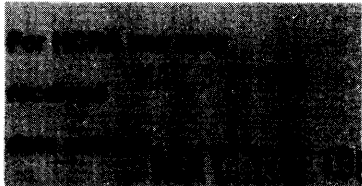


United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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 General George Cowles House

and/or common General George Cowles House

2. Location

street & number 130 Main Street N/A not for publication

city, town Farmington N/A vicinity of congressional district 6th

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	N/A	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
			<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name James McA. Thomson

street & number 130 Main Street

city, town Farmington N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Farmington Land Records, Town Hall

street & number 1 Monteith Drive

city, town Farmington state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title See continuation sheet has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date " " "  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records "

city, town " state "

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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

#### Overview

The George Cowles House (1803) is a substantial, square brick structure on Main Street in Farmington, Connecticut, about three-quarters of a mile south of the village's central intersection. The house faces east, close to the street, while grounds of 5 1/2 acres extend behind the house and to the south. An old barn and a carriage house converted to a dwelling are on the grounds. The house is one of a number of large 18th- and 19th-century houses along Main Street that make up the Farmington National Register Historic District.

The George Cowles House is designed in the spirit of Jeffersonian Classicism with a colossal Ionic portico of five columns on the south facade, toward the garden. There is a Palladian window in the tympanum of the portico's pediment while on the opposite (north) end of the house there are two large Palladian windows, at first- and second-story levels. The elaborate front entrance and interior decorative trim are carried out in the manner of Robert Adam.

#### Exterior

The 2 1/2-story, gable-roofed, principal block of the George Cowles House is almost square, 42 feet wide by 43 feet deep. The portico projects ten feet on the south side while a 2-story 20x42-foot ell extends to the rear.

The 2-story portico, with its five Ionic columns instead of the usual four, is the most impressive architectural element in the design. (Photograph 1.) The exterior surface of the columns is stucco, covering the interior brick cores. The capitals are wooden, robustly carved, and include a rose in the balteus between the volutes. The columns support an entablature of plain architrave and frieze with projecting cornice over small modillions. The raking cornices also project causing the tympanum of flush boarding to be recessed. The Palladian window, directly over the central column, occupies the full height of the tympanum. The window rests on a projecting, molded sill. Its central section consists of six rectangular lights, with radial muntins in the half-round section above. Paneled pilasters frame the 1-over-1 sections of the window on either side and support plain friezes with boldly projecting cornice caps. The arch of the central section springs from these caps, and has a key block at the top. (Photograph 2.)

The portico is supported by an arcaded brick structure of four round-arched openings separated by pilasters that serve as pedestals for the columns. Barrel groin vaulting behind the arches supports the floor of the portico. As the ground slopes off, this basement-level arcaded structure is exposed, extending the height of the south portico elevation to four stories.

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Continuation sheet Existing Surveys

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National Register of Historic Places  
1972  
Library of Congress  
Washington

Federal  
D.C.

State Register of Historic Places  
1975  
Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford

State  
CT

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The wall behind the portico, which is the south elevation of the house, has four bays. The two central windows are close together, that is, they are closer to one another than they are to the extreme left and right windows. The first-floor windows have tall, 6-over-12 double-hung sash, under large, splayed, brownstone lintels. The wall above the sash is fitted with recesses so that they may be raised up out of the way and the apertures serve as doorways to the portico. The second-floor windows are 6-over-6.

The front of the house also has four bays. The windows at both levels have 6-over-6 sash, the splayed brownstone lintels and thin brownstone sills. The window enframements are within the masonry openings, and are not molded. Brownstone is also used for the visible foundation walls of three courses of ashlar. At the roof line, the architrave and frieze of the portico stop at the wall of the house, but the cornice supported by modillions continues across the full width of the front. (HABS Sheet 5 and Photograph 3.)

The doorway occupies the second bay from the right. It is approached by broad, brownstone steps of four risers. The top riser and tread are the top course of the ashlar foundations. The 5-panel door is flanked by leaded side lights over recessed panels. The side lights are defined by engaged colonnettes of inverse taper that support a plain frieze with a fluted and beaded version of a dentil course and a flat, molded cap. The central section of this entablature, over the door, is recessed. Its cap is segmental in plan instead of straight and supports a gilt eagle.<sup>1</sup> (Photograph 4.)

The fanlight of the doorway has a basket-handle or three-centered arch of rowlock brick springing from brownstone impost blocks. The leaded glazing in a radial petal pattern is the same as shown by Sheet 5 of 1934 drawings for the Historic American Buildings Survey and in the 1926 White Pine Series, but a picture published in 1906<sup>2</sup> shows a simple pattern of radial muntins. The 1906 picture also shows the side lights leaded in a pattern of diamonds rather than the present ovals, and shows the frieze, now plain, decorated with a swag to left and right with a double swag in the center. The diamonds appear in HABS Sheet 5, demonstrating that while the fanlight was changed before 1934 the changes in side lights and frieze occurred later. The festoons also appear in the 1934 drawing.

The brick in the front wall of the house are laid up in Flemish bond. All the other walls are common bond. The exterior was sandblasted, perhaps two decades ago, to remove yellow paint thought to have been added as in the early 20th-century photographs the brick appears not to be painted.<sup>3</sup>

The brownstone ashlar foundations are continued on the north elevation and the ends of the roof slopes are treated as raking cornices with modillions and short returns. There are 6-over-6 windows near the front and near

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the back at the first and second floors, and, in the center, Palladian windows at the levels of the stair landings between the first and second floors and between the second and third floors. These two Palladian windows are similar to the one in the south elevation pediment except that there is interlacing tracery in the round-headed sections. (HABS Sheet 8.)

