

PROPERTY NAME

Johnson House, Wallingford, CT

Page 1

United States Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NAT. HIST. SERVICE

1420

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Franklin Johnson House

Other Name/Site Number: NA

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 153 South Main Street Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Wallingford Vicinity: NA

State: CT County: New Haven Code: 009 Zip Code: 06492

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: x

Public-local:    

Public-State:    

Public-Federal:    

Category of Property

Building(s): x

District:    

Site:    

Structure:    

Object:    

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

   3   

   3   

Noncontributing

    buildings

    sites

    structures

    objects

    Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National

Register:    3   

Name of related multiple property listing: Wallingford Center Historic District

PROPERTY NAME

**Johnson House, Wallingford, CT**

Page 2

United States Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

John W. Shannahan October 20, 1998  
Signature of Certifying Official Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. 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): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson R. Beall 11/23/98

bar  
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

PROPERTY NAME

**Johnson House, Wallingford, CT**

Page 3

United States Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Current: WORK IN PROGRESS Sub: museum  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. DESCRIPTION**

Architectural Classification: LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Materials:  
 Foundation: STONE  
 Walls: BRICK/CEMENT  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 Roof: Rolled roofing  
 Other Description: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The Franklin Johnson House is a two-story Italiante-style building constructed in 1866 of brick covered with a light coat of cement, which is scored to resemble ashlar (Photograph 1). The house faces east on the main street, about one-third of a mile south of Wallingford's downtown central intersection in a residential neighborhood comprised of historic houses of similar size and spacing.

The Johnson House is sited toward the front of a flat parcel of 2/3 acre with shade trees located on the sides and toward the rear. An original masonry outhouse and ca.1900 frame barn are in the backyard.

A heavy cast-iron fence standing on a low wall of rock-faced brownstone blocks runs across the front of the house at the lot line. Its balusters resemble lyres in shape (Photograph 3). A bluestone walk leads up to the low hip-roofed wooden front porch. Chief features of the seven-foot-deep full-width porch are its cast-iron railing of arched balusters that encompass vertical and diamond motifs and the distinctive wooden columns connected by the railing. The tapered fluted columns, which are supported on high hexagonal pink granite pedestals, rise from tall turned bases to plain banded capitals and individual entablatures, and to brackets under the overhanging porch roof (Photograph 4). The four columns at the front of the porch are complemented by two engaged half-columns at the returns. The foundation of the porch on the south side displays in masonry the construction date "A.D. 1866."

The mass of the house is essentially a 34' x 32' cube, plus front porch and rear addition (see Figure 1, Site Plan). The brick walls of the building are covered with a

thin coat of cement, as differentiated from stucco which is a thicker mixture comprised of several components. In the three-bay front elevation the central doorway is deeply recessed without wooden casing on the face of the masonry. The flanking windows have 6-over-6 sash, also inset without decorative wooden casings on the face of the masonry. Window surrounds within the masonry openings are flat. The window sills and lintels and their impost consoles are pink granite.

At the second floor the arched central window is glazed with colored glass in a pattern of small rectangular panes which form a border around the arched upper glazing. The cornice of this window is curvilinear (Photograph 5). Flanking windows are rectangular, the same as those at the first floor. At the attic level a wooden molding serves as a string course, establishing a frieze in which small horizontal three-pane windows are located. The windows are bracketed by single gadrooned wooden consoles in a cyma reversa curve terminating in a small drop finial, similar to those supporting the porch roof. Soffit of the broad roof overhang is flush boarding (Photograph 6).

On the south side elevation the first window at both first and second floors is the same as those on the front. A two-story five-sided bay is to the rear. Its first story is the same masonry as the main block, but its first-floor cornice and second floor are wood painted a dark brown. Sash are 4-over-4. The bay's flat roof with molded edge is at a level just below the molded string course that runs around the house to form a frieze band below the main roof (Photograph 7). The north elevation of the house has three windows at each floor, arranged in a 1-2 rhythm (Photograph 8). The small 26' x 10' rear addition is narrower than the main block but of the same construction, finish, and window treatment, suggesting that it was built soon after 1866. The presence of the original rear wall, uncovered by selective demolition on the interior, establishes that the rear section is indeed an addition. The addition is seen in the 1881 Aerial View (Photograph 19).

