

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

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

received **DEC 12 1983**
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Branford House
and/or common Avery Point Regional Campus, University of Connecticut

2. Location

street & number Shennecosset Road and Eastern Point Road NA not for publication
city, town Groton N/A vicinity of
state Connecticut code 09 county New London code 011

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name See Continuation Sheet
street & number " " "
city, town " " " vicinity of state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Groton Town Hall
street & number Poquonnock Road
city, town Groton state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1982 federal state county local
depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect St.
city, town Hartford, state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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

Branford House, an elegant late Gothic Revival or Jacobethan-style mansion, dominates the stony promontory of Avery Point at Groton, Connecticut, its vista sweeping over Pine Island Bay of Long Island Sound at the mouth of the Thames River. The house was built between the autumn of 1902 and the spring of 1904. Its walls were laid in a warm-gray granite quarried from the site itself. Originally the focus of the 72-acre estate of railroad magnate Morton F. Plant, the house with its accessory buildings is now part of a denser development built for the U.S. Coast Guard during the 1940s. This nomination includes Branford House itself, its gate lodge and entrance gate, the complex of stable, barn and courtyard, a garage and waterfront boathouse. The area nominated, about 22 acres, also includes a campus library and a modern heating plant, both of which do not contribute to the historic character of the complex. See accompanying survey entitled "Proposed Boundary of Branford House, University of Connecticut, Avery Point, Groton, Connecticut" (Figure 1).

Present Appearance

Branford House is a commanding three-and-one-half story building, its rich architectural vocabulary of crenelated turrets and pinnacled dormers and gables worked into an elegant harmony under a long pitched roof with ridge at continuous height over all three wings. The main axis of the house angles in a northwest-southeast direction but to simplify descriptions of the building, the north front with the main entry in it will be called the facade, with the side facing seaward designated the south elevation, and so forth. The building, although its turrets and dormers are asymmetrically placed, has an overall balance due to the opposing axis angles of its lateral wings and the size, scale and arrangement of gables and dormers.

The house is a masonry structure with granite exterior bearing walls concealing a system of steel beams and interior bearing walls of concrete. The ground plan centers on the great hall or central block, from which the flanking wings extend east and west. A music room, structurally discrete, was added to the west side of the house shortly after it was built, gutted recently by fire, and entirely restored in the early 1960s (Figure 2). There are three full floors above the basement, with attics under the ridge. The overall dimensions of the house are approximately 160' on its east-west axis by 50' north-south at the central block, including the terrace. The visitor approaching the house on the driveway sees the facade first, while the south elevation overlooks the water at Pine Island Bay.

Branford House's facade (Figure 4) presents a wide central section from which lateral wings project forward at 45° angles to create an entry court with the main door at the center. Two polygonal turrets, crowned by crenelated parapets, are set

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The property is owned by the State of Connecticut and leased primarily to the University of Connecticut.

The 'owner' should be notified by correspondence directed to:

Governor William A. O'Neill
Executive Chambers
Capitol Building
165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06115

Jay Jackson, Esquire
Senior Counsel
Executive Chambers
Capitol Building
165 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06115

The 'lessee' should be notified by correspondence directed to:

Dr. John DiBiaggio
President, University of Connecticut
Storrs, CT 06268

Dr. Arthur Gillis
Vice President of Finance and Administration
University of Connecticut
Gully Hall
Storrs, CT 06268

Dr. James L. Baird, Director
Avery Point Regional Campus
University of Connecticut
Avery Point
Groton, CT 06340

Concerned Citizens for Branford House
P.O. Box 947
Groton, CT 06340

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The east end of the south elevation, which is the gable end of the east wing, is anchored by a polygonal turret two stories tall and crowned by a crenelated parapet. An open terrace with a low stone wall runs across the rear of the house.

Branford House's east elevation catches the early morning sun on its angled planes. On the water side, a one-story porch, partly glazed, wraps around from the south, across the side of the gabled wing to a two-story turret which joins the south with the east elevations. The stone porch roof and parapet are carried on Tudor arches. This eastern elevation is a picturesque composition of planes and angles, surfaces joined by trim-stone quoins. A major triangular gabled dormer surmounts the turret, the end of the east wing extending beyond to finish in the building's east gable end. This end features a small one-story battlemented extension, and a trim-stone oriel at second floor level. Windows on first and second floors are mullioned pairs in stone enframements, with two single windows at third-floor level. A blind oculus in a stone surround centers the gable field just below the finial that crowns the east face.

Interior

Branford House was built as a summer cottage to be used by its owners only during the warm season. Its orientation, angles, window placement all encourage breezes to cool the house; they invite views from the inside out, and the porches, loggias and solarium beckon people to venture out in all directions that lead to the sea. The building has 31 rooms exclusive of basement and attic, bathrooms, corridors and the unusually extensive storage space typical of the house. These rooms are on three levels.