The ell to the rear was extended by one bay in the 1940s, at which time the raking cornices of the roof, the returns and the fanlight in the gable end either were saved and re-used in the new end wall or were replicated. The former end wall seen in HABS Sheet 7 had no fenestration except the fanlight, while the present end wall has two 8-over-8 windows in the basement, paired 12-over-12 windows at the first floor and one 12-over-12 window at the second floor. In the ell the windows are smaller and the lights in the sash are smaller than in the main block.

The south elevation of the rear ell has a shed-roofed porch whose floor level is a continuation of the floor level of the portico. It has round wooden posts that are supported by square brick piers. The general scheme is shown by HABS Sheet 6, although the ell now extends one bay beyond the porch, the paneled doors have been replaced by glazed doors, and the exterior steps have been removed.

On the north side of the ell, in the recessed corner with the main block, HABS Sheet 8 shows a stucco pantry. This has now been replaced with a two-story wooden addition, over an added two-car garage. (Photograph 5.)

The roof of both sections of the house is covered with slate shingles. The date when they were applied is not known. The HABS drawings (1934) refer to wood shingles but there is no local knowledge that the shingles were changed subsequent to 1934. There are three tall brick chimneys on the main block, and one on the ell. HABS Sheet 8 indicates a former chimney "removed to below roof" but there is no structural indication in the wall or basement that this chimney ever existed. It appears that the HABS references to wood shingles and the former fourth chimney may be errors. Three dormers were installed in the front slope of the main roof in the 1940s for the purpose of adding light to the third floor, and were removed in the 1960s. The one dormer added earlier on the rear slope remains. The blinds shown in the HABS drawings are thought to have been a 20th-century addition, and were removed in the 1960s.

#### Outbuildings

The smallest of the three outbuildings is a pyramidal-roofed shed directly behind the house that now serves as a pool house. (Photograph 6.) The former late 19th-century barn, converted to a dwelling in 1949 is a two-story frame structure, gable roofed, with clapboard siding. It has a

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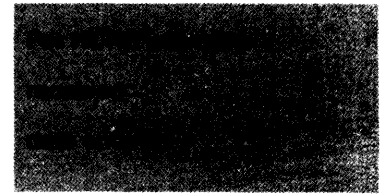
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central hooded entrance with two overhead garage doors to the right and paired windows and a glazed bay to the left. At the second floor there are three wide, gabled dormers. The frame of the barn southwest of the house, in the meadow, is old, perhaps 18th century. It was moved to the present location from another property in the 1960s. The wood-shingled gabled roof and vertical siding date from the 1960s. The barn is separated from the garden by a brownstone wall. (Photograph 7.)

A high, stepped brick wall runs close to the street from opposite the north end of the house south to beyond the portico. It was built in the 1940s as protection against increasing traffic on the street.

Interior

The plan of the first floor consists of four rooms. The front door opens into a large, two-story, stair hall that is lighted by the two Palladian windows in the north wall. The stairs ascend against the north wall to a landing, then turn left (south) 90 degrees to the second floor. The railing continues along the south and east sides of the open well to the north wall and the second flight of stairs, above the first, to the third floor. (Photograph 8.)

The first run of the stairs has 15 risers to the landing, then nine risers to the second floor. The handrail terminates in a volute at the bottom, and is ramped at the landing and second floor. There are three thin rectangular spindles per tread. The triangular space underneath the stairs is filled with paneling. The north wall formerly was painted with trompe l'oeil panels.

The inside surface of the front door is wide diagonal boards. There is a molded, projecting cap above the door, under the fanlight. The 6-over-6 windows at the northeast corner of the hall have deep reveals. The window surrounds are molded on the sides and at the top, with a broad, flat stool. The soffit and sides of the reveals are paneled. Other windows throughout the house employ the same scheme.

Toward the rear the hall narrows to a passage. (See HABS Sheet 2.) The double door shown by the drawing as dividing the two sections of the hall have been removed, while the rear door shown as leading to the pantry has been closed. The rear door and its surround are still in place, however, including a fanlight with simple radial muntins. Originally, this was an exterior door and its simple fanlight is a companion to the front door fanlight shown in the 1906 picture.

Two doorways lead from the hall to the drawing room. Positioned directly opposite the two windows in the south wall of the drawing room, they have the same molded surrounds and paneled reveals as the windows. In addition,

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they have a wide frieze with vertical channels, dentil course, and broken pediment. (Photograph 9.) The 8-panel doors are a mahogany color.

In the drawing room the ceiling is 12 feet high. A wide frieze with a pattern of incised "triglyphs" encircles the room. It is surmounted by a projecting molded cornice with flat soffit. A raised molding on the ceiling about a foot in from the walls sets off a ceiling border, and there is a chair-rail molding on the walls. The reveals of the two front windows run to the floor, with the wall space under the sills filled by panels.

A chief decorative element in the room is the fireplace and its mantel. The hearth is granite and the firebox opening is edged with sandstone. The opening is flanked by free-standing reverse-taper colonnettes, similar to those in the front entrance, which support a frieze with groups of vertical channels. The frieze breaks out over the columns. The portion of the frieze over the fireplace opening has a central urn with ribbons and festoons to left and right. The portions of the frieze that break out over the columns have an urn on each of the three sides. These raised decorative elements are composition. At the top of the frieze there is a band of molding made up of alternating short and long narrow dentils, under the mantel shelf. The mantel shelf is in three sections, central -- over the opening, and left and right -- over the columns, all with molded and beaded edges rounded in plan. The chimney breast projects from the wall and the ceiling cornice breaks out at the chimney breast. (Photograph 10.)

