

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED **MAR 16 1982**  
DATE ENTERED

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

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

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Keeler Tavern, (Benjamin Hoyt house), Ridgefield Hotel,  
Cannonball house

AND/OR COMMON

Keeler Tavern

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

132 Main Street

N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Ridgefield N/A VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

5th

STATE

Connecticut CODE 09

COUNTY

Fairfield

CODE

001

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED
- N/A

**STATUS**

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

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- MUSEUM
- COMMERCIAL
- PARK
- EDUCATIONAL
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ENTERTAINMENT
- RELIGIOUS
- GOVERNMENT
- SCIENTIFIC
- INDUSTRIAL
- TRANSPORTATION
- MILITARY
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Keeler Tavern Preservation Society

STREET & NUMBER

132 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Ridgefield N/A VICINITY OF

STATE

Connecticut

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Ridgefield Town Hall, Town Clerk's Office

STREET & NUMBER

400 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Ridgefield

STATE

Connecticut

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places (Connecticut)

DATE

1975

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut

# 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" 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 Keeler Tavern occupies an L-shaped lot at the top of a high ridge in the south central part of the town of Ridgefield. It is located on the west side of Main Street (Route 33), near the intersection of West Lane (Route 35, running through to New York State), in the center of the town's original village settlement. Main Street today is approximately the same width as it was when originally laid out in 1708 (132 feet) but is now a heavily traveled route which, together with Route 7, connects Norwalk, Westport and Danbury. Despite the importance of Main Street and the centrality of the tavern's location, the immediate area has never been developed commercially and there are a number of fine 18th and 19th-century residences in the vicinity as well as several well-maintained modern houses with attractive, generous-sized grounds. The tavern's context is, therefore, strongly residential and possesses some sense of historical character.

The original, early 18th-century house, later converted as a tavern, is 42 x 28' in dimension and is oriented with its principal facade facing north, where the ground slopes down slightly (photo 1). The west end of the house is approximately 35' from Main Street. The house is a 2½-story frame Georgian-style dwelling with central chimney (constructed of stone with brick above the roofline) and gambrel roof of a type common to the Ridgefield area in this period. The roof covering is wood shingle (recent) and a decorative railing around the top, at the level of the break in the roof pitch, is a mid 19th-century addition. There are 6 gable-roof dormers, each embellished with pilasters, entablatures and pediments, 5 of which were probably constructed in the early 20th century. The center gable on the south side, however, is earlier and appears in photographs of the house dating from the 1870s and 1880s. There is a simple wide cornice under the eaves. The exterior covering of the house is wood shingle. The main (north) facade is 3 bays wide, with central entrance flanked by 4-pane side-lights and surrounded by a simple, molded frame with slight projection above the lintel. The single front door with 5 sunken panels is early or original. The windows on all sides of the main house are 12 over 12 pane glass, also with simple molded frames with slight projections above the lintels.

Near the northeast cornerpost of the house is a large hole in the shingling containing a cannonball which hit and became lodged in its present position in 1777, as a result of a skirmish related to the battle of Ridgefield in the Revolutionary War.

In addition to the original, main entry on the north side, the house has exterior doors on the west (street entrance) and south (originally the principal tavern entrance). Both of these are surrounded by simple, molded frames similar to that of the north entrance. The south door is an example of very early construction, made of 2 layers of studded oak panels set at right angles to each other, and displays an original latch and exceptionally fine lion's head knocker.



# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Interview with Preston Bassett, Curator and Past President, Keeler Tavern Preservation Society, September 28, 1979.

Silvio A. Bedini. Ridgefield in Review. Ridgefield: The Ridgefield 250th Anniversary Committee, Inc., 1958.

Florence S. M. Crofut. Guide to the History and the Historic Sites of Connecticut. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937. Vol. I, pp. 137-43.

**AGREEMENT NOT VERIFIED**

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 2.279 acres

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

QUADRANGLE NAME Bethel Quadrangle

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 1,8 6,2,5,8,6,0 4,5,6,9,9,2,0  
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B                 
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C               

D               

E               

F               

G               

H               

## VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property occupies an L-shaped lot identified on the Ridgefield Assessor's Map E160 as parcel 80. It is bounded as follows:

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Susan Ryan, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Keeler Tavern Preservation Society

DATE

9/12/1979

STREET & NUMBER

132 Main Street

TELEPHONE

(203) 438-5485

CITY OR TOWN

Ridgefield

STATE

Connecticut

# 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.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE



TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE February 23, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

ATTEST *Bruce MacDougall*  
 KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER  
*Patrick Andrews*  
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE 4/24/82

DATE 4/20/82

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DATE ENTERED	

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 6 PAGE 1

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (cont.)