The low hipped roof is almost flat. The north chimney, one of two originally rising from the roof, continues to be visible. The former cupola is seen in the 1881 Aerial View (Photograph 19).

Turning to the interior, the front door opens to a central hall with rooms on either side. The stairway in the central hall has been replaced (Photograph 9). In the north (right) front room, the marble fireplace mantel with an iron grate and the elaborate plaster ceiling medallion remain in place (Photographs 10, 11). Window reveals are 11" deep. Door and window casings are plain with band moldings (Photograph 12). The south front room has a second marble mantel and boldly molded ceiling cornices. The south rear room features the bay in which panels under the windows are part of the composition (Photograph 13). A modern kitchen occupies the rear of the house.

Finishes on the second floor are similar to those on the first. Several four-panel doors with original hardware and ceramic knobs are in place, as well as bold cornice moldings (Photograph 14). The interior of the two-story bay on this floor is the same as at the first floor. The arched central window, at the front of the hall, is glazed in the upper sash with arched frosted glass, suggesting that it may not be original because the technology for manufacturing frosted glass was not yet developed when the house was built in 1866 (Photograph 15).

In the attic two small garret rooms on the north continue to display rough plaster walls and batten doors (Photograph 16). In the center of the attic a steep stair ascends

-----

to the level of the former cupola (Photograph 17), while the south part of the third floor is open attic space.

The cellar floor in part is brick and in part is cobblestone.

The outhouse in the backyard is a smaller version of the main house in both design and materials. It is a cube built of brick with a cement wash scribed to resemble ashlar, has a low pyramidal roof with broad overhang, and formerly had a cupola (Photographs 18, 19, Figure 2). Aside from the cupola, the outhouse is well-preserved on both exterior and interior.

A frame gable-roofed barn dating from ca.1900 in the southwest corner of the lot is built of weathered vertical bead-board siding. The original barn on the property was at the northwest rear corner of the yard.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:\_\_\_ Statewide:\_\_\_ Locally: x

Applicable National Register Criteria: A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C x D\_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D\_\_\_ E\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ G\_\_\_

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
<u>ARCHITECTURE</u>	<u>1866</u>	<u>1866</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: NA

**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

Summary

The Franklin Johnson House, built in 1866, is a well-preserved example of an Italianate-style building designed by an unknown architect after the manner which Henry Austin (1804-1891) made famous with his James Dwight Dana House (1849) on Hillhouse Avenue in New Haven, Connecticut. The Johnson House, a simple cube in mass with widely overhanging eaves, is distinguished by exotic trim of plantlike columns and by its masonry construction, made to resemble ashlar by scribing, both of which clearly take inspiration from the precedent set by Austin.

Historical Note

Franklin Johnson built his house in 1866, the year date inscribed in the front porch foundation. He lived there for 20 years, until his death on February 2, 1886. The Wallingford Land Records show that he was active in real estate transactions before and during these years. The indices list him as a grantor at least 13 times between 1866 and 1884, and as a grantee for more than 40 entries from 1834 to 1873. Location of the

parcels involved in the transactions often is given as being in the central part of the town.

In the 1868 atlas (Figure 2) the F. Johnson parcel is an irregular shape abutting P. Whittlesley to the south. A new street at the rear lot line of the Whittlesley and Franklin properties took the name Whittlesley Street and the short street identified by the atlas with the name W. Bartholomew became Franklin Street (see current street map, Figure 3). Thus it appears that the two adjoining property owners were active in the development of their neighborhood and gave their names to two of the streets. In later Sanborn maps the Johnson parcel has been conventionalized in shape as a regular rectangle.

After Franklin Johnson's death, the house continued as a residence until it was converted to commercial purposes ca.1980. Interior alterations made at that time included installation of the present front stairway and rear demising partitions. The current owner, the Wallingford Historic Preservation Trust, is rehabilitating the building for use as the home of the American Silver Museum.

### Architecture

In mid-19th-century Connecticut, a version of the Italianate house consisting of a cube under low-pitched roof and broad roof overhang, usually embellished with classical trim, was widely popular. The style, initially based on the vernacular farmhouses of the Italian countryside, was developed by English architects such as John Nash, brought to the United States by John Notman of Philadelphia, and popularized by Andrew Jackson Downing as part of the Picturesque movement. In the interpretation of the style as seen in the Johnson House, the basic boxy mass is quite plain, depending for its architectural statement on the wide roof overhang and character-defining trim features.