There are two doors from the hall leading to the dining room, behind the drawing room. One of these doors is centrally located opposite the fireplace as shown by HABS Sheet 2. The second has recently been opened up, toward the front of the house opposite the window east of the fireplace. The walls between the drawing room and dining room and between these two rooms and the hall are brick bearing walls. Probing the wall between the hall and the dining room at the point opposite the window east of the fireplace seemed to indicate a void in the brick, and upon opening up the wall the void was confirmed. Analysis suggests that there is a second original doorway in the wall between the hall and the dining room opposite the window west of the fireplace, and, therefore, that the present central door is added. Originally, both the drawing and dining rooms had two doors from the hall, opposite the south windows.

The dining room architectural trim is similar to that of the drawing room but less elaborate. The ceiling cornice is the same, but there is no frieze below it. The fireplace has the same stone hearth and stone border around the opening, but instead of free-standing columns it has pilasters. The pilasters, however, are tapered, in the inverse fashion characteristic of the house. The capitals of the pilasters have vertical channels, picking up the element found in the friezes of the drawing room, but they support a plain frieze, paneled in the center. The band

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of molding under the mantel shelf is simpler and the mantel shelf itself, while curved and in three sections, is simpler than in the drawing room.

The dining room does have its own special feature. This is a wide alcove against the east wall under a semi-elliptical arch with central key block. The arch springs from the capitals of paneled pilasters that are decorated with a molding of alternating short and long vertical thin dentils similar to those found in the fireplace moldings but with the short pieces now at the bottom instead of the top. There is one doorway in this wall, opposite the south window of the drawing room front wall, now not used. (Photograph 11.) No indication has been found of a doorway in the wall opposite the north drawing room window.

The ceiling has been lowered in the study behind the stair hall. The window on the back wall has been moved to the north, closer to the corner, and an imported, dark wood, strapwork design fireplace surround has been installed. These changes occurred in the 20th century. There is a door to the space under the stairway, now a lavatory.

The ceiling height on the second floor is 12 feet, the same as on the first floor. The floor plan is also similar, consisting of the hall well and three rooms. Each room has a fireplace and ceiling cornice. Major and minor changes have been made on the second floor.

The major change was made in the hall, soon after 1907.<sup>6</sup> A steel I-beam was installed mid-way in the hall running north-south, a dressing room (or hall bedroom) and bath were added at the front of the house and the stairway to the third floor was altered with a shortened first run positioned north-south in front of the reduced stair well. This is the arrangement shown by HABS Sheet 3. It was reversed in 1970 by removal of the I-beam and the two small front rooms, opening up the full stair hall to its two-story height again and returning the stairs to its original configuration.

There are two doorways from the hall to the front chamber and one to the rear chamber, identical to the corresponding doorways on the first floor, including the broken pediment. The two south chambers have chair rails. The fireplace surrounds are not as elaborate as those on the first floor. The arrangement of closets and bathrooms has been changed from time to time.

The ballroom on the third floor is a single long, open space extending out over the portico, with a coved ceiling. (Photograph 12.) In the 1940s the space was partitioned into bedrooms lighted by the dormers installed on the front slope of the roof. These changes were reversed in 1970. A dormer on the rear slope of the roof, added by Theodate Pope, continues to light a bathroom. The Palladian window at the south end of the ballroom has paneled pilasters with fluted capitals under a dentil



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course. The interior of the two Palladian windows on the north wall is similar. The difference is that the north windows in their upper round-headed sections have interlacing muntins while the south window has radial muntins.

The rear wing, originally devoted to service, in addition now has a small apartment in the final bay added in the 1940s. HABS Sheet 2 is incomplete and does not reflect the current floor plans.

1. The 1934 HABS drawings do not show the eagle, indicating that it has been added since that date.
2. Farmington, Connecticut, p. 18.
3. The amount of pitting in the brick indicates that the abrasive cleaning was relatively mild. No maintenance problems or deterioration in appearance have developed in the ensuing two decades.
4. The 1906 photograph does not show a fourth chimney. The 1913 Colonial Dames and 1930s Federal Writers Project reports are silent on the roof covering. A further error in the HABS drawings is the north point; it is west of north.
5. While the HABS drawings show blinds, the HABS photographs do not.
6. Farmington building permit No. 20, January 7, 1949.
7. Theodate Pope bought the house in 1907. The second-floor changes were described by Florence Gay in 1913 as "new".
8. During October 1981 the door from the hall to the dining room opposite the fireplace was closed up, and the original doorway to its west was opened up. The original configuration has now been restored of two doors from the hall to the dining room as there are two doors from the hall to the living room, all four doors being opposite south windows. In addition, a door has been fitted into the doorway between the dining room and the living room (Photograph 11). On the dining room side it is flush with the wall.

# 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 type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Local history
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1803

Builder/Architect Unknown

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### Criteria

The George Cowles House with its impressive south portico is an unusually fine example of the influence of Jeffersonian Classicism in domestic American architecture. The house is given a measure of elegance by the carefully coordinated interior and exterior decorative trim, that is designed in the manner of Robert Adam (1728-1792), the prestigious Scottish architect. (Criterion C.) The Cowles family who built the house and owned it for the first 100 years was one of the prominent and influential families in Farmington during the 18th and 19th centuries. (Criterion B.)