Ridgefield Historic Resources Inventory  
1978-79 local

Ridgefield Preservation Trust  
Ridgefield, CT

and  
Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford, CT

Ridgefield Bicentennial Commission  
Survey of 18th-Century Houses in Ridgefield  
1976 local  
Landmarks Committee, Ridgefield Bicentennial  
Commission  
11 Old Stagecoach Road  
Ridgefield, CT

Historic American Buildings Survey (Connecticut)  
1966 state  
Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford, Ct

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

A 1-story shed-roof addition on the east side of the house was added at an early date, possibly at the same time as the kitchen ell (see below); its fenestration matches that of the earlier, main section of the house. In the 1860s or 1870s a simple porch was added around the east and part of the south sides of the house supported by plain turned posts and embellished with lattice-work trellis panels which match the design of the roof railing. A wood picket fence with large, square Italianate corner and gateposts, around the west and north parts of the grounds, and a small, gothic, lattice-work well house in a patio at the south side of the house, were also added during the same period (photo 2).

The 1½-story kitchen ell (originally with lean-to woodshed) on the south side of the house was probably added in the 1770s, with the commencement of the tavern operation. The ell has a simple plank door in its south wall, and an interior end chimney with tall brick stack approaching the height of the central chimney in the main section of the house. An additional long, frame wing (approximately 20 x 50' in dimension), which cuts into the woodshed of the earlier ell and extends east (toward the rear of the property) was added around 1910 by architect Cass Gilbert (photo 1, left). This ell, which contains a summer dining room and a modern kitchen on the 1st floor, and bedrooms and a bath on the 2nd floor, was originally a full 2 stories high with a gambrel roof. The roof of this wing was lowered slightly and replaced by a simple gable version in the 1950s.

There is a ½-basement under the east side of the main section of the house originally accessed on the interior by stone steps from the southwest room (parlor). The foundation walls are large fieldstone boulders in mortar. The east wall was extended approximately 6' at the same time as the 1st floor (see above). A large open stone vault, probably for storage, occupies the southeast corner of the original basement area under the house. The basement was extended south under the kitchen ell in the 1770s, and there is a large beehive oven in the base of the kitchen chimney. The basement was further extended east from the ell when the ca. 1910 wing was added (also with stone foundation walls) and the basement floors were cemented at this time.

The main section of the house has a 4-room plan typical of Georgian houses of the central chimney type. Most corner and chimney posts, summer beams and chimney girts are exposed throughout the interior. The north entry opens into a small porch (stairhall) directly opposite a

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DATE ENTERED APR 2 / 1982

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

single-flight staircase to the 2nd floor located directly in front of the chimney. The wall below the stairs is paneled and encloses the cellar stairs, accessed from the parlor. The stairs have simple hand-rail and turned balusters, which appear to be 19th-century in date, while the decorative scroll-cut bracket along the string is early or original. The floor in this area, and throughout the 1st floor rooms, is covered with wide oak boards which are early or original.

On the 1st floor, the northwest (front) room or parlor is plastered (photo 3). It has a large fireplace constructed of stone with very little mortar, with a beehive oven lined with small bricks and crudely framed with stone at the opening. It is possible the room served as the kitchen for a very early house of 2-room plan which was later enlarged as the present structure (see Item 8). The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society has fitted the room with a collection of 18th-century furniture since 1966 (none of which is known to have been a part of the original tavern furnishings).

Notable features in the northeast room or dining room include decorative paneling below the windows, from floor to sill, probably added by Abijah Ressiguie in the mid 19th century, and an elegant Federal-style fireplace frame and mantel embellished with carved festoons (photo 4). The mantel was originally a part of the early 19th-century Bristol house on Elm Street in New Haven, and was removed to the Keeler Tavern by Cass Gilbert when the house was demolished to make way for Gilbert's New Haven Public Library in 1908. The hearth opening was reduced in size and lined with cement some time in the 19th or 20th century. The room is now used by the society to display dining room furniture of the Federal period.

The south room (originally a kitchen) served as the tap or bar room of the tavern after about 1772 (photo 5). The walls are wainscoted to the chair rail and plastered above. A stone fireplace, larger than that of the parlor, is surrounded by a very plain wood frame with narrow mantel shelf. A brick beehive oven in the rear wall of the fireplace is framed with an iron arch at the opening. An enclosed, single-flight stair which opens to the 2nd floor through a trap door occupies the northwest corner of the room (photo 6). Under the stairs near the west wall is a closet with a postmaster's desk and shelves, probably installed in the mid 1790s (see Item 8). The east wall of the

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RECEIVED MAY 13 1982
DATE ENTERED

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 4

tap room contains a large cupboard with shelves, presumably for tavern supplies. The room now houses a collection of 18th-century furniture appropriate for a room of this type, assembled by the tavern's preservation society.

