

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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RECEIVED **JAN 27 1982**
DATE ENTERED **FEB 25 1982**

**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

Josiah Bronson House

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

Breakneck Hill Road

__ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Middlebury

__ VICINITY OF

5th

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Connecticut

CODE
09

COUNTY
New Haven

CODE
009

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

__DISTRICT

__PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

__AGRICULTURE

__MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

__UNOCCUPIED

__COMMERCIAL

__PARK

__STRUCTURE

__BOTH

__WORK IN PROGRESS

__EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

__SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

__ENTERTAINMENT

__RELIGIOUS

__OBJECT

__IN PROCESS

__YES: RESTRICTED

__GOVERNMENT

__SCIENTIFIC

__BEING CONSIDERED

__YES: UNRESTRICTED

__INDUSTRIAL

__TRANSPORTATION

__NO

__MILITARY

__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Lawrence M. & Esther F. Duryee

STREET & NUMBER

Breakneck Hill Road

CITY, TOWN

Middlebury

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Middlebury Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

1212 Whittemore Road

CITY, TOWN

Middlebury

STATE

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1981

__FEDERAL STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

EXCELLENT DETERIORATED
 GOOD RUINS
 FAIR UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

UNALTERED
 ALTERED

CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE
 MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Josiah Bronson House is a 2½-story gable-roofed frame dwelling built about 1740. The house shares its three-acre lot with two barns, both of which have hewn frames and appear to date back to the 19th century or earlier. The area is one of widely scattered houses, none as old as this and many comparatively recent. The acreage with the house was formerly used for pasturing horses, but now the only agricultural activity is a stand of Christmas trees and a garden. The house is at the corner of steep Breakneck Hill Road and a little stone-wall-bordered lane which leads to some ponds behind the property. There is a large old maple in front of the house and several smaller trees scattered about, but most of the land is open. The front yard is planted mostly with a ground cover, and there are a few shrubs close to the house.

The five-bay facade faces Breakneck Hill Road. The central entrance is flanked by partial sidelights. Formerly, the house had a cantilevered shed roof sheltering the entrance,¹ but this was removed, as were the later columns which had been added to the early porch. The original thick panelled and batten door is still in place, as is the old latch, a Suffolk-type with a three-lobed head instead of the usual spade or spear-shaped outline. There is a modern panelled door serving as a storm door in front of the older door. Windows are fitted with twelve-over-twelve sash, some of it old but most closely reproduced. The exterior is covered with wood shingles of considerable age underneath which are old clapboards nailed directly to the studs. The house may originally have been of lean-to form: it is only one room deep, neither front room contains a cooking fireplace, and a stone foundation to the rear would seem to line up with a lean-to's rear wall. Instead, there is a late 19th-century 2-story ell appended to the east rear. Rafters that were examined showed no sign of having been cut down from longer, lean-to rafters, but many appear to have been replaced, so the roof's evidence is incomplete. The underpinning and central stack are a fieldstone rubble although the chimney is built of brick above the point where it emerges from the asphalt-shingled roof. The stack foundation has a large vault four feet deep and four feet wide built into it. The vault can be reached from the east room's hearthstone or from the cellar, (only under the east half) where the blocks closing off the small rectangular opening have been removed.

The east front room has a small brick fireplace framed by a bolection molding, with a raised panel arrangement covering the surrounding wall. Around the room runs a dado of horizontal beaded boards. The original floor is covered over. In the south east door a large batten door on strap hinges leads to the side yard. The north front room is quite similar, with a nearly identical treatment of the fireplace wall. However, along the top there is a band of dentilling absent from the other room. Also, the wide-board oak or chestnut floor is visible, and there is a chair rail instead of the dado. The chambers above are reached by rear stairs only - the front stairway is missing, if in fact there ever was one. The upper rooms are plain, though there is a chair rail throughout and the old floors are in place. The west chamber has a small fireplace set within a recessed panelled niche: above the fireplace is a single rectangular panel and a cupboard with a panelled door on early brass hinges. Framing members visible in the interior are all plainly cased. Only the second-story posts show a marked flare and there are no visible summers. The chimney girts and posts on the first story are of exceptional dimension, however, and the two panelled walls are set back within the central bay defined by the girts. Rooms in the ell are modern.

The larger barn is sited west of the house at some distance. It is a story and a half high with a shed-roofed extension to the north side. The small barn is behind the house down the lane. Both have asphalt-shingled gable roofs and

8 SIGNIFICANCE

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

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1738 - built BUILDER/ARCHITECT
c. 1800 - sidelights, dentils

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Josiah Bronson House is a significant historical resource for Middlebury, Connecticut. The house is one of few 18th-century houses remaining in that town, and it is a good example of a dwelling of that period: it has much well-preserved historical material, which typifies 18th-century building custom (Criterion C). In addition, the house is important for local history (Criterion A). The Bronsons were among the first to settle at Breakneck, and the family played an active role in the town's development. Tradition holds that the Count of Rochambeau visited this house on two occasions while his army was encamped nearby. The visit by the French troops made a large and enduring impression upon the people of the area, and it is appropriate to recognize this building associated with the encampments.