### Architecture

The impressive south portico is the dominating architectural feature of the house. The tall columns with their robustly carved Ionic capitals, the large Palladian window in the tympanum, and the proportions and detailing of the pediment reflect the classical tradition articulated in America by Thomas Jefferson during the period in which the George Cowles House was built. Jefferson's appreciation of this interpretation of classicism was strengthened by his studies of Roman buildings during his service as ambassador to France after the Revolutionary War, and was expressed in his designs for his home, Monticello, for the Capitol at Richmond, Virginia, and for the University of Virginia. He never embraced the Greek Revival style that was to follow. This distinction was recognized in the Farmington community where the George Cowles house was described as "the large brick house...with its imposing Roman facade."<sup>1</sup>

Many of the decorative elements of the house, other than the portico, derive from the work of Robert Adam, the influential Scottish architect of the third quarter of the 18th century. Adam developed a lighter and more attenuated version of neo-classicism that won wide approval. He often used Palladian windows, of which three are found in the George Cowles House, and was famous for his sophisticated treatment of doorways and mantelpieces. The doorway of the George Cowles House is designed as a companion piece to the mantels. Both have the reverse-taper columns and raised swags and festoons. In addition, both have the curved surfaces that Adam also used extensively. The elliptical arch was a favorite of Adam's, represented in the house by the arch over the dining room alcove.

Another design influence found in the house is that of the Colonial Revival. While the reason for changing the glazing in the fanlight and sidelights of the doorway is not recorded, it seems likely that the popularity of the Colonial Revival in the early part of the 20th century may have been a factor. The removal of the Adamesque swags from below the fanlight was regrettable.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 5.5

Quadrangle name New Britain

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

18	680	110	46	20	480
Zone	Easting		Northing		

B 

18	680	050	46	20	390
Zone	Easting		Northing		

C 

18	679	970	46	20	420
Zone	Easting		Northing		

D 

18	680	010	46	20	560
Zone	Easting		Northing		

E 

Zone	Easting		Northing		

F 

Zone	Easting		Northing		

G 

Zone	Easting		Northing		

H 

Zone	Easting		Northing		

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is described in the Farmington Land Records, volume 163, page 441. It is the remaining acreage that now goes with the house.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title David F. Ransom

organization Architectural Historian

date April 30, 1981

street & number 33 Sunrise Hill Dr.

telephone 203 521-2518

city or town West Hartford

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date March 11, 1982

For HCERS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

William A. Hanson

date 6-11-82

Keeper of the National Register

Patrick Indus

date 5/7/82

Chief of Registration

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Significance

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The careful planning and coordination of classical or neo-classical elements in the well-thought-out design of the George Cowles House suggest that the house was the work of a competent architect, whose identity, unfortunately, is unknown. There were two contemporary houses in nearby Hartford of similar design for which the source of plans is also unknown.

One of the Hartford houses, the Ezekiel Williams House (Photograph 13), stood just west of downtown on the southwest corner of Asylum and Hopkins streets until it was demolished in the 1890s to make way for an addition to Hartford Public High School. The piers for support of the columns, the spacing of the windows in the wall behind the portico and the Palladian window in the pediment of the Williams and Cowles houses are similar. The classical idiom was further expressed in the Williams House by the flanking wings with columned porches. The columned porch on the south side of the rear ell of the George Cowles House echos this feature.

A 1797 entry in the Hartford Land Records<sup>2</sup> for the sale of 12 acres by William Lord<sup>3</sup> to Ezekiel Williams (1764-1843)<sup>4</sup> may be a record of the purchase by Williams of the land on which to build his house, and is close to the 1803 date of the George Cowles House. The Williams House remained in the hands of the descendants of the owner until it was demolished.<sup>5</sup>

The other Hartford house, the home of Henry Hudson,<sup>(1780-1843) (see photo 14)</sup> was located in the center of town on the northwest corner of Prospect and Arch streets until it was demolished, c. 1910, to make way for the Hartford Municipal Building. The portico of this house, otherwise similar to the other two, had six columns, grouped three and three on either side below the Palladian window of the pediment. A photographic view to the southwest of the Prospect Street facade (Photograph 14) shows several similarities to the George Cowles House. The wide frieze of the portico stops at the brick wall of the house. The entrance is in the second bay from the right, and its sill is on a level with the top of the ashlar foundations. There are two Palladian windows in the north wall, not centered, but at heights suggesting that they lighted a staircase.

It is said that Elias Morgan built this house,<sup>6</sup> but his name does not appear in the Hartford Land Records index. As Henry Hudson bought several pieces of land from Roderick Sheldon,<sup>7</sup> a prominent landowner in this part of the city, it seems likely that Hudson built the house.

Hudson owned paper mills in East Hartford and was a member of the publishing firm of Hudson and Goodwin. The house passed through several hands, and as seen in the photograph had a Second Empire wing added, before it was demolished.<sup>8</sup>

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Both of the Hartford Houses have Tuscan columns. The George Cowles House, with its Ionic capitols, is different from the other two in this respect. But, on the whole, the three houses built at the turn of the 19th century are remarkably similar. It seems quite likely that they had a common design origin, but what that origin may have been is unknown.

Among the possibilities that come to mind to explain the construction of three so nearly similar houses in the Hartford area within a few years of one another, three are worth mentioning. Possibly, a talented architect, thus far unidentified, designed the three houses, or designed the first one, from which the other two were copied. Possibly, the design for these houses appeared in an architectural pattern book, as yet unidentified, that was followed by local builders. And, possibly, the Jeffersonian design was brought to the Hartford area by workmen who had been employed in Washington and Virginia. Workmen were recruited from various parts of the country, including Connecticut, by Jefferson, and it may be that the design came north with a returning master builder. The fact that the Cowles family was engaged in the mercantile business in Farmington and in the South adds a measure of credence to this theory.