The east end of the tap room also opens into a small plain room with plaster walls and simple woodwork at the southeast corner of the house. Its location suggests it was an early bedroom or borning room, but was used as an additional dining room at least from ca. 1804.<sup>1</sup>

The kitchen in the small south ell, dating from around the mid 1770s, also has wide oak floor boards and plaster walls and ceiling. A large stone fireplace in the south wall is, like that of the tap room, surrounded by a plain frame topped by a narrow mantel shelf. There is an original chimney cupboard above the mantel. A beehive oven over an ash box with original iron cover is located behind a small door to the right of the hearth opening. Doors on either side of the chimney enclose large shelved closets. In the northeast corner of the room is an enclosed, single-flight stair to the 2nd floor, with an additional basement stair underneath. The north wall of the basement stairs, originally the south exterior wall of the house prior to the addition of the ell, retains the wide, beaded clapboards which sheathed the main section of the house in the mid 18th century. The kitchen also contains simple 18th-century furniture, dishes and utensils collected by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

A door in the east wall of the kitchen leads down a few steps to a large formal dining room in the longest wing added around 1910 (the floor level of this wing is slightly lower than that of the original house and kitchen ell). The design and detail of the wing is Colonial Revival, inspired by architecture of the Federal period, and features a set of 3 arched, molded frames with pilasters and keystones also transferred here by Gilbert from the demolished Bristol house in New Haven (photo 7).

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<sup>1</sup>It was used as a private dining room when Jerome Bonaparte and his party visited the tavern in 1804. It has been restored and furnished as a dining room by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.



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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 5

Beyond the Gilbert dining room is a small pantry (now used as a crafts shop by the tavern society) and a modern kitchen at the extreme east end of the wing.

On the 2nd floor of the original or main section of the house, the northeast, northwest and southwest rooms are original and retain their 18th-century floor boards and simple woodwork. The walls in these rooms are plastered. Paneled closets were installed in each of these rooms some time in the 19th century. In the northeast room, the closets occupy the chimney wall and the possible presence of an original fireplace in this wall has not yet been investigated. The northwest room contains the only fireplace on the 2nd floor. It is a very small, cement-lined opening and was probably reduced from its original size also in the 19th century. The frame partition and door between the northwest and southwest rooms is constructed in hinged sections which swing up and can be secured to a set of iron hooks in the ceiling of the southwest room, creating a large space which was used in the 18th and 19th centuries as a meeting hall and ballroom. The northeast and northwest rooms currently display 18th and 19th-century bedroom furnishings and costumes. The arrangement of the southeast corner of the 2nd floor, which now contains 2 small rooms and a hall connecting with the 2nd floor of the rear ell was probably altered when the ell was added in the late 18th century. In the ell, over the kitchen, is a continuation of the hall, containing the kitchen stairs, and 2 small additional rooms of simple design, probably also originally used as bedrooms.

At the east end of the 2nd floor hall in the south ell is a door leading to the 2nd floor of the ca. 1910 wing, containing additional bedrooms and a bathroom. Originally servants' quarters, these rooms are now used as storage and work space by the tavern society.

The 3rd floor of the tavern was unfinished until 1966, when it was renovated as a modern apartment by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society.

### Grounds and Outbuildings

Northeast of the tavern is a 1-story frame garden house (approximately 25 x 50' in dimension) with an open terrace overlooking a walled garden to the east, all designed by Cass Gilbert and constructed around 1910 (photo 8). The garden house is a modified Colonial Revival

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RECEIVED MAI 16 1982  
DATE ENTERED

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 6

structure with French doors on the 1st floor, and elliptical gable windows inspired by Federal architecture. The garden facade features a 5-bay portico of extremely delicate design, with slender columns supporting elliptical arches, cornice, and decorative balustrade above. A series of elliptical marble steps descend to the lawn and a marble pool beyond. The landscaping is inspired by a combination of Dutch and Italian Baroque garden forms (photo 9). The bronze putto at the east end of the pool, and several large Italian urns scattered around the garden were acquired and placed by Cass Gilbert. The garden is bordered on the north and south by brick walkways paved in a herringbone pattern and covered by trellis arches embellished with vines, flowering plants and ferns. The entire garden is enclosed within a brick arcade, blind along the north and south walls, and open at the east end.