The ground floor (Figure 3) includes in the central section the entry vestibule and the two-story great hall which opens onto the long south terrace. The east wing holds the dining room and a breakfast room in a glassed porch, in addition to the kitchen and several food service rooms which have been altered to a new arrangement.

The west wing holds drawing room, solarium and library in addition to a passage and a stair to the master bedrooms above, and a corridor. The passage to the music room and the music room itself extend from the west wing of the house at ground floor level.

Entering the house through the heavy wooden front door, the visitor comes into a low-ceilinged, wood-panelled vestibule facing a heavily carved, convex-curved wall which contains a double door (which is not apparent when closed) leading to the great hall beyond. To the left, a run of stairs rises to join the staircase leading to the mezzanine passage which crosses the great hall at second-floor level along its north side. To the left, another panelled door opens into an alcove off the main hall.

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asymmetrically, the smaller one in the central section just east of the entry, the larger tucked into the angle formed by the junction of the central section with the west wing. This larger turret, which rises above the roof ridge, is called "the clock tower," and its north face features a large dial. A circular stair inside this tower is suggested on the outside by the placement of the mullioned window pairs, set between the stories of the house and stepped up from east to west on the facets of the tower.

The angled east wing has two full stories below the eaves line, which is apparent on the north front only on this wing. A granite stringcourse, lighter in color than the rock-faced random ashlar of the walls, is a strong horizontal detail between the first and second stories, and it ties the east wing into the central section well. A second stringcourse above the second floor acts as a cornice line, although it is no heavier than its companion below. The two dormers are treated like small gables, their faces rising above the eaves line, laid up in granite ashlar which continues the facade plane of the wing. Each dormer has a single double-hung window enframed with the smooth, tawny stone used throughout the facade for trim. The east dormer has a gabled shape, crowned with a stone finial; the west dormer has a more elaborate, curved Flemish-gable form with side and center finials. A unifying section of crenelated parapet runs from this dormer to a major dormer on the center section of the north face. A tall chimney stack is stepped forward from the facade plane, crowned by four octagonal trim-stone flues. A pedimented stone tablet carries a decorative boss just above the line of the eaves. Windows in the east wing are typical of the house. Most are set in pairs, with stone mullions separating transom from window, and dividing the pairs. Enframements throughout the house are of the tawny-colored trim stone, and most windows have Gothic label moldings over them. Originally all of the typical windows had leaded glass in the transoms with clear plate below.

The central section of the facade is tied to the wings by the upper stringcourse, which is continuous in this section, and by the sense of continuous floor levels across the house which is conveyed by the regular (although not uniform) height of the windows. The entry door centers the ground floor of this wing. It is set in a pointed Tudor arch and flanked by narrow single windows. The whole is framed in tawny trim stone which ornaments the reveal with clustered colonnettes or reeds. The small turret is the major feature of the central section, dominated by the tall bank of mullioned windows lighting a stair within. The tower is capped by a crenelated parapet. Flanking the tower top, above the second-story stringcourse, a pair of gable-roofed major dormers light the third floor, augmented by a smaller Flemish-gabled dormer. The gray slate roof rises to a copper ridge, fancily crested with copper crenelations. Small dormers, inconspicuously painted gray, light the attics just below the ridge.

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The facade's west wing, angled to correspond to the east wing, projects beyond the major clock tower. Like the east wing, this one has gabled dormers, a stepped-forward chimney with octagonal flues and a pedimented stone tablet. A three-sided oriel of tawny trim stone introduces a new detail to this section of the facade.

Looking eastward at the west end of the house one first sees the gable end of the wing described above. Here, a small, buttressed one-story extension with a triple trefoil-arched window under a Tudor arch is capped by a crenelated parapet. The extension supports an oriel at second-story level, and a pair of mullioned windows with transoms is set beneath a Gothic label molding. Coping made of the trim stone defines the gable, which is surmounted by a stone finial.

The music room, built by 1910 and restored after a fire in the 1960s screens the rest of the western end (Figure 5). This room, which is connected to the house by a passageway, is rectangular in plan, and only one story above grade. Built of and trimmed with stone matching that of the main house walls, the music room's stones are hewn more roughly, its ashlar set to a more random pattern than at the main house.

The west end proper, behind the music room, consists of the wall of the west wing (Figure 5). There is an arbor-style loggia at ground-floor level, a crenelated oriel and pairs of mullioned windows at the second floor. Above the upper string course, gable dormers whose fronts are in plane with the facade rise to light the third floor. One is triangular-pedimented and two are Flemish-gabled. Tall chimneys, with each flue