Ownership History

Solomon Cowles (1758-1814) was a successful merchant and trader who conducted a business in the Farmington area under the family name. In 1802 "for the consideration of the parental affection which I have for my son" he gave a parcel of 14 acres of land to his son, George Cowles (1780-1860).<sup>10</sup> George Cowles was married December 3, 1803; both the land and the house were a wedding present from father to son.<sup>11</sup>

George Cowles lived affluently while carrying on his father's mercantile business. The family had fine stables and lands, and in particular he owned a celebrated white horse. The house was the scene of much gaiety. The owner was active in the state militia and in due course achieved the rank of major general, the highest military office in the state, although it is not recorded that the militia under his command ever saw action.<sup>12</sup> An important event consistent with George Cowles position in the community occurred at the house when it was the place where the first meeting was held proposing the formation of the Farmington Canal Company.<sup>13</sup>

But all was not well. George Cowles was unable to carry on the family enterprise with the success achieved by his father and was "unfortunate in business."<sup>14</sup> The house was mortgaged to James and Augusta Cowles for \$5000 in 1834.<sup>15</sup> Presumably, the mortgage was foreclosed,<sup>16</sup> for the James Cowles family lived in the house. James was the son of Elijah Cowles, and was "one of the wealthiest men in town."<sup>17</sup>

James Cowles left life use of his dwelling house and lot, now said to contain about 12 acres, to his wife.<sup>18</sup> In the inventory of his estate the homestead

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is referred to as the "George Cowles" house and is valued at \$10,000.<sup>19</sup> The will provided that at the death of Mrs. Cowles the property would pass to two sons, James L. and Adrian Cowles.

The next conveyance recorded in the land records is the sale by James L. Cowles, now of New York City, in 1907 to Theodate Pope.<sup>20</sup> The parcel in this transaction is much smaller than in prior conveyances, 325 feet on Main Street, 400 feet on New Road on the west and 580 feet deep. Theodate Pope (1868-1946), the architect, was the daughter of the Pope family who lived in Farmington at Hill-Stead, a house designed by Stanford White in association with Theodate Pope. Miss Pope (later Mrs. Riddle) never lived in the George Cowles House but would not sell it for many years to interested tenants. She exercised her architectural aptitudes in two ways: First, she added the I beam to make possible additional second-floor rooms that reduced the size of the stair hall, a change that has been reversed by the present owner. Second, she designed and built four units of worker housing on New Road that remain in place to the rear of the nominated property.

At length, after<sup>23</sup> 37 years, Theodate Pope Riddle sold the house in 1944 to Marjorie L. Sage<sup>21</sup> who added the dormers and divided the ballroom, more changes that have been reversed by the present owner. Mrs. Sage's heirs sold the house in 1961 to Wilmarth S. Lewis<sup>22</sup> who lived next door to the south where he maintained the Walpole Library. Presumably, he purchased the George Cowles House for protection. He sold it in 1963 to James McA. Thomson, the present owner,<sup>23</sup> who was a Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice and the grandson of James McA. Thomson of Brown, Thomson & Co., the Hartford department store that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries occupied the Cheney Building designed by H.H. Richardson.

1

Farmington, Connecticut, p. 14. It is also to be noted that Oak Hill, James Monroe's house in Loudon County, Virginia, designed by James Hoban incorporating suggestions from Jefferson, has a 5-column, 2-story, side portico. - See Wendell D. Garrett, Thomas Jefferson Redivivus, Barre: Barre Publishers, 1971, p. 158.

2

Hartford Land Records, 21/200, August 19, 1799

3

This part of the city was known as Lord's Hill.

4

Ezekiel Williams and his brother married sisters who were the daughters of Oliver Ellsworth of Windsor, Connecticut, the first Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court.

5

For several years before it was demolished the house was leased to John C. Mead, a Hartford architect who is perhaps best known for his Vanderbilt Mansion, later the Ira Dimock House, on West Hill in West Hartford.

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6

Morgan, p. 96.

7

For example, HLR 36/343, November 3, 1807.

8

One of the owners was David Watkinson, Hudson's brother-in-law, who by testamentary gift founded the Watkinson Library and the Watkinson School for Boys. Hudson and Goodwin were Noah Webster's publishers.

9

Richard L. Cote of the Virginia Landmarks Commission currently is preparing a dissertation that deals with Jefferson's recruitment of craftsmen from various parts of the country for work in the Washington and Virginia area. While Cote has correspondence indicating that Connecticut was one of the areas that furnished men, details of names and locations in Connecticut from which the men came have not yet been developed. Cote also offered the opinion that the George Cowles House is not the type of classical design associated with Jefferson in Virginia but rather is a Greek Revival style design. -- Interview with Richard L. Cote, June 14, 1981.

10

Farmington Land Records, 33/521. Bounded east on highway or town street, west on the river, south on the heirs of Carol Case, and north on Hamilton Washburn and "my own land." This language places Solomon Cowles north of George Cowles. The next large house south of George Cowles is the Xenas Cowles house, "said to have been designed by an officer of Burgoyne's army" by Julius Gay, p. 110, a reference to its pavilion that is typical of the work of William Sprats, a British prisoner of war who designed half a dozen houses in central and northwestern Connecticut with distinctive Ionic tetrastyle porticos. The next house south of Xenas Cowles is the Solomon Cowles, Jr., House, known in recent years as the Wilmarth S. Lewis Walpole Library, now the property of Yale University. At the turn of the century, the Xenas Cowles House was owned by Anna Roosevelt, sister of Theodore Roosevelt.

11

Cowles, p. 262.

12

HABS 1930s report on the George Cowles House. The report is not signed or dated and has no footnotes or sources.

13

Hurlburt, p. 131.

14

Cowles, p. 261.

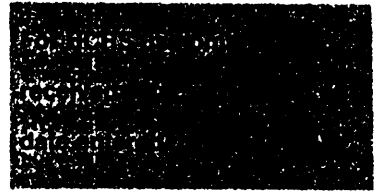
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15  
FLR 46/413. 13 acres bounded north by Solomon Cowles, east by Main Street, south by Richard Cowles and west by the Farmington and Pequabuck Rivers, the Farmington Canal running across the west part of said land.