Directly to the rear or east of the tavern, along the dirt driveway on the south side of the property, is a 2-story frame caretaker's cottage with hip roof, designed in a very simple early Colonial Revival style (photo 10). It was probably built in the late 19th century and was originally located further west of its present position, on the high ground near the tavern. The cottage was moved, and the kitchen ell added, by Cass Gilbert shortly after he acquired the property in 1907.

East of the cottage, at the southeast corner of the property, is a large frame Colonial Revival barn with gambrel roof, also designed and constructed by Gilbert around 1910 (photo 11). The irregular and somewhat whimsical facade of the barn has a large, off-center gambrel-roof gable flanked by a shed-roof dormer and a gable-roof dormer and has a small gable-roof cupola on the roof (original blueprints for the barn by the Gilbert firm are in the possession of the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society).

FOR HCRS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	MAR 13 1982
DATE ENTERED	

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 7

In 1759 Benjamin Hoyt died and the lot and homestead passed to his son, David. 10 years later, in 1769, David sold the property to his nephew, Timothy Keeler, Jr. (1748-1815). In 1770 Keeler married Esther Kellogg of Norwalk, who had purchased a slave the preceding year. The record of this transaction is the 2nd earliest extant document relating to the presence of slaves in the town.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after his marriage, Keeler obtained one of the earliest liquor licenses in the town and opened the tavern in 1772 (the addition of the kitchen ell, and the conversion of the old kitchen to a tap room, probably occurred around this time). The tavern quickly became a popular place of refreshment and informal meetings, and was a regular stop for the overland stage line between Boston and New York via Hartford, as well as for the Danbury-New York Stage Line.

Because of Keeler's strong interest in the patriotic cause, the Tavern became a center of resistance during the Revolution. According to local tradition, citizens made bullets in the basement of the tavern, and it was for this reason that the British troops, traveling south along Main Street after the Battle of Ridgefield in 1777, fired a volley of shots at the tavern (one cannonball is still visible lodged in its original position in the northeast cornerpost of the structure). On at least one occasion the tavern was used to house ailing soldiers from nearby camps.<sup>2</sup>

In 1792 the tavern also became the 1st location of the Ridgefield Post Office (the Federal Post Office was established in the town in 1791), and the postmaster's office was probably installed in the tap room of the tavern shortly after this time. Colonel Philip Burr Bradley acted as 1st Postmaster until 1805 when Timothy Keeler himself assumed the position until his death in 1815.

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<sup>1</sup>The 1st instance on record occurred in 1740. The document relating to Esther Kellogg is found in the Ridgefield Historical Collection in the Ridgefield Public Library. The part of the collection relating to the property is sometimes referred to as the "Keeler Tavern Papers."

<sup>2</sup>Diary of Elisha Frisbie, December 24, 1776, Lichtfield Historical Society. Quoted in S. Bedini, Ridgefield in Review (Ridgefield: Ridgefield 250th Anniversary Committee, 1958), p. 59.

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RECEIVED MAR 10 1982
DATE ENTERED

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 8

After 1815 the tavern passed to Timothy's son William and daughter Anna, who jointly ran the business until William died in 1827. Anna continued alone until she married Abijah Ressiguie (1791-1887) some time around 1829. Ressiguie had already established a considerable local reputation as founder of the 1st carriagemaking firm in Ridgefield, one of the town's most important industries in the early and mid 19th century (Ressiguie & Olmsted, founded in 1815). After 1825 the firm was dissolved or reorganized as Brush, Olmsted and Company, which was located across Main Street on the present site of the Congregational Church on the corner of West Lane. Ressiguie remained a partner for some time, but after 1829 he seems to have concentrated on running and updating the tavern. The picket fence, gothic wellhouse, roof railing and porch, and interior details such as the paneling below the dining room windows, were all added by Ressiguie in the mid 19th century. After 1887 Anna Marie Ressiguie, the only child of Abijah and Anna, inherited the tavern and continued to run it until some time before 1907, when she sold it to architect Cass Gilbert (1858-1934).

