were once covered in blue carpet, are now exposed concrete. A heavy rectangular altar of white marble rests on the raised chancel but has also been damaged by vandals (Photograph 13). Cylindrical, polished metal light fixtures with projecting fins hang from the ceiling (Photograph 14). Ceiling fans are hung from extended rafters set into the frame. The pews that once occupied the space have been pulverized by vandals (Photograph 15). The balcony, which once held the 34-pipe, 3-rank organ enclosed behind sharply angular, varnished wood panel screens is extant, but damaged by vandalism (Photograph 16). The twisted metal of the organ pipes is piled in heaps on the cement floor along with the broken mechanism of the instrument itself (Photograph 17).

At the northwest corner of the narthex, doors lead to the hyphen connecting the Religious Education Building to the Chapel. The floor level steps up several feet in elevation from the hyphen to the Religious Education Building (Photograph 18). This one-story structure is built on an irregular, rectilinear footprint measuring 121-by-98-feet in plan and contains two chapels, offices, a vestry, sacristy, fellowship hall, and classrooms. The Religious Education Building was in a very poor condition and not safely accessible. From what could be discerned, ceilings are a combination of exposed laminated timbers, wood plank roof decks, and suspended acoustic tile. Exterior walls are brick and glass that mirror their outside appearance, while interior partitions are gypsum board. Floors are a combination of carpet and vinyl tile. Illumination is provided by a mixture of suspended incandescent globe and fluorescent shop fixtures.

The interior of the Religious education Addition has simple, contemporary architectural finishes such as acoustic tile ceilings, masonry and gypsum board walls, and carpeted and tile floors (Photograph 19).

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### **Community Building (Non-Contributing Building, 1975)**

The 8,800 square foot Community Building is a flat-roofed brick and concrete block structure with a recessed entry and double-leaf metal door providing additional access to the side of the building (Photograph 20). It was constructed in 1975 and was not accessible at the time of the field visit.

### **Integrity**

Prior to its sale in 2019, alterations to the original plan of the Shepherd of the Sea Chapel had been minor. In 1969, one unit of fixed glazing in the apex of each gable end was replaced with an awning-type remote-operated window.<sup>3</sup> The original electronic organ was replaced in 1987 with a used Austin organ taken from the First Presbyterian Church in Greenwich, Connecticut. The new organ was of moderate size and number of pipes. It was built in 1956 by the Austin Organ Company of Hartford, Connecticut as opus organ number 2238. To accommodate the organ and optimize acoustics, the Navy made minor modifications to the Chapel balcony to accommodate the instrument.<sup>4</sup> Around 1992, the plexiglass skylight was replaced and in the religious education addition the Catholic Chapel (AKA Blessed Sacrament Chapel) was relocated to a different room. In 1995, the Navy constructed the religious education addition and made minor renovations to some architectural finishes and interior partitions in the original religious education building.<sup>5</sup>

Since 2016, the condition of the Chapel has deteriorated significantly due to vandalism. Despite this, many of the aspects of integrity remain in place. The placement of the building on the lot and its relation to the larger naval base means that it has retained its integrity of location. The building remains visible from the public way of Gungywamp Road and is a striking edifice to encounter. The Shepherd of the Sea Chapel retains its integrity of design since the major exterior character defining feature of the structure, which was a simple frame and expanses of glass curtain walls (or their original arrangements and frames) remain intact. These elements also relay the original feeling and association with a religious institution – the soaring height and shape of the building clearly evoke its original association with religious architecture.

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<sup>4</sup> Battista, Carolyn. The Uncommon Art of Cruising for the Pipes *New York Times* September 18, 1988. <https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1988/09/18/issue.html>

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## 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.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1966

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1966: Construction of the building

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Blachard, Carl Jr, Architect

Alexander Schnip & Sons, Builder

\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Shepherd of the Sea Chapel (the Chapel) is eligible for inclusion in the National Register under Criterion C in the area of Architecture at the state level of significance.<sup>6</sup> The Shepherd of the Sea Chapel remains a significant example of modern religious architecture constructed by the Navy during the Cold War era. It establishes the design tenets of modern architecture through its placement on the site, as well as the sculptural use of the A-frame to manipulate plane, volume and light. The scale of the building in terms of its capacity and height makes it a notable example of A-frame church architecture in Connecticut designed by the New Haven-based architect Carl R. Blanchard, Jr. The design, construction techniques, and materials at the Chapel are notable when compared to other buildings constructed for the Navy during the same Cold War time period. The period of significance for the chapel is 1966, the year in which it was completed. The single-story wing, built in 1966 to house offices, a kitchen and two additional chapels and the later attached expansion (1995) are included in the contributing building. The adjacent Community Center (1975) does not contribute to the Chapel's significance.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