16  
No record of the foreclosure can be found in the land records.

17  
The Farmington Magazine, p. 1.

18  
Farmington Probate Records, 11/269, executed May 23, 1851.

19  
FPR 11/282, 1859.

20  
FLR 77/109.

21  
FLR 98/109.

22  
FLR 154/169.

23  
FLR 163/441.



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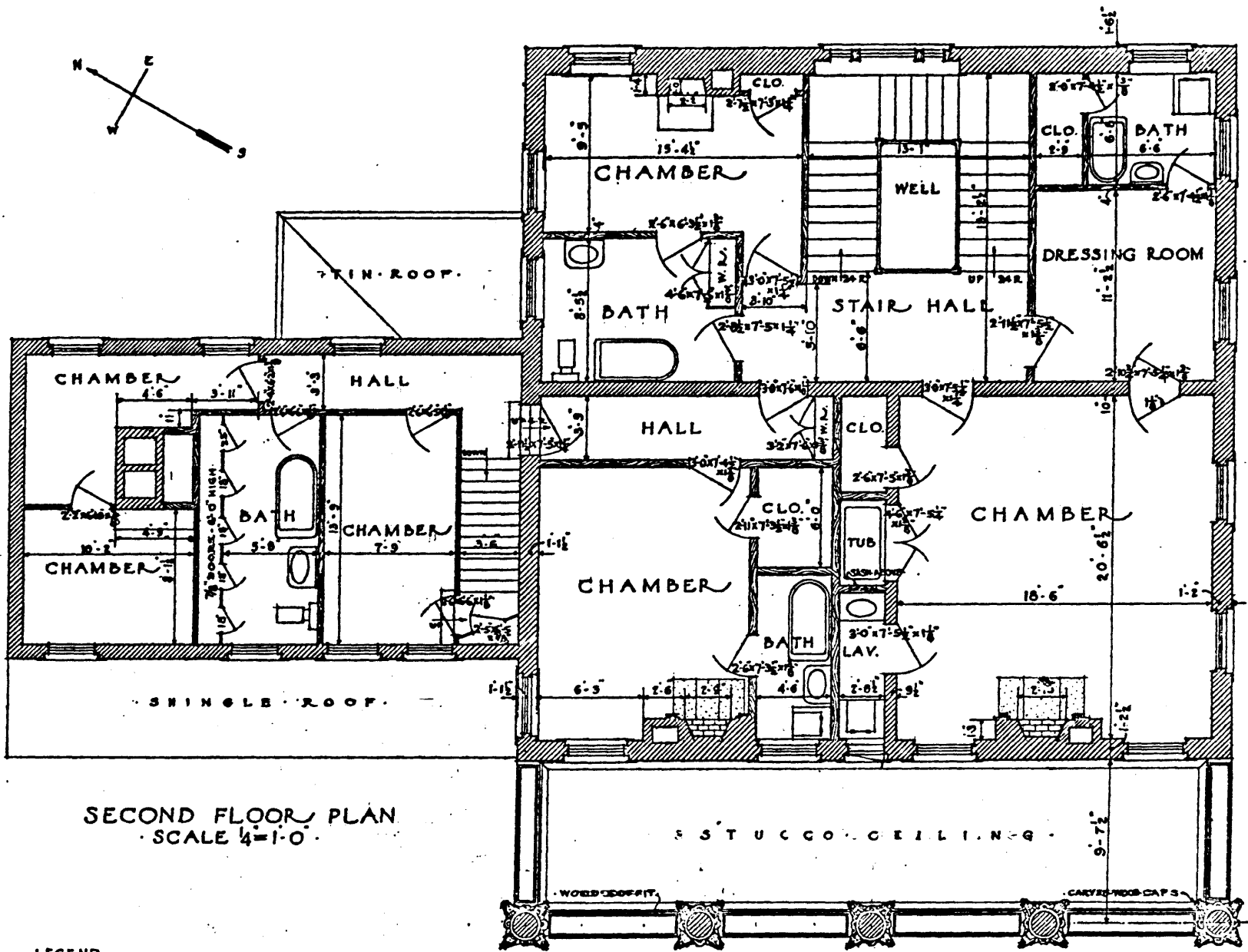
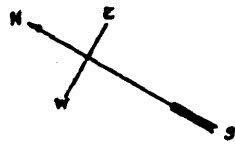
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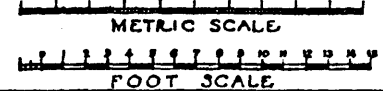




SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

- LEGEND
- BROWNSTONE
  - BRICK
  - WOOD

W. A. EDDETS - DEL. - R. J. PERCIVAL



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BRANCH OF PLANS AND DESIGN

NAME OF STRUCTURE  
**GENERAL COWLES HOUSE** TOWN OF FARMINGTON  
COUNTY OF HARTFORD STATE OF CONNECTICUT

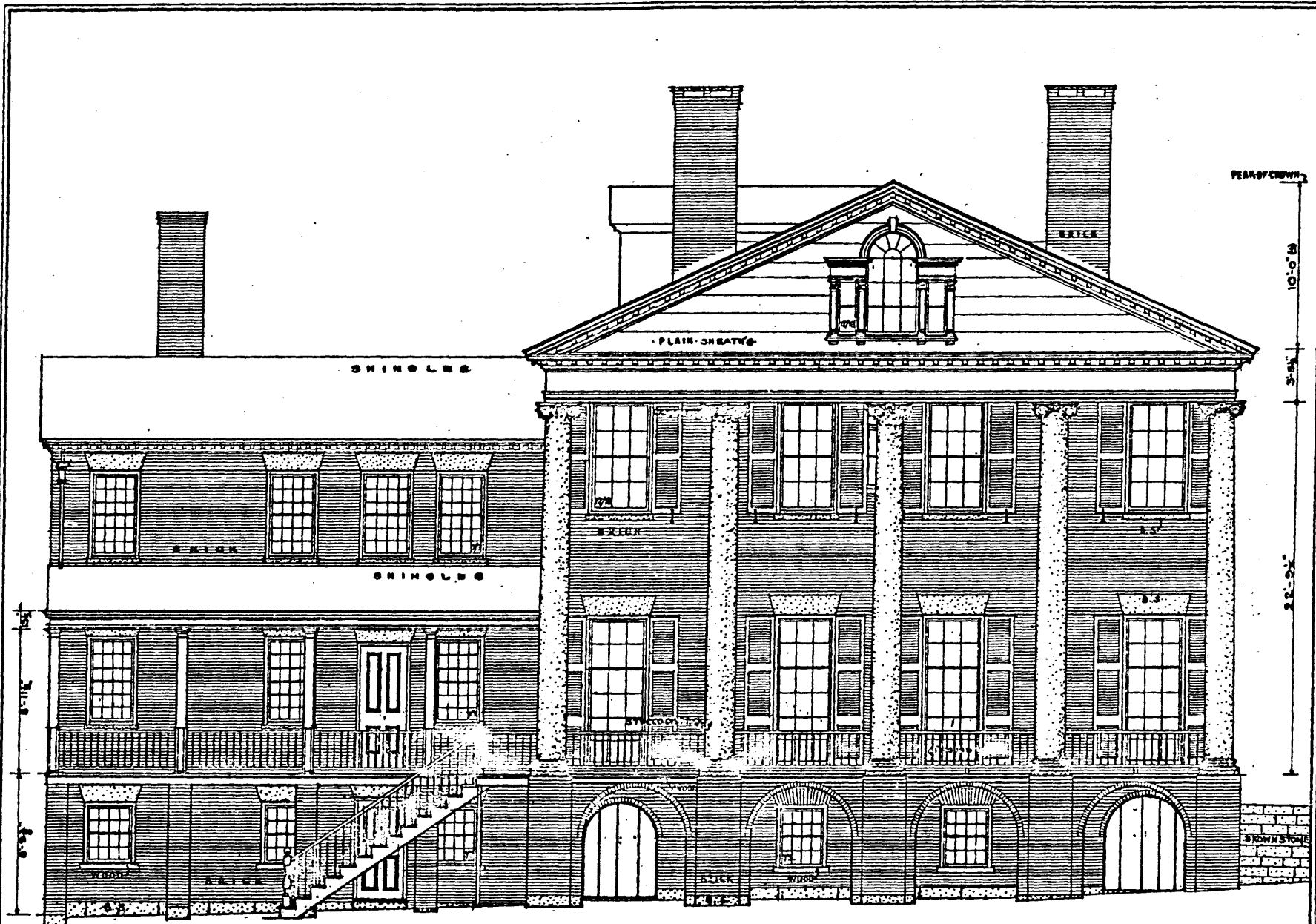


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APR. 13, 1934

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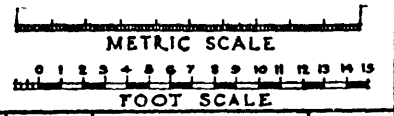




- SOUTH ELEVATION -

SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

- LEGEND**
-  BROWNSTONE
  -  BRICK
  -  WOOD
- N.L. LOCKWOOD, DEL.