At the time he purchased the tavern, Gilbert was engaged in creating a city plan for New Haven, which focused on developing the Colonial theme of the city's green, and designing the Colonial Revival public library on the New Haven green (1908). Construction on the north side of the green at this time involved the demolition of a number of Federal-style houses along New Haven's early 19th-century "Quality Row" (Elm Street). Gilbert acquired a collection of architectural fragments from one of these, the Bristol house, which occupied the site of the new library, some of which he incorporated into additions to the Keeler Tavern. In addition to the long east wing, Gilbert constructed the garden house and walled garden, the barn, and moved the caretaker's cottage and added a kitchen ell, all around 1910. Gilbert resided at the tavern on a year-round basis toward the end of his life.<sup>2a</sup> After his death in 1934 Gilbert's widow and daughter, Emily Finch Gilbert, continued to occupy the house until 1957 when Emily sold it to Vernon Welsh, a recent historian of Ridgefield, and his wife Glenna (see bibliography; Mrs. Cass Gilbert died in 1952).

In 1966 the tavern was purchased by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society (founded for this purpose) and used as a museum. The goal of the society has been to publicize the tavern's historical value, and thereby in a sense revive its historical function as a principal social and psychological center of the Ridgefield community. The society has restored many features of the building to 18th or 19th-century form, including the parlor and tap room fireplaces; re-roofed the Gilbert

<sup>2a</sup>It is listed as his only residence in 1932-33 by Who's Who in America, vol. 17, p. 936.

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 9

wing, barn and cottage; painted the tavern; pointed and repaired the main chimney; and installed modern fire and security and heating systems. The society furnished the rooms of the tavern in accordance with their various functions in the 18th and 19th centuries. Shortly after 1966 a small apartment was installed on the 3rd floor of the tavern and privately rented to provide continuous occupancy for security purposes. In addition to the tavern's museum function, the society operates a small crafts shop in the Gilbert wing, and uses the garden house for public lectures.

### Criteria A

Keeler Tavern was a regular stopping place along 2 of Connecticut's most important stage lines; it was the 1st stop on the "overland route" from New York to Boston via Danbury and Hartford (Main Street), and it was a major stop along the old Post Road from Bedford, New York, to Hartford (along West Lane). Passengers were picked up and dropped off or simply stopped for refreshment, and horses were changed at the tavern. Timothy Keeler also hired 1 and sometimes 2 blacksmiths to work regularly at the tavern, and some of the Blacksmith Agreements are preserved in the Ridgefield Historical Collection. The tavern also functioned as the town Post Office, and as a principal center for meetings and entertainment, and provided the town's only public ballroom during its early years of operation. Keeler's own political interests and active involvement in community affairs (discussed below) undoubtedly contributed to the popularity of the tavern and its importance as a place for exchanging news. Notable visitors included the 2nd Postmaster General, Timothy Pickering; the 2nd Secretary of the Treasury, Oliver Wolcott; Governor John Treadwell of Connecticut; and, in 1804, Napoleon's brother Jerome Bonaparte, on his honeymoon with his wife Elizabeth Patterson of Baltimore.

Also mentioned above is the tavern's importance during the Revolutionary War. It is, in fact, the principal extant structure in the town directly connected with the events of the Battle of Ridgefield in 1777. Copies of Regimental Orders found at the tavern (now in the Ridgefield Historical Collection) also indicate that it may have served as Ridgefield's militia headquarters during the latter part of the Revolution and for some time thereafter.

### Criteria B

The house and later tavern was owned by 3 individuals who were distinguished in Ridgefield history as follows:

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED MAR 18 1982
DATE ENTERED

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 10

Benjamin Hoyt (ca. 1639-1759), 2nd owner of the property, probably built the house in its original form. He was among the earliest permanent settlers of the town. Hoyt was born in Deerfield, Massachusetts, and was one of few survivors of the French and Indian attack on that community during the winter of 1703-04.<sup>3</sup>

Timothy Keeler, Jr. (1748-1815) embarked on his career as tavernkeeper when he purchased the old Hoyt homestead in 1769 at the age of 21 and converted it to a tavern 3 years later. However, in addition to his role as proprietor, Keeler was Ridgefield Postmaster (from 1805) and justice of the peace. According to one of Keeler's account books found in the Ridgefield Historical Collection, he also provided miscellaneous legal services for the townspeople, such as writing letters and petitions regarding court cases, making copies of legal documents and, on several occasions, acting as a bondsman.<sup>4</sup> He was a captain in the Ridgefield militia during the Revolutionary War, and served several terms as a representative in the state legislature.

Abijah Ressiguie (1791-1887) was the principal founder of Ridgefield's carriagemaking industry in the early 19th century, in addition to his role as a later proprietor of the tavern. Ressiguie was apprenticed to an independent carriagemaker in 1806, and set up shop on his own 4 or 5 years later. Around 1815 he expanded the business in partnership with Chauncey Olmsted, and the firm became the 1st major industrial enterprise of economic importance in the town. They supplied the local market and exported hundreds of carriages and wagons to Orange County in New York State. After 1825 Ressiguie remained a partner in the successor firm of Brush, Olmsted and Company, which continued until about 1875. Its factory, located across Main Street from the tavern and known locally as the "Big Shop," is no longer in existence. Ressiguie's involvement with the trade seems to have diminished somewhat after he took over the tavern in 1829. The tavern remains the principal extant structure associated with Ressiguie.