Henry Austin, architect, of New Haven (1804-1891) was well-known in Connecticut and the Northeast. He apprenticed in the office of Alexander Jackson Davis, an associate of Downing, and his partner, Ithiel Town. Austin gave his identifying interpretation to the Italianate style by designing exotic trim as seen at the Dana House. In Wallingford, he drew plans for such a house, known as "a rose-bedecked mansion" (Withey), for Moses Yale Beach. It is now demolished except for its elaborate front porch columns. The anonymous designer of the Johnson House followed in Austin's footsteps as portrayed by the James Dwight Dana House in New Haven and the Moses Yale Beach House in Wallingford.

The Johnson House is a simple cube in mass, with the standard "low-pitched roof with widely overhanging eaves having decorative brackets beneath" (McAlester, p. 212), central cupola, and three-bay facade, but it is exceptional for its finishes and trim. The cast-iron front fence and front-porch railing are elaborate introductions to the facade. Their patterns are complex and classical, in one case a lyre. The high pink granite polygonal pedestals for the porch columns are an unusual color for the Italianate style, which often employed sandstone. The granite possibly came from the nearby Stony Creek quarries in Branford, Connecticut, which are noted for stone of this color. The same stone is used for the lintels and sills of windows throughout the house and outhouse. The brick walls are made to resemble stone ashlar, thereby increasing the elegance of the building's appearance in the manner made common by Nash in his London city planning.

The bulbous base of the porch columns is exotic and seldom seen. The exaggerated taper of the fluted shaft sets it apart from most, as does the plain band used as a

capital under the egg-and-dart molding below the shallow individual entablature. The roof bracket above combines multiple curves with a drop pendant in an elaborate design used both for the porch roof and the main roof.

The configuration of the bay on the south elevation is more typical for the period, but the combination of building materials, masonry for the first floor and wood above, is not. The bay is well-preserved; the wooden components appear to be original. In a complex detail, the bay's roof, flat, with projecting molded edge, is held below the frieze band which surrounds the house, avoiding the break in its continuity which would have occurred if the bay had been carried up to the height of the main roof.

Interior details of marble mantels, elegant plaster ceiling medallion, and bold cornice moldings carry on the spirit of complex embellishment established on the exterior. The windows and window surrounds are original and in good condition. The 11-inch depth of the reveals dramatically signals the thickness of the masonry walls.

A final unusual component of the resource is the Italianate multi-person outhouse, which faithfully follows the architecture of the main house, and is equally well-preserved on both exterior and interior. The pointed cupolas of both the house and outhouse are clearly visible in the 1881 View (Photograph 19).

Information is lacking as to the identity of the architect of the Johnson House. While it is conceivable that the Johnson House was designed by Henry Austin, it seems unlikely due to the absence of any local information or tradition to that effect, and to the absence of Austin drawings for the house in the two repositories for Austin materials. Austin drawings held by the New Haven Colony Historical Society are primarily for the New Haven City Hall. Ten boxes (2 1/2 shelf feet) in the archives of University Library, Yale University, contain Austin drawings, specifications, correspondence, etc., but are considered to represent only a fraction of Austin's work. No reference to the Johnson House is found in the finding aids of either repository.



9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Atlas of New Haven County, Connecticut.* New York: F.W. Beers, 1868, Plate 48.
- Henry Austin Papers, MS 1034. Manuscripts & Archives, University Library (at Sterling Library), Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Henry Austin Folders, Library of New Haven Colony Historical Society, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Brown, Elizabeth Mills. *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976, p. 138.
- Downing, Alexander Jackson. *Country Houses.* New York: D. Appleton & Company, 1856.
- Hale, Clarence E. *Tales of Old Wallingford.* Chester, Connecticut: Pequot Press, 1971.
- McAlester, Virginia & Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses.* New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984.
- View of Wallingford, Connecticut. O.H. Bailey & Co., Boston, 1881.
- Wallingford. Maps by Sanborn Map Company, New York, N.Y., 1911, Plate 10; 1919, Plate 12.
- Wallingford Assessor's field card.
- Wallingford Land Records, Grantors' Index, 14 entries, vol. 63, page 82-vol. 73, p. 33; grantees index, 43 entries, vol. 38, p. 62-vol. 60, p. 452.
- Wallingford Probate Records, vol. 28A, p. 180; vol. 28B, p. 69.
- Whiffen, Marcus. *American Architecture Since 1780.* Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1969.
- Withey, Henry F., and Withey, Elsie Rathbun. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).* Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970 (reprint of 1956), p. 26.