### **Criterion C: Architecture**

Shepherd of the Sea Chapel is a significant example of A-frame church construction and is representative of a post-World War II trend toward modernist construction in both religious and military facilities. Proponents and historians of A-frame construction have claimed a number of vernacular antecedents for triangular, "all-roof" construction in various cultures around the world, mainly in Northern Europe. The birth of the twentieth-century A-frame came in the 1930s, when International Style architects working in the United States, most notably Austrian emigrant Rudolph Schindler (1887-1953), reconstituted the basic form as a luxury home through the application of a Modern approach to style, materials, and interior planning. Several architects such as Andrew Geller introduced A-frames into vacation communities along the east coast. In the San Francisco metropolitan area in the early 1950s, the firm of Campbell & Wong designed plans that were later developed into stock plans and kits for residences and featured in popular magazines. The "leisure house" and lumber industries (such as the Douglas Fir Plywood Association) further developed and spread the design nation-wide by the 1960s. The peak of modern A-frame construction and popularity extended from about 1950 to 1975. The form's simplicity, affordability, style, and functional flexibility were well-suited to the period's cultural and economic conditions, when Americans were embracing Modern design and had disposable income available for vacation and second

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<sup>6</sup> A previous determination (2016) also stated that the Chapel is recommended eligible for listing in the National Register under Criterion C and Criteria Consideration A at the state and local levels in the area of Architecture.

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homes.<sup>7</sup>

The expansion of suburbs following World War II, brought about an unprecedented need for church construction that coincided with the popularity of the A-frame design. Religious congregations were seeking new architectural forms that incorporated the post-war period's sense of optimism and Modernism. They were excited by the style's lack of historical associations and use of inexpensive industrial materials and production techniques. The A-frame's skyward-pointing form, in particular, offered a variety of non-denominations and positive religious interpretations and opportunities. It also allowed for dramatic architectural effects in a building that could be constructed rapidly and at low cost. As architectural historian Gretchen Brueggen states, "it met the 'looks like a church' criteria while signaling a contemporary spirit."<sup>8</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867-1959) Unitarian Meeting House, completed in 1947 in Madison, Wisconsin, is considered to be the primary precedent for A-frame churches.<sup>9</sup> In the 1950s, trends in religious architecture became a topic of the popular press and the A-frames churches of several prominent architectural firms and individuals had been included in articles on the subject.

By the early 1960s, when Shepherd of the Sea Chapel was completed, the A-frame had become one of the most popular forms of post-war religious architecture. Important examples included Eero Saarinen's (1910-1961) Kramer Chapel in Fort Wayne, Indiana (finished 1957) and Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's (SOM) U.S. Air Force Academy Cadet Chapel (Cadet Chapel) in Colorado (design unveiled 1955, completed 1963). Cadet Chapel, designed by Walter Netsch (1920-2008), was perhaps the largest and most stylistically influential A-frame church completed in the country. The building measures 280 feet long, 84 feet wide, and 150 feet high. The Protestant chapel, the largest of the three in the building, holds 1,200 individuals. With its iconic roofline made up of multiple steel and aluminum tetrahedrons, the building was an important precedent for the incorporation of modernist architecture into governmental/military and religious buildings. It was the focus of national scrutiny and debate, including Congressional hearings on what architectural styles were appropriate for the United States' post-war philosophical and cultural agendas.

Prominent ecclesiastical architect Arthur Rigolo (1909-1997) also completed two influential A-frame chapel designs in the 1950s in New Jersey that received national press exposure. Saarinen's and Rigolo's works were constructed on a scale comparable to that of Shepherd of the Sea Chapel. Pietro Belluschi's Trinity Lutheran Church in Walnut Creek, CA (1956) uses a truncated A-frame design set into stone clad walls set inside the roof plane.<sup>10</sup> This allowed for

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<sup>7</sup> Randl, Chad. *A-Frame*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York, NY., 2004.15-26, 31-32, 47-59, 86-87.

<sup>8</sup> Brueggen, Gretchen. "The A-Frame Church: Symbol of an Era." In *The Suburban Church: Modernism and Community in Postwar America*, University of Minnesota Press, 2015. 85-124.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

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light to rise up along the planes of the interior frame - just as Carl Blanchard's design does at Shepherd of the Sea.

In Connecticut, several Modern churches were constructed in the late 1950s and early 1960s by architects of national standing. Outstanding examples include Wallace K. Harrison's (1895-1981) First Presbyterian Church, known as the Fish Church, in Stamford (built 1958, NR and NHL designated, 2021). Joseph Salerno's (1915-1981) United Church of Rowayton in Norwalk (1962, NRHD-listed in 2016); Victor Lundy's (1923-) Unitarian Church in Westport (1961), and Unitarian Meeting House in Hartford (1964, NR-listed 2024) are all additional examples. These buildings used highly expressionistic designs that incorporated novel roof forms, although none are A-frames. One notable example of a contemporary A-frame design is the First Presbyterian Church of New Haven designed by John Dinkeloo, James P. Owens and Christiaan Dinkeloo in 1966. It is located at 704 Whitney Avenue and has the same continuous A-frame structure found at Shepherd of the Sea.

Groton has about six Modern houses of worship, with Shepherd of the Sea Chapel being the only outstanding example of A-frame construction. A second outstanding Modern church, St. Mary Mother of the Redeemer, is cylindrical in form with a distinctive multiple-arch roof system. The building was designed by little-known Mystic architect William F. Hermann (1929-2011) and completed in 1968.