Despite some alterations, the house stands as a good representative of an 18th-century dwelling. The most serious loss is undoubtedly the replacement of the lean-to, c. 1850, by the present ell; this has changed the exterior form and deprived the interior of the usual kitchen and large cooking fireplace. The loss of the hood or shelter over the front door has also left the entrance looking somewhat unfinished.¹ But overall, the house presents the five-bay, gable-roof, central chimney form which is characteristic of the period. The construction of the house, with its heavy girts and flared second-story posts, is usually associated with houses built about 1750 or earlier, as is the lack of sheathing between studs and clapboards. Usually houses of the period had summer beams; their absence in this house may perhaps be attributed to the use of oversized chimney girts and posts to bear the floors' weight.

The raised-panel fireplace walls in the two front rooms and the roll moldings surrounding the openings are typical of pre-Revolutionary interiors, before mantels and shelves replaced this early treatment. Only the dentillation along the top of the parlor wall suggests an owner of more than moderate means. The stone vault in the cellar is unusually large and deep, though stack foundations commonly included some kind of recess or niche. Explanations for these spaces range from food storage to hiding places. Other significant and representative interior features include the dado, chair rails, wide-board floors, many original hinges and latches, and the partially panelled chamber fireplace wall. The latter includes a set of early brass hinges on the cupboard, an unexpected material were it not for nearby Waterbury, the birthplace of American brass. However, they may be English.

The Bronson family settled at Breakneck as early as 1690, and this house is believed to have been built by Josiah Bronson shortly after 1738. Josiah lived a long life (1713-1804). "He was shrewd, calculating, and social; became a lieutenant, secured wealth, and attained an honorable position in society."² In addition to his position as a leader of the militia, Josiah was influential in having Middlebury set off from the town of Waterbury. He was a farmer of substance, and ran a cider mill on the property. Today the two barns associated with the house recall the Bronsons' dependence upon agriculture. A portrait of Josiah is at the Mattatuck

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Bronson, Henry. The History of Waterbury, Connecticut. Waterbury: Bronson Brothers, 1858.

Duryee, Lawrence M. "Breakneck in the American Revolution." Newtown Bee, August 29, 1975, p. 1.

_____. "The Bronson Saga of Breakneck Hill." Lure of the Litchfield Hills, Winter, 1973-1974, pp. 20-22.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 3

QUADRANGLE NAME Waterbury

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 656410 4601010
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B
 ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is shown as Block 26, lot 11 and Block 27, lot 11 on Middlebury Assessor's Map 11; Land Records reference is Volume 61, page 648.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Bruce Clouette, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE February 26, 1980

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford

STATE CT

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL X

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 January 18, 1982

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Entered in the
National Register

DATE 2/25/82


KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER
ATTEST

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

FOR HCRS USE ONLY
RECEIVED JAN 27 1978
DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Josiah Bronson House
Middlebury, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

Significance (cont.):

Museum in Waterbury, with a reproduction now taking its place in the parlor of this house. Silas Bronson, a wealthy merchant and philanthropist who established the Waterbury public library, was the grandson of Josiah and is believed to have been born in the house in 1788.

Middlebury's most memorable events were the two encampments of Rochambeau's army, in 1781 on their way to Yorktown, and in 1782 back from victory over the British. On both occasions the French found the terrain around Breakneck well-named, and much effort was spent moving the artillery up and down the hill. The return trip was especially bad, as it rained continuously, and some complained that camping at Breakneck was worse than the war itself. At least one cannonball has been found in the vicinity, and a monument has been erected on the site of the camp. It is easy today to dismiss the encampment as a minor part of an important military campaign, but to do so overlooks the tremendous impact of several thousand troops on a small settlement like Breakneck. Typically, there was a great deal of interaction between the French and Americans. The Americans worked to provide food and water for the troops, and were often entertained by the army's band. In turn, the officers visited with local dignitaries, one of whom tradition says was Josiah Bronson of Breakneck. The French found Breakneck to be "a hamlet with but few houses . . . These are widely scattered and very ugly."³ They made maps of the area, and the location of the Josiah Bronson house clearly corresponds to a structure shown on their map. Indeed, the house is the only one which can with confidence be said to have been there at the time of Rochambeau's visit.⁴

Although our modern-day appreciation of the house may differ from that of the officer quoted above, it is important that the French presence be commemorated by more than a monument: not only does the house date back to the period of the encampment, but Rochambeau himself is said to have visited Josiah Bronson there.

¹J. Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut (New York: Dover Reprint, 1963, of 1924 ed.), 105, shows a similar porch in Branford on a house dated 1710, and although he suggests a Dutch Long Island connection, the roofs are also found in Durham and Danbury, and on later 18th-century houses.

²Henry Bronson, History of Waterbury (Waterbury, 1858), 470-471.

³Howard C. Rice, Jr. and Anne S.K. Brown, The American Campaigns of Rochambeau's Army (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

⁴Rice and Brown do not mention Josiah Bronson, but they assert that Isaac Bronson's house (Josiah's brother's) is at the foot of the hill. However, this house appears to be Federal in style and c.1820; see II, p. 314. Moreover, William Cothren in his History of Ancient Woodbury (Waterbury, 1854) asserts that the Isaac Bronson house was replaced by a newer house by Isaac's grandson; p. 214.

The French visits were on June 27-30, 1781, and on the return, in October, 1782.