PROPERTY NAME

Johnson House, Wallingford, CT

United States Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register as a contributing resource in the Wallingford Center Historic District.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: .67

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A	<u>18</u>	<u>4590980</u>	<u>682020</u>	B	___	___	___
C	___	___	___	D	___	___	___
E	___	___	___	F	___	___	___

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary of the nominated property is the lot line of the parcel which it occupies as described in Wallingford Land Records, volume 553, page 569.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the property is the lot line described above, which has been the boundary of the property for decades.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: David F. Ransom, Consultant, reviewed by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinator

Org.: Architectural Historian

Date: February 1998

Street/#: 83 Avery Heights

City/Town: Hartford

State: CT

ZIP: 06106

Telephone: 860 953-8626

---

### List of Photographs

Photographs were taken by David F. Ransom in February and June 1997. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, CT 06106.

Photograph 1

Front (east) elevation  
View west

Photograph 2

South and front  
(east) elevations  
View northwest

Photograph 3

Front fence  
View northeast

Photograph 4

Front porch column  
and railing  
View northwest

Photograph 5

Second-floor central  
front window  
View west

Photograph 6

Northeast corner  
of roof overhang  
View west

Photograph 7

Bay on south elevation  
View northwest

Photograph 8

Front (east) and  
north elevations  
View southwest

Photograph 9

Front stair  
View southwest

Photograph 10

Mantel in north  
front room  
View west

-----  
Photograph 11  
Ceiling medallion in  
north front room  
View northwest

Photograph 12  
South front room  
View southeast

Photograph 13  
South rear room,  
bay interior  
View south

Photograph 14  
Second-floor south  
front room,  
View southeast

Photograph 15  
Second-floor central  
front window  
View east

Photograph 16  
Garret  
View northeast

Photograph 17  
Stair to cupola  
View southeast

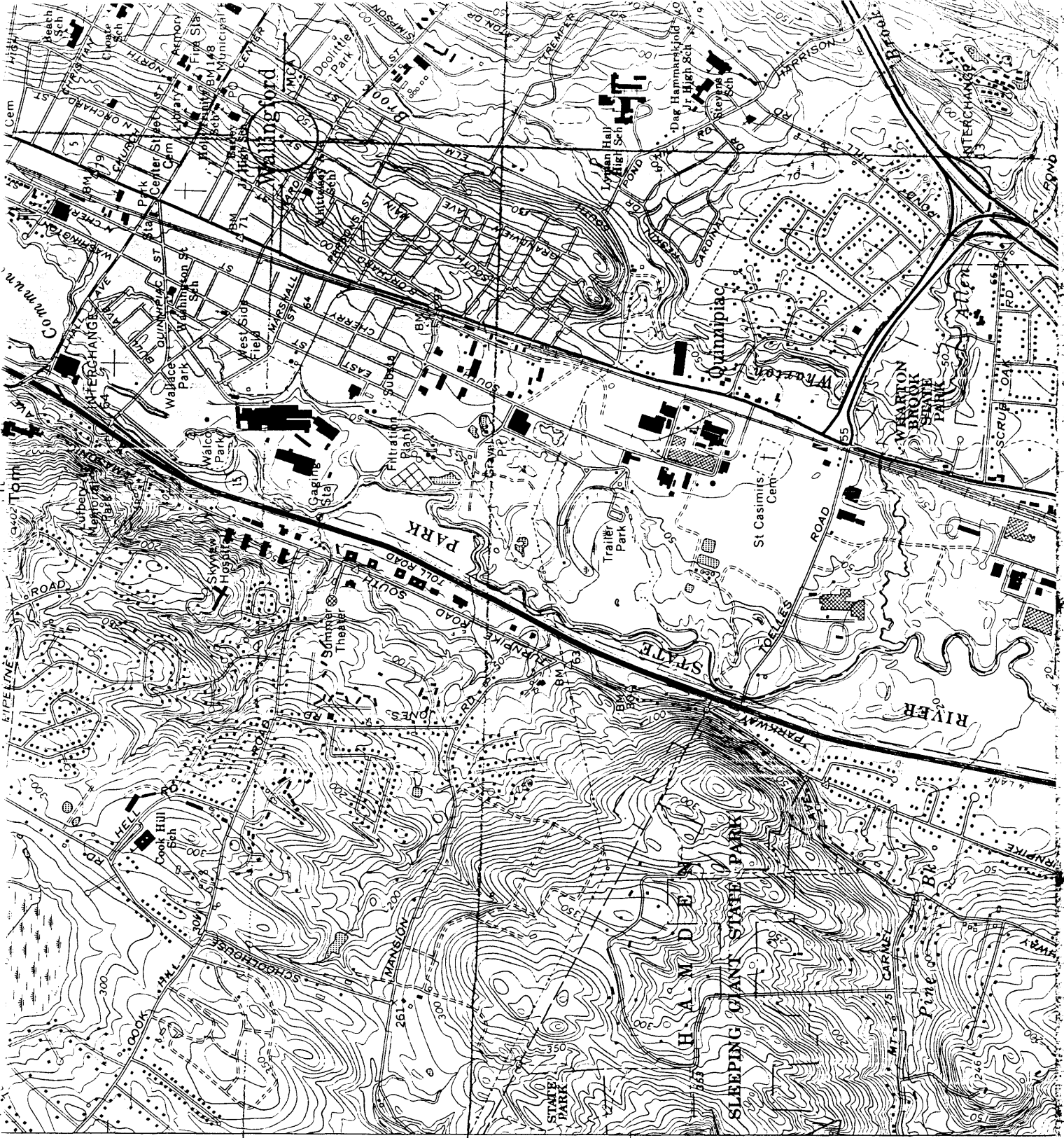
Photograph 18  
Outhouse  
View southeast