Understanding the limited documentation concerning Navy chapel construction in the Cold War Era, the Shepherd of the Sea Chapel appears to be an excellent example of a Modern, Cold War era design. The Navy's *Definitive Design for Naval Shore Facilities, Part I* contains several examples of Modern chapels in different sizes. These conservative designs utilized low inverted "gullwing" and shallow-pitched compound-slope roofs supported by trusses; steel frame and concrete block or poured concrete walls; and fenestration consisting of hidden vertical window slits. However, these standardized plans may not have been widely used, for no built examples could be identified and the Department of Defense (DoD) context for church design in the armed services states that "the Department of the Navy did not develop standardized Cold War chapel plans".<sup>11</sup>

Background research identified eight chapels in addition to the Groton Chapel constructed by the Navy during the Cold War Period and showing Modern design influence. None of these are similar, and their expression of Modern design characteristics varies widely. The only other chapel of comparable design quality within the service is the Pearl Harbor Memorial Community Church, a smaller A-frame designed by Hawaiian architect Clifford F. Young and completed in 1958. This property was found to be eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places because of its stained-glass window wall by artist John Wallis. The chapels at Naval Air Station Meridian, Mississippi (completed 1963) and Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Oak Harbor, Washington (1964) both utilize curved, laminated wood structural systems, but neither is in the A-frame form. These are

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<sup>11</sup> Smith et al. 2008:n.p.; U.S Navy, Bureau of Yards & Docks 1962.

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conservatively styled worship buildings with prominent gable roofs and brick walls and plate glass windows in heavy cast stone or with stone surrounds. They appear similar in form, if not detailing, to the chapel at Naval Air Station Treasure Island (constructed 1943, now closed), which had a plain, squat belfry with a wide pyramidal cupola. The size of the Whidbey Island Chapel, with a capacity of 400 worshippers, is similar to Shepherd of the Sea and has a similar curtain wall system in its gable end. The chapel at Naval Hospital St. Albans, New York (built before 1974) utilized a minimalist approach to its exterior, which may have been constructed of precast concrete. The chapel's nave is sheltered under a shallow-pitched gable roof, is flanked by narrow side wings for offices, and has a short, flat-roofed belfry with a tapered metal spire. The chapel at USMC Base Quantico, Virginia (built 1957), meanwhile, has a main block influenced by Colonial Revival-style architecture, but its belfry is topped with a futuristic finned metal spire. No design information could be located for two additional chapels identified from the period: those at Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base New Orleans, Louisiana (1965) and Naval Station Mayport, Florida (1965). The Aloha Jewish Chapel at Naval Station Pearl Harbor (1975) represents a complete break in style from any of those described above. This worship building utilizes a multiple-arch, thin shell concrete structure with brick walls.

The glued and laminated timber A-frames in the Shepherd of the Sea Chapel represent a typical application of the material in the post-World War II era. Glued, laminated timbers, known as "glulam," were first developed and used in Europe between 1890 and 1920 and brought into United States production in the 1930s. Before World War II, laminated timbers found a limited application in large clear-span buildings such as auditoriums, gymnasiums, and warehouses, mostly in the upper Midwest. Restrictions on the use of steel during World War II resulted in heightened interest in the material, which was subsequently incorporated into military and industrial buildings across the United States. In one noteworthy application, the Navy built eight large drill halls in Illinois with arches that measured 8-by-27 inches in section, 42 feet high, and provided a 115-foot clear span. The Army Quartermaster Corps and Corps of Engineers used a laminated arch roof system in their "800 Series" regimental chapel, of which numerous examples were built during World War II. Following the war, there was a widespread acceptance of the material, and it was standardized and uses expanded across the United States.<sup>12</sup>

The need for a new chapel for Naval Submarine Base New London was brought about by its dramatic expansion during the 1950s and early 1960s in support of Cold War-related activities. The submarine base became the largest of its type in the world, reaching a population of 2,031 personnel in 1962. That same year the United States Government acquired approximately 109 acres of vacant land from the State of Connecticut to construct new housing. This included the roughly 13-acre parcel on which the Chapel would be constructed.<sup>13</sup> Extensive new off-base housing developments were built for sailors and their families in the area where the chapel would be sited. Between 1961 and 1965, the Navy constructed 1,500 units of Capehart-type

<sup>12</sup> Jester, 1995:137-139.

<sup>13</sup> NAVFAC MID Atlantic Environmental Business Line. *Final Environmental Condition of Property. Shepherd of the Sea Chapel and Building 1004 Naval Submarine Base, New London Gorton, Connecticut*, July 2014.

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housing in Nautilus Park and an additional 156 family housing units in the Conning Towers development. The Chapel provided support for the Chapel-on-Thames, which is located on base and served as the primary worship hall for the Naval Submarine Base New London since its construction in 1944.