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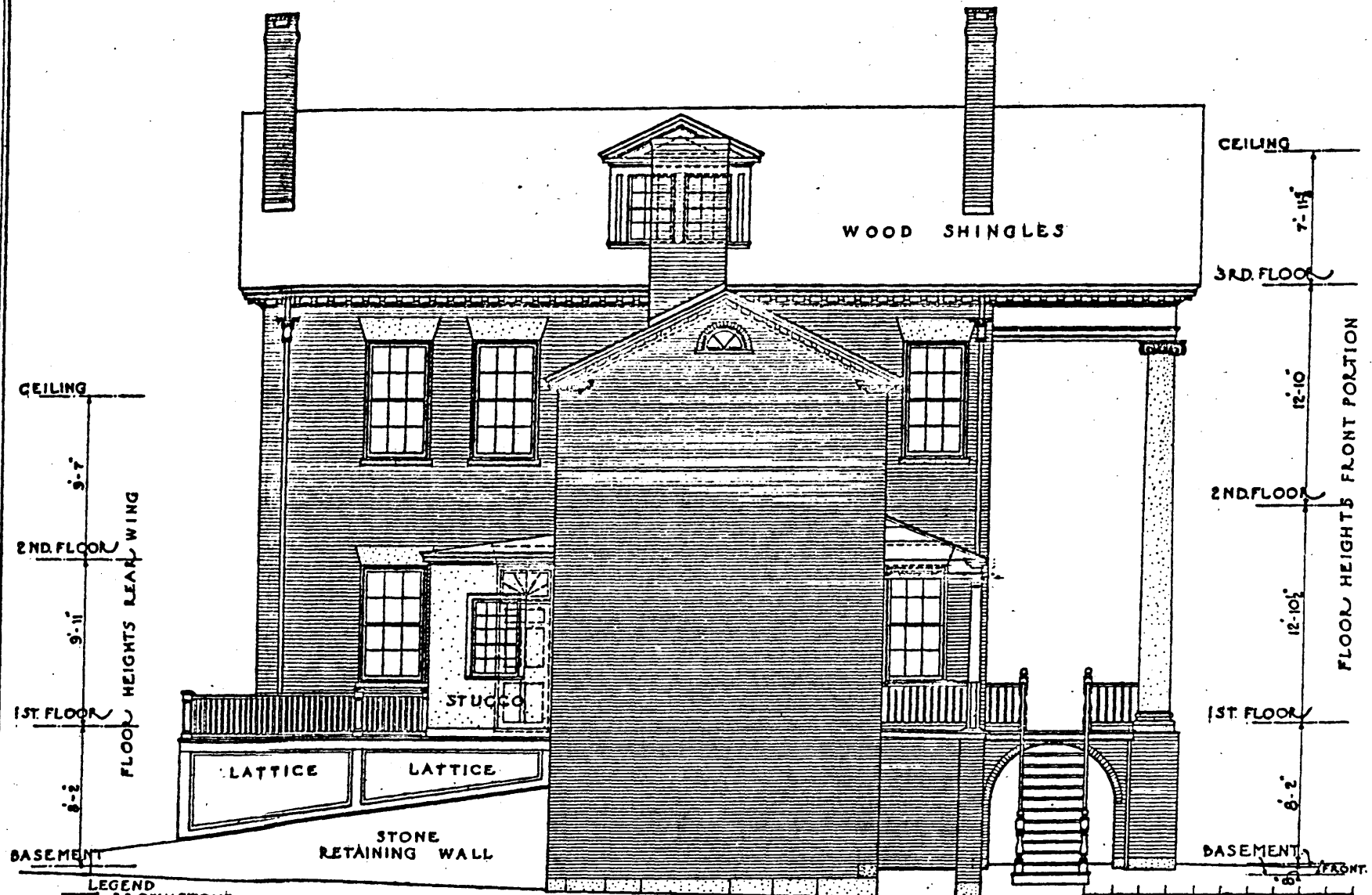
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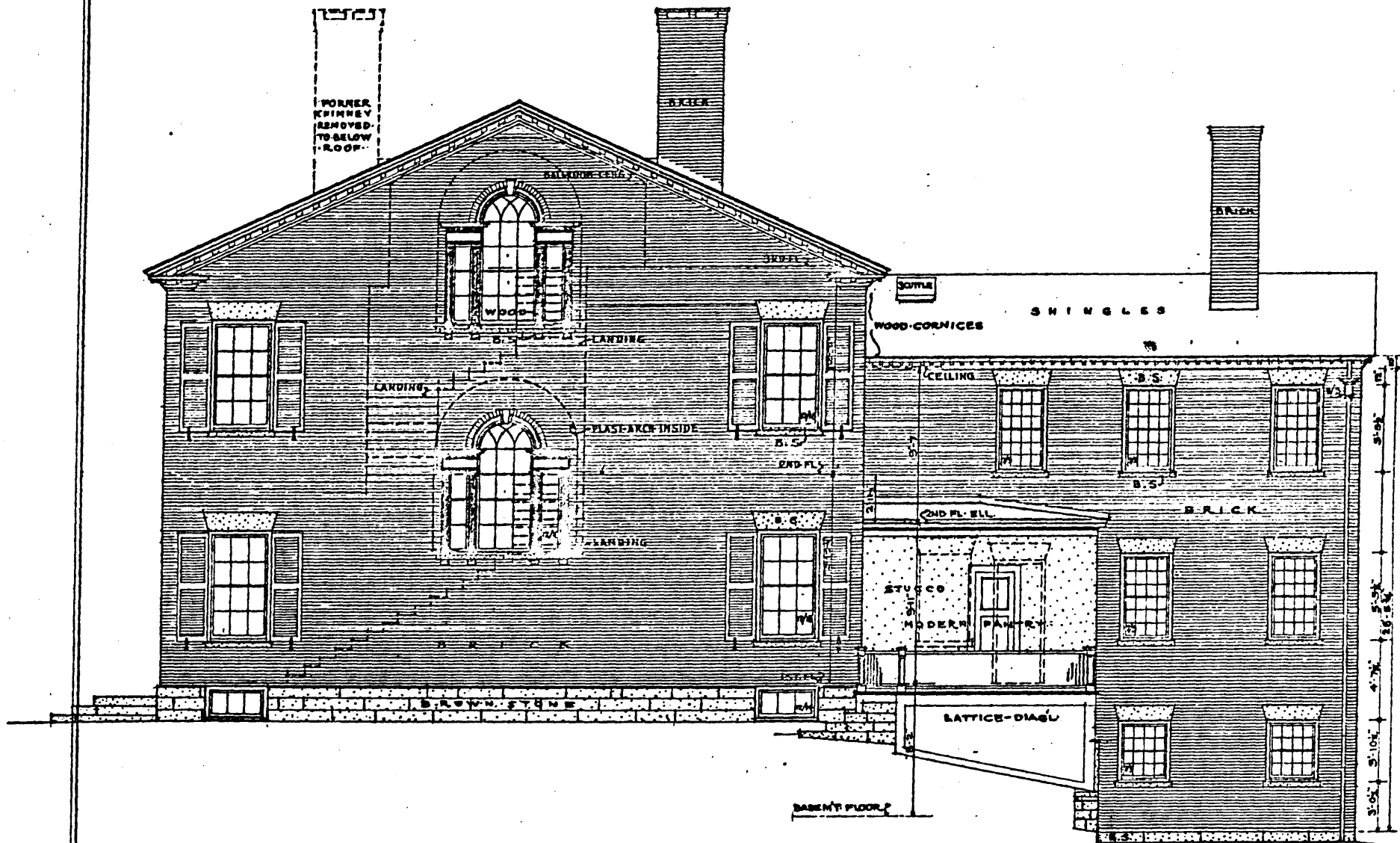
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METRIC SCALE  
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 FOOT SCALE

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**LEGEND**  
 BROWNSTONE  
 BRICK  
 WOOD  
 N.L. LOCKWOOD, DEL.

• NORTH ELEVATION •  
 SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"

METRIC SCALE  
 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15  
 FOOT SCALE

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