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<sup>3</sup>The south door of the tavern, constructed of 2 layers of studded oak boards set at right angles to each other, has recently been examined by past curator of Historic Deerfield, Peter Spang, and identified as a type of defense door common to the Deerfield area around 1700. Information supplied by Preston Bassett, September 28, 1979.

<sup>4</sup>Reference quoted in Bedini, op. cit., p. 200.

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 11

The tavern is also associated with one of America's most prominent and significant early 20th-century architects:

Cass Gilbert (1858-1934), who bought the tavern in 1907 as a summer home and resided there on a permanent basis toward the end of his life, was born at Zanesville, Ohio, and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In 1880-82 he entered the New York office of McKim, Mead and White. Gilbert won the competition for the design of the Minnesota State Capitol (1896), the competition for the New York Custom's House (1905), and the internationally prestigious competition for New York City's Woolworth Building (constructed in 1912-13). Gilbert's other notable works include the state capitols of Arkansas (rebuilding, 1912) and West Virginia (1928); the St. Louis Art Museum (1904); the Scott Memorial Fountain, Belle Isle, Detroit (1914); the United States Supreme Court building in Washington, D.C. (1934); and the United States Court House in New York City (1934). He was a founder and president (1913-15) of the Architectural League of New York; President of the American Institute of Architects (1908-09), and chevalier of the Legion of Honor of France (1924). In Connecticut, Gilbert also designed the Waterbury Municipal Complex (1913-24).

Criteria C

The Keeler Tavern is an excellent example of the early 18th-century Georgian residence later converted to tavern, a development which was extremely common in Connecticut and throughout New England. The simple, central chimney plan with original central entrance and broad gambrel roof constitutes a type common to the Ridgefield area in the early years of its settlement, although only a handful of examples of this type are extant. The gambrel roof, in particular, may reflect the influence of Dutch Colonial architecture from the New York area (photos 1 and 2).

The essential arrangements of the interior of the tavern as they existed in the late 18th or early 19th centuries have remained intact or have been restored by the Keeler Tavern Preservation Society (e.g., the parlor and tap room fireplaces), so that the structure presents a clear picture of how the various rooms functioned in the overall tavern operation. While there is no bar or ordinary (although the tap room very likely originally contained such a feature), the shelved closet in the east wall of the tap room probably held items used in serving refreshments. The presence of the postmaster's closet

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 12

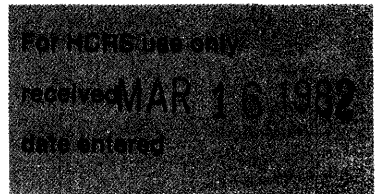
is an unusual feature (photo 6), while the arrangement of a 2nd-floor ballroom formed by a swinging partition between 2 smaller rooms frequently appeared in early American inns. The original tavern sign has also been preserved and is displayed inside the tavern. It is a shield-shaped sign crowned by a broken arch reflecting Chippendale influence, and portrays a Colonial horseman on the front with the inscription "T. Keeler," with a representation of 2 indian horsemen on the reverse. The front of the sign also shows evidence of an earlier symbol, a portrait within a circle (possibly King George III, a common motif for pre-Revolutionary tavern signs), which has been painted over.

The tavern and its grounds acquired considerable additional architectural significance after 1907, under the ownership of architect Cass Gilbert. While Gilbert is best remembered for his Beaux-Arts Classical and Neo-Gothic public and commercial architecture (e.g., the Woolworth tower and the United States Supreme Court building), he also shared with other American architects of his period an active interest in Colonial architecture which was a force in the history of American preservation as well as in the continued popularity of the Colonial Revival style in this country. Probably following his early mentor, Charles Follen McKim (who initiated the project), Gilbert played an active role in the purchase of the Octagon House in Washington, D.C. by the American Institute of Architects in 1901-07. Gilbert combined the Colonial Revival style with Beaux-Arts scale, siting and planning in such works as his New Haven Public Library. The library was an outgrowth of his involvement with New Haven's Civic Improvement Committee and his work on a New Haven city plan which aimed at emphasizing the city's Colonial architecture and heritage. These projects, which commenced in 1906-07, were exactly contemporary with Gilbert's purchase and subsequent additions to the Keeler Tavern property. Gilbert's sensitivity towards early American work is exemplified by his recovery of a collection of fragments from the demolished, Federal-style Bristol house, which occupied the site of the New Haven library. In 1914 Gilbert presented the front door of the house to then director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert W. deForest, and it is currently 1 of 5 early American doors on display in the museum's American wing. The mantelpiece and 3 elegant interior archways from the house were incorporated into the original dining room and the long Colonial Revival east wing which Gilbert added to the tavern around 1910 (photos 1, 4 and 7).