The new Chapel, operated by the Chaplain's Department, supported the spiritual needs of the expanded population with worship services, religious education, and meetings space catering to Protestant, Catholic and Jewish faiths. The Chapel also hosted community events such as military ceremonies for awards and changes of command, as well as programs for commemorative occasions and non-religious holidays. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on July 30, 1965 and just over one year later on October 2, 1966, Rear Admiral James W. Kelley delivered the dedication sermon.<sup>14</sup> Dedicatory prayers were also offered by Rabbi Leonard J. Goldstein, Catholic chaplain Robert J. Usenza, and Protestant chaplain Richard E. Jordan underlying the multi-denominational use of the space.<sup>15</sup>

The Shepherd of the Sea Chapel is a significant example of Modern religious architecture constructed by the Navy during the Cold War era and within the Town of Groton. It demonstrates several design tenets of Modern architecture through careful attention to site considerations, and the sculptural use of plane and volume, and light. The building's large size and capacity, while not significant from an engineering perspective, help to make it an outstanding example of A-frame design and Modern church architecture. The design and construction techniques in evidence at the chapel are superlative examples of the type when compared to the other identified examples of Navy religious construction during the Cold War period.

The Office of Carl R. Blanchard, Jr., Architects, in New Haven, Connecticut provided design services and Alexander Schnip & Sons, Inc. of Norwich, Connecticut served as contractor for the Shepherd of the Sea Chapel.<sup>16</sup> Carl Blanchard's design is demonstrative of Modern Style architectural precepts in its siting, composition of building masses and planes, and manipulation of light and space. The stepped procession from Chapel to Religious Education Building echoes the natural site contours, while the composition of the complex contrasts the high, upward-lifting diagonal planes of the Chapel against the low horizontality of the Religious Education Building. Blanchard took advantage of the possibilities afforded by the A-frame structure to disassociate the roof from the walls, which enclose, but do not support, the building. The glass curtain walls, which are set back under overhanging eaves, emphasize the heavy roof form when the building is viewed from the exterior, yet break down the division between interior and exterior spaces while one is inside the building. The brick side walls are hidden by and detached from the roof and their extension into wind breaks and garden enclosures outside the building envelope emphasizes their structurally independent character, while emphasizing the relationship between interior and exterior spaces. Within the chapel, Blanchard shaped the worshipper's experience in the space, which progresses from the

<sup>14</sup>“Shepherd of the Sea Chapel to be Started” The Day, Friday July 23, 1965, 7.

<sup>15</sup> “Base Chapel Dedicated” The Day. October 3, 1966, 21.

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relatively dark and compressed volume of the narthex to the nave's soaring and sky-lit ceiling. The Chapel's orientation maximizes natural light and illuminates the chancel during the morning services, while also minimizing solar gain. The hidden bands of windows in the soffits add a second, more diffused light source that illuminates the ceiling.

A declining base population, particularly in off-base housing, following the end of the Cold War resulted in diminishing attendance at chapel services by the 2010s. At the same time, maintenance costs for the structure escalated, particularly costs related to heating the structure. These factors led to the closure of the chapel in February 2012 and its sale out of United States Government ownership in 2016.

Carl R. Blanchard, Jr.

Architect Carl R. Blanchard, Jr. (1912-1996) was a New Haven native, who graduated from the Pratt Institute in 1934 and studied in Yale University's Department of Architecture in 1934. This was a year after Eero Saarinen graduated, but well before the department's embrace of Modernism in the early 1950s. Between 1935 and 1938, Blanchard carried on a partial practice in New Haven while serving in junior roles at the Resettlement Administration, the Connecticut State Department of Public Works, and Fletcher-Thompson Architects and Engineers. He established his own practice at 111 Whitney Avenue in New Haven in September 1938, which he halted temporarily during World War II to work as an executive in the Bristol Aeronautical Corporation and as a plant engineer for the Chandler-Evans Corporation. At the end of the war, Blanchard resumed his private practice, which he had built up to include two associates and three draftsmen by 1953.

Historians Herbert Rand and Joseph Freeman undertook a case study in 2017 for the United States Navy to determine whether Blanchard's design for the Shepherd of the Sea could be considered the "work of a master". They found that given the limited reach and acknowledgement of Blanchard's design work (at least what was known at the time) that it did not meet the definition. Instead, they suggest that Blanchard's career was defined as one of service. He was appointed Chair of the Architecture and Engineering Commission (from roughly 1953-1962) of the Citizens Action Committee (CAC) established by New Haven Mayor Richard E. Lee. The CAC brought the ideas of Modern architecture into the city's landscape through large and sometimes controversial redevelopment projects.<sup>17</sup> At various times, he served as president, secretary, and committee member in the AIA's Connecticut Chapter. He was also active in the North Haven Town Planning & Zoning Commission and the North Haven State of Connecticut Architectural Regulation Board.<sup>18</sup>

Blanchard's works were not recorded in national periodicals or journals of American

<sup>17</sup> Rand, Herbert and Joseph Freeman. *PROJECT 15-779: Work of a Master? Addressing Evaluation of Routine or Prosaic Architecture by Famous Architects on Military Facilities*. Department of Defense Legacy Resource Management Program. JRP Historical Consulting, LLC, February, 2017. Accessed online at [Work-of-a-Master-Addressing-Evaluation-of-Routine-or-Prosaic-Architecture-by-Famous-Architects-on-Military-Facilities-Report-2017-Legacy-15-779.pdf \(osd.mil\)](https://www.osd.mil/Work-of-a-Master-Addressing-Evaluation-of-Routine-or-Prosaic-Architecture-by-Famous-Architects-on-Military-Facilities-Report-2017-Legacy-15-779.pdf), 59.