Photograph 19  
1881 Aerial View

-----

### List of Figures

- Figure 1. Site Plan and Photo Key
- Figure 2. Atlas of 1868.
- Figure 3. Map of Wallingford streets, 1991.



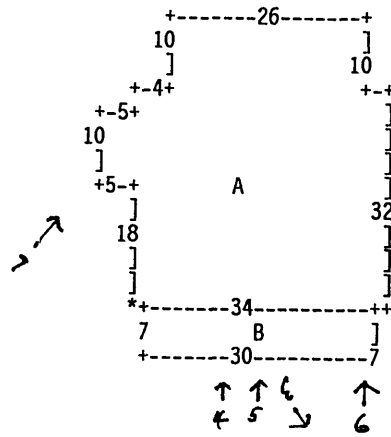
JOHNSON HOUSE  
 WALLINGFORD  
 NEW HAVEN COUNTY  
 CONNECTICUT  
 UTM REFERENCE  
 18/4590980/682020

4592 27'30" 4591 4590 4589 4588  
 6466 IV NW (MOUNT CARMEL)

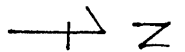
Barn



Outhouse



House



**Johnson House**  
**Wallingford, CT**

Site Plan

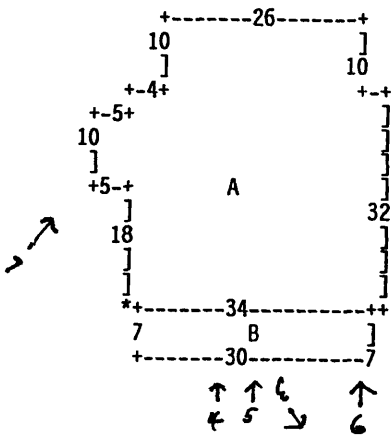
Photo Key

Figure 1

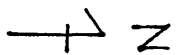
Barn



Outhouse



House



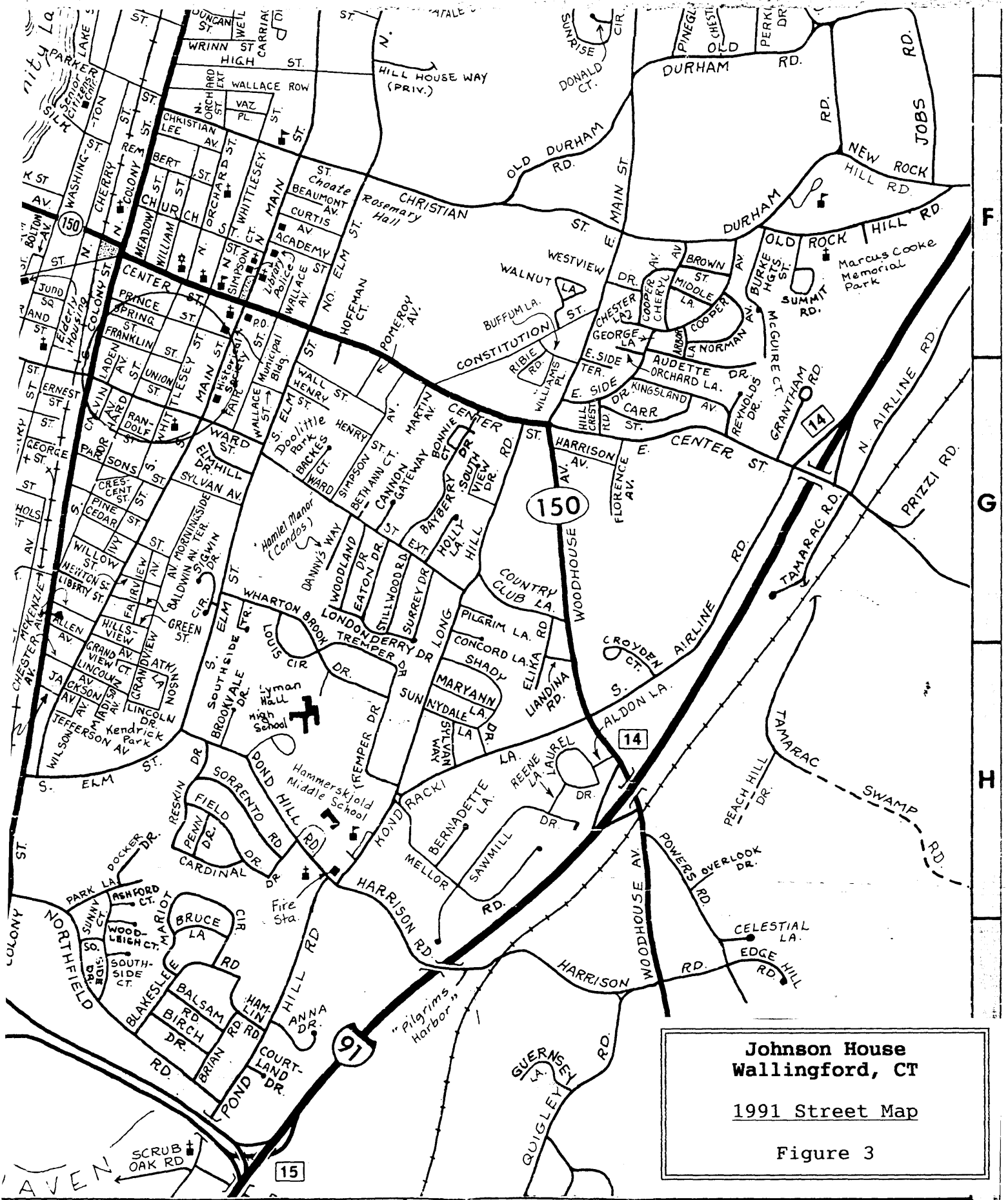