**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 13

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

While Gilbert is known primarily for his monumental public architecture, his creative sense of eclecticism and his ability to combine several stylistic modes successfully in compositions of modest scale are uniquely reflected in the outbuildings and garden he designed on the tavern property in the same period. The barn is a consciously American vernacular type of design achieving almost a Victorian sense of whimsy and irregularity (photo 11). The very simple garden house contains references to Federal architecture (the gable windows, French doors and porch balustrade) yet is Italian in its orientation to the garden. The garden itself possesses the symmetry, formality and intimate scale of the Dutch 17th-century enclosed garden while its embellishments are Italian (the putto and urns).

The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society possesses a small collection of Gilbert's drawings, whiteprints and blueprints of the tavern additions and outbuildings which document and enhance the historic integrity of the Gilbert additions.

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9

PAGE 14

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

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 15

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION (cont.)

Beginning at a point on the east edge of Main Street, the north boundary runs easterly 325.34', turns to run northerly for 178.73', and continues easterly for another 93.57', along the south edge of Kent Lane. At that point, the east boundary proceeds southerly 374.56'. At that point the south boundary proceeds westerly 327.42', southerly 4.10', and westerly again 109.70', to Main Street. At that point the west boundary follows the east edge of Main Street in a northerly direction, to the point of commencement.

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KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

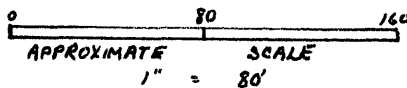
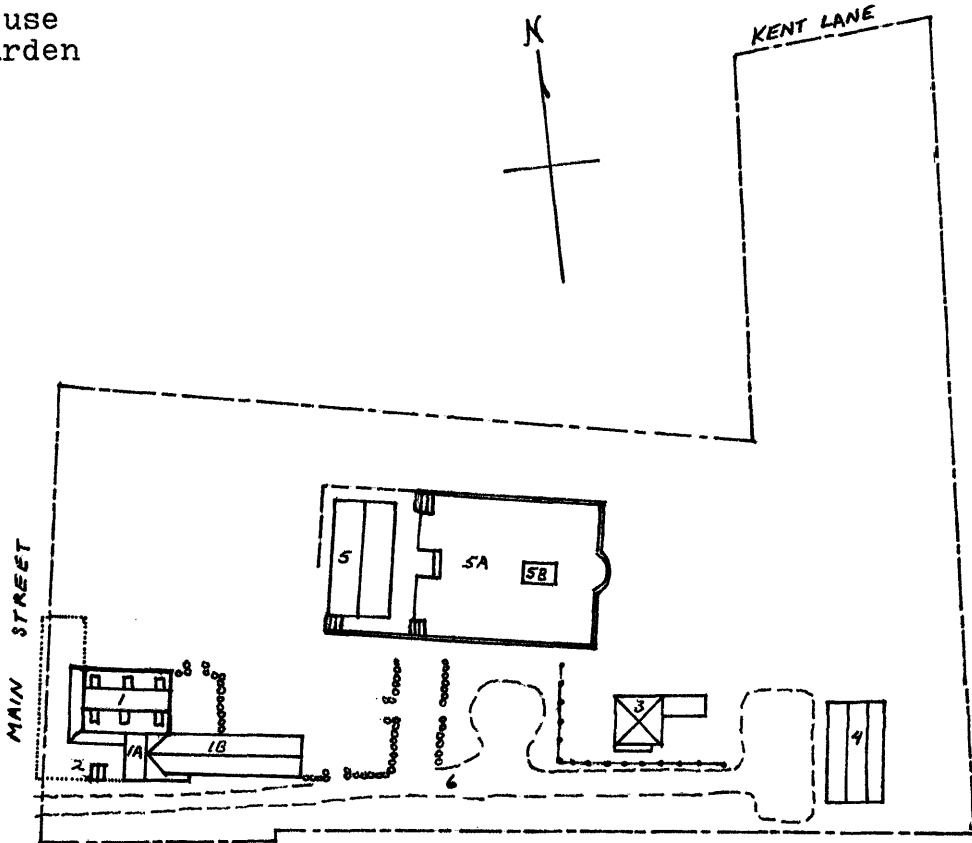
CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 16

## SUPPLEMENTARY MAP: SITE PLAN

- 1 Tavern
- 1A Late 18th-century ell
- 1B Ca. 1910 ell
- 2 Wellhouse
- 3 Caretaker's cottage
- 4 Barn
- 5 Garden house
- 5A Walled garden
- 5B Pool
- 6 Driveway



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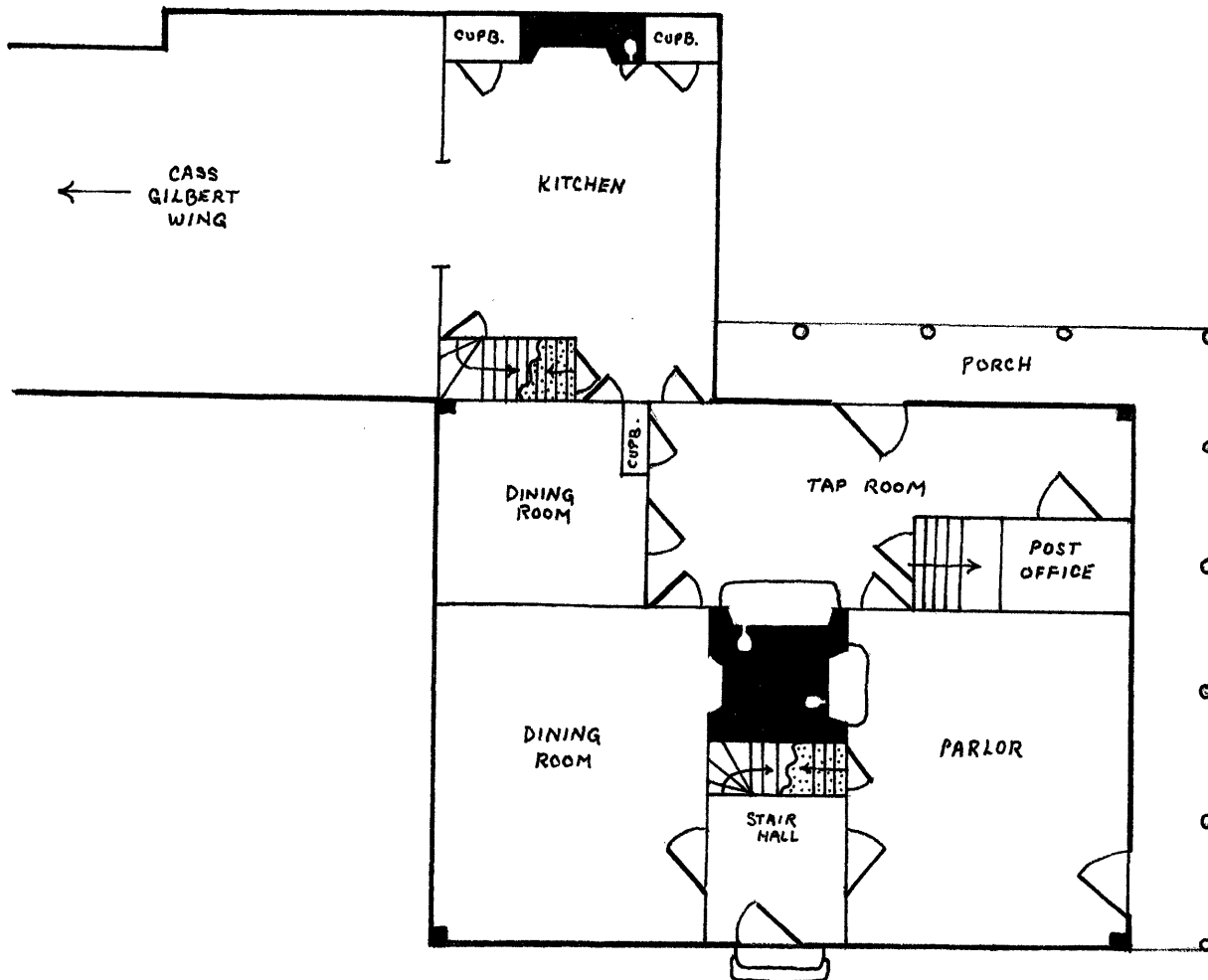
KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 17

## FIRST FLOOR PLAN (SCHEMATIC)



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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

KEELER TAVERN  
Ridgefield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 18

## SECOND FLOOR PLAN (SCHEMATIC)