<sup>18</sup> Blanchard, Jr. 1946, 1953; Gane 1970:77.

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architecture or architectural history, or in the Avery Index to Architectural Periodicals. His 1953 AIA questionnaire (the most recent available) shows that he had completed by that time approximately 31 new construction projects for religious, commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential clients in Connecticut. In addition to Shepherd of the Sea Chapel, the AIA's 1970 directory listed his principal later works as the North Haven High School in North Haven (built 1962) and the Connecticut Motor Club of American Automobile Association in Hamden (1964).

Shepherd of the Sea came at the height of Blanchard's career and appears to have been Blanchard's only commission for the Navy. He is known to have designed only two other ecclesiastical buildings: the Holy Transfiguration Church (Russian Orthodox, 1966) and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (1973), both in New Haven. A sketch of the Holy Transfiguration Church was featured on the cover of the November-December 1967 edition of *Connecticut Architect* magazine. The corresponding article describes Blanchard's adherence to traditional Russian building forms while incorporating Modernist (specifically Brutalist) elements.<sup>19</sup> This, along with two other of his best-known Modern works completed for Southern Connecticut State University, are featured on the New Haven Preservation Trust's *Modern Architecture* web page. This first is Memorial Union Hall (1959), which has a New Formalist façade composed of repetitive classically inspired columns.<sup>20</sup> The other is Connecticut Hall (1970), the University dining hall, which has an exaggerated bronzed mansard roof and squat massing resulting in a Brutalist appearance. Limited photographs and descriptions available of his later works show that Blanchard often incorporated the heavy forms of Brutalism into his later designs.<sup>21</sup>

In 1972, at age 60, Blanchard brought in Stuart Tillinghast as a partner, at which time the firm was renamed Blanchard & Tillinghast, Architects. Blanchard was a member of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), in whose directory he was last featured in 1970.

The builder of the Chapel and Religious Education Building was Alexander Schnip & Sons of Norwich, CT. The firm was founded in 1920 by Alexander Schnip (1886-1960). By the time the Naval Chapel was constructed, the firm was headed by John Schnip who graduated from Mitchell College in 1949 with an Engineering degree. After serving in the Navy John joined his father's firm and grew it from a \$100,000 a year business in 1952. By 1960, John and his brother Alexander grew the business into a \$2.5 million firm. This increase in revenue came resulted from a shift away from residential to commercial, industrial, and redevelopment projects beginning in 1954. Some of their notable projects include large-scale shopping areas in Norwich and Mansfield and Thames Plaza in New London.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Holy Transfiguration Church, 1966" *Connecticut Architect*, Connecticut AIA, Volume 3, Number 6, November-December, 1967, pp 15-16.

<sup>20</sup> Rand and Freeman, 59.

<sup>22</sup> New England Real Estate Journal Professional Profile John Schnip, 1967. Accessed online at: <https://nerej.com/profiles/professional-profile-john-schnip-1967>

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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[Prosaic-Architecture-by-Famous-Architects-on-Military-Facilities-Report-2017-Legacy-15-779.pdf \(osd.mil\)](#)

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**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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

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## 10. Geographical Data

**Acreeage of Property** Approximately 13

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

### Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 41° 22' 54.96" Longitude: 72° 04' 06.56"

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

**Or**

### UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

1. Zone: Easting: Northing:

2. Zone: Easting: Northing:

3. Zone: Easting: Northing:

4. Zone: Easting : Northing:

### Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary is consistent with the legal limits of the property as conveyed in Deed 1213/451 and conforms to the plan of Town of Groton Parcel Number 178019702631 as shown on Figure 2.

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**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary was chosen to follow the current and historic boundary of Parcel Number 178019702631 as identified in the Town of Groton assessment records (2024).

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: Stacey Vairo  
organization: Preservation Connecticut (for CT SHPO)  
street & number: 940 Whitney Avenue  
city or town: Hamden state: CT zip code: 06517  
e-mail svairo@preservationct.org  
telephone: \_\_\_\_\_  
date: August 2024

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**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)  
**Figures**

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### Figures

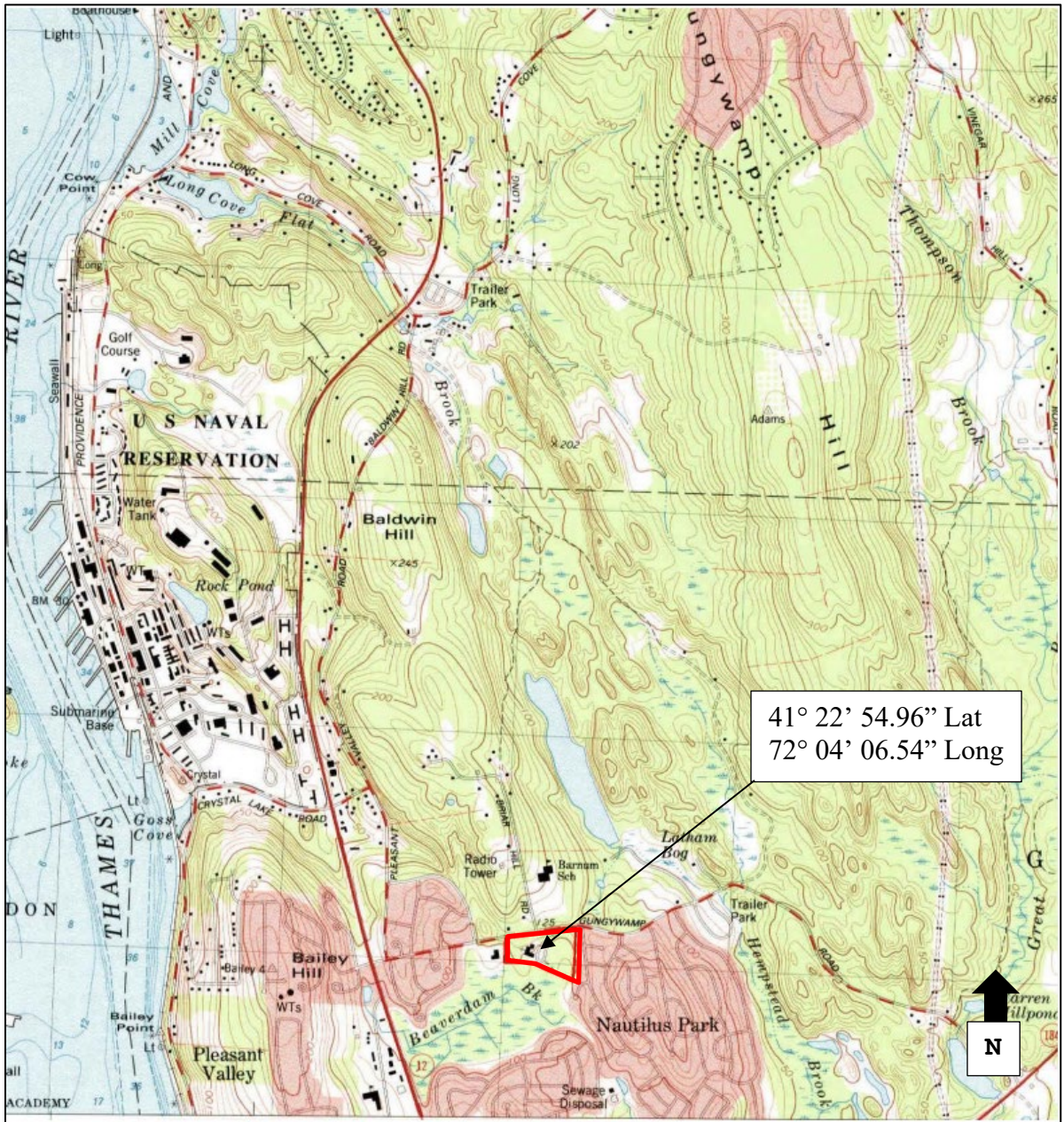


Figure 1. United States Geological Survey (Uncasville Quadrangle, 1984). Site outlined in red.

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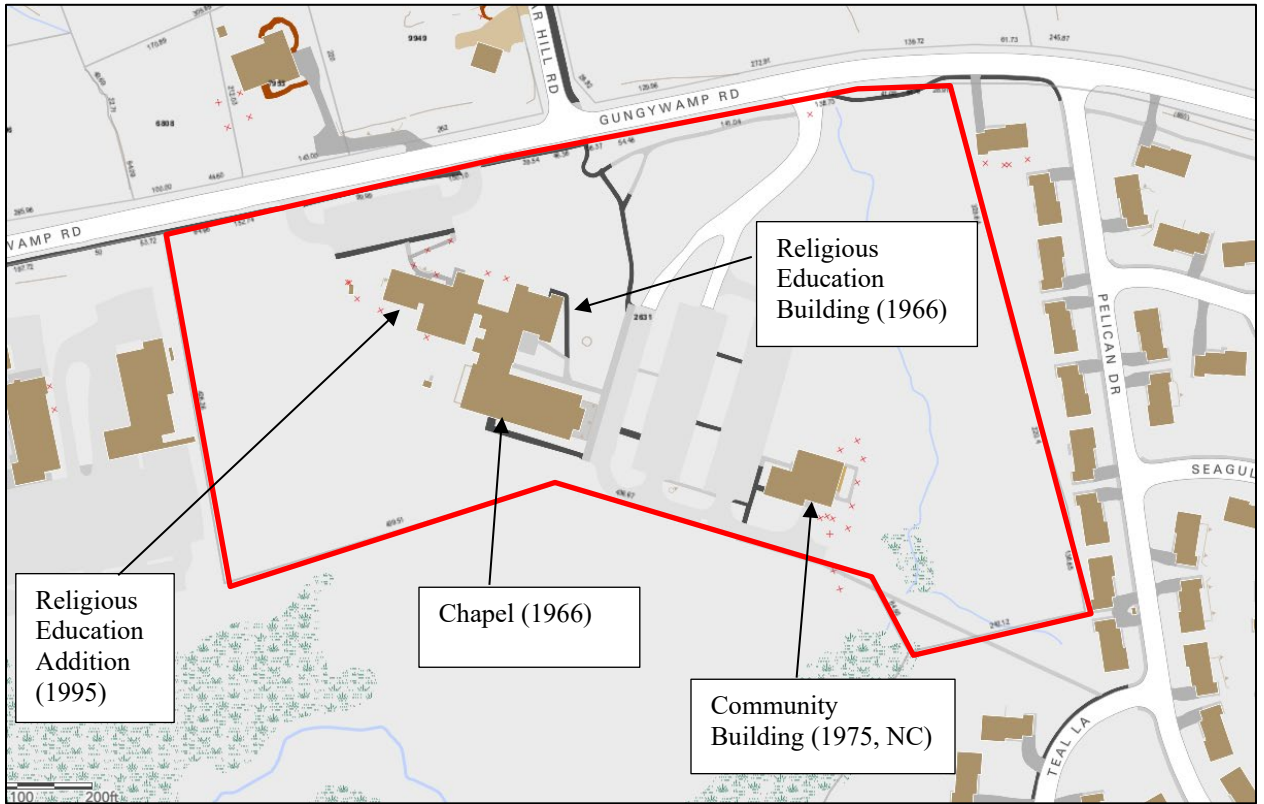


Figure 2. Site Plan showing the boundaries of the property and buildings at 231 Gungywamp Road (Parcel 178019702631), Town of Groton, GIS Online.

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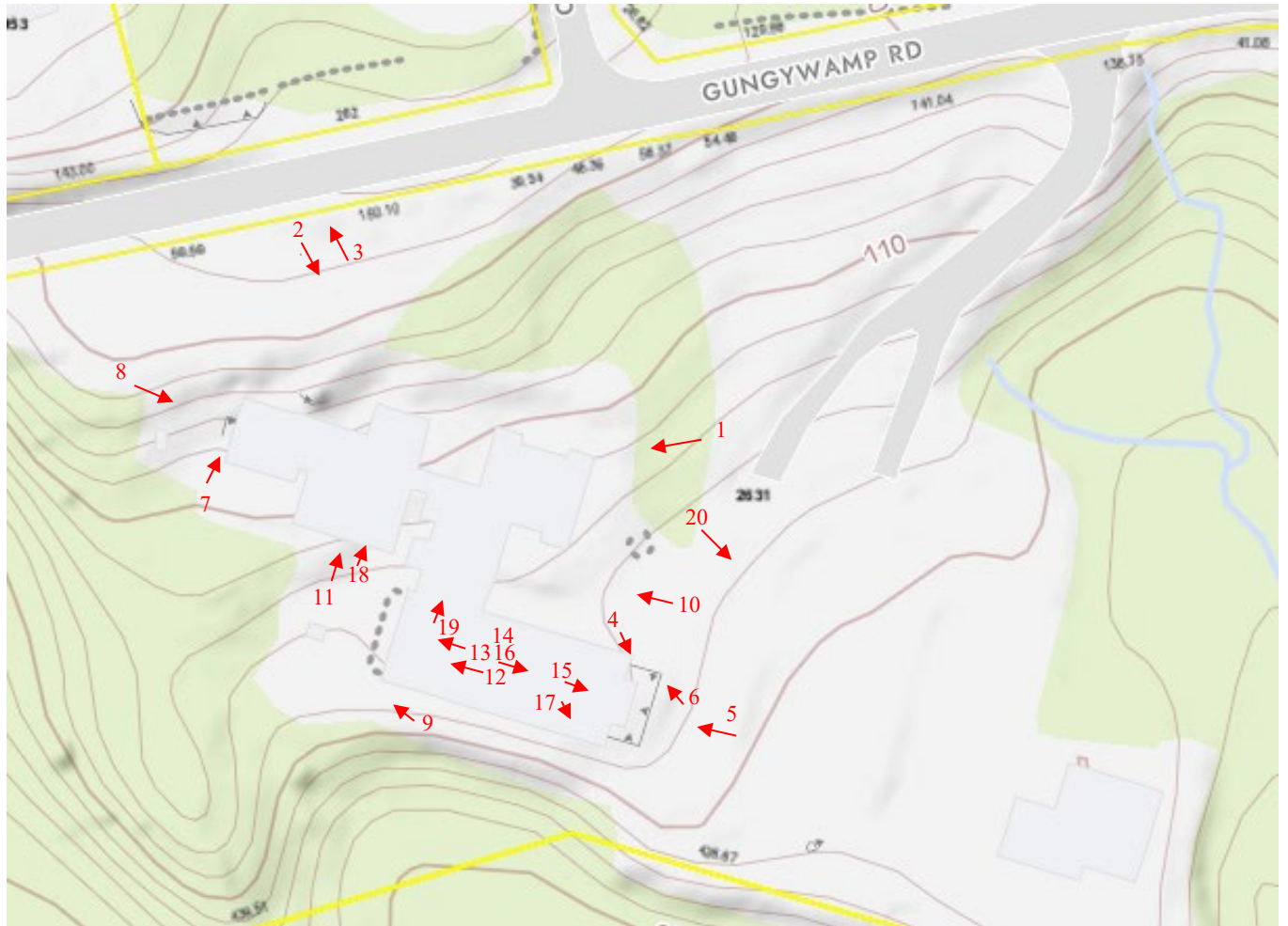


Figure 3. Photograph Key

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Figure 4. Postcard ca. 1966 of Shepherd of the Sea Chapel (Barnes Studio, Gales Ferry, CT).

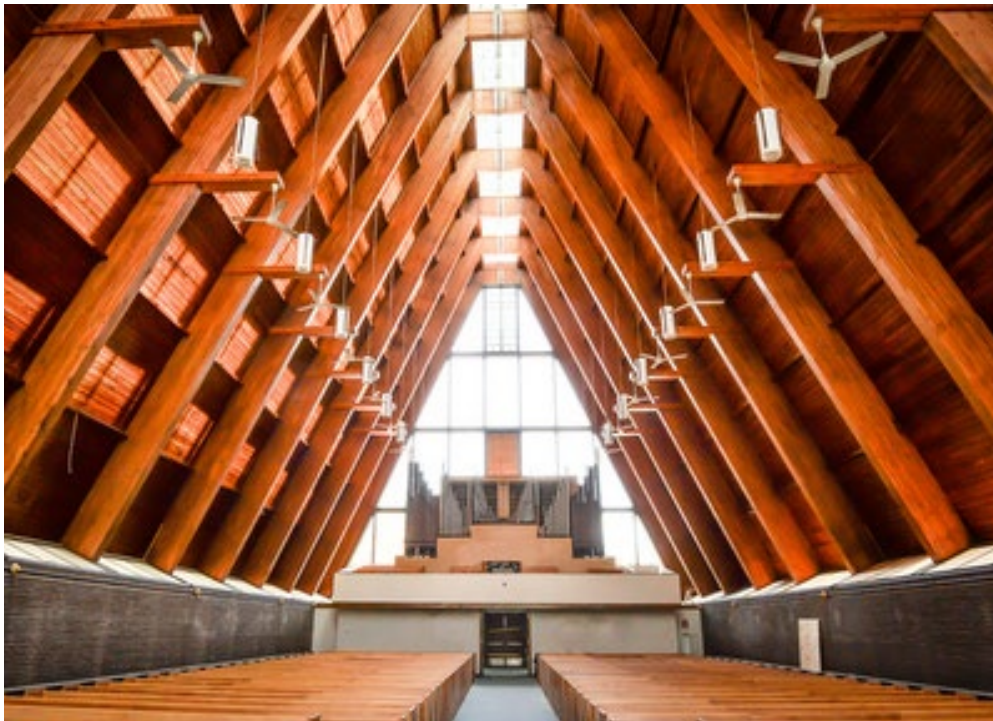


Figure 5. Image taken from PEMCO Property website showing condition in 2016 when it was advertised for sale.

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## Photographs

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Shepherd of the Sea Chapel

City or Vicinity: Groton

County: New London County State: CT

Photographer: Stacey Vairo

Date Photographed: February 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 20. Shepherd of the Sea Chapel and Religious Education Wing, view west.
- 2 of 20. View southeast from parking lot looking towards Addition toward Chapel.
- 3 of 20. Sign along Gungywamp Road, view north.
- 4 of 20. Detail of concrete footing at the base of each arch, view southeast.
- 5 of 20. Façade (eastern elevation) of Chapel, view west.
- 6 of 20. Brick end wall on north side of entrance, view northwest.
- 7 of 20. Walled garden at the rear (west) of the building, view north.
- 8 of 20. Western (rear) elevation, view east.
- 9 of 20. Deteriorated base of an arch on the southwest corner of the building, view northeast.
- 10 of 20. Exterior of the Religious Education Wing, view west.
- 11 of 20. Exterior of the Religious Education Addition (1995), view north.
- 12 of 20. Interior of the building facing the altar, view west.
- 13 of 20. Marble altar which remains in place, but it heavily damaged, view west.

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- 14 of 20. View east looking toward the balcony containing the remnants of the Austin organ.
- 15 of 20. Detail of the balcony and narthex/entry, view southeast.
- 16 of 20. View east of Chapel looking toward narthex.
- 17 of 20. Pipes of the organ, pews and floor tiles, view southeast.
- 18 of 20. Interior of chapel looking north toward Religious Education Addition steps, north.
- 19 of 20. Interior of Religious Education Addition, view north.
- 20 of 20. Community Center Building (NC), view northeast.

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for nominations 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. 460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.