**Johnson House**  
**Wallingford, CT**

Site Plan

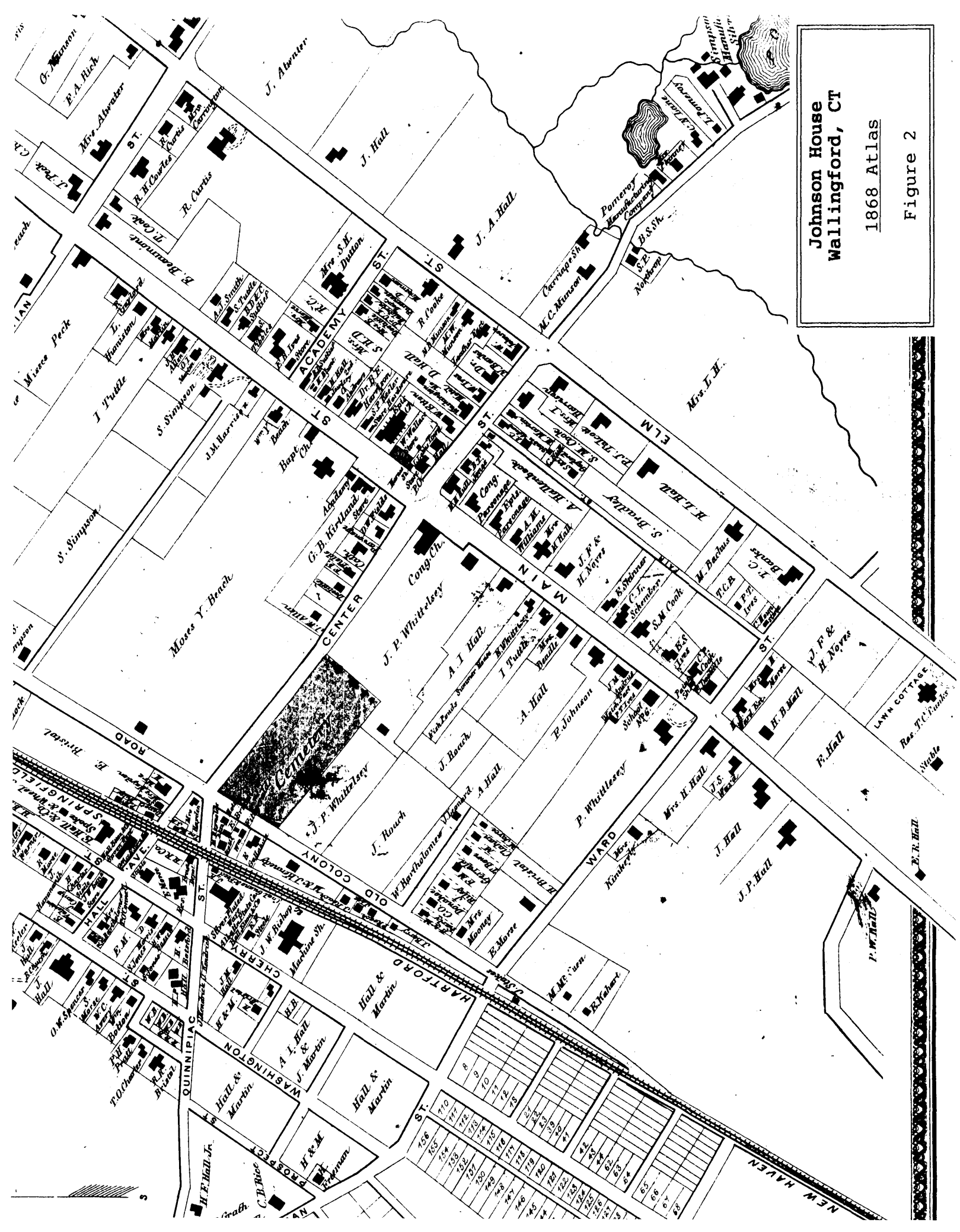
Photo Key

Figure 1





**Johnson House**  
**Wallingford, CT**  
 1991 Street Map  
 Figure 3



Johnson House  
 Wallingford, CT  
 1868 Atlas  
 Figure 2

158	110				
159	111				
160	112				
161	113				
162	114				
163	115				
164	116				
165	117				
166	118				
167	119				
168	120				
169	121				
170	122				
171	123				
172	124				
173	125				
174	126				
175	127				
176	128				
177	129				
178	130				
179	131				
180	132				
181	133				
182	134				
183	135				
184	136				
185	137				
186	138				
187	139				
188	140				
189	141				
190	142				
191	143				
192	144				
193	145				
194	146				
195	147				
196	148				
197	149				
198	150				
199	151				
200	152				
201	153				
202	154				
203	155				
204	156				
205	157				
206	158				
207	159				
208	160				
209	161				
210	162				
211	163				
212	164				
213	165				
214	166				
215	167				
216	168				
217	169				
218	170				
219	171				
220	172				
221	173				
222	174				
223	175				
224	176				
225	177				
226	178				
227	179				
228	180				
229	181				
230	182				
231	183				
232	184				
233	185				
234	186				
235	187				
236	188				
237	189				
238	190				
239	191				
240	192				
241	193				
242	194				
243	195				
244	196				
245	197				
246	198				
247	199				
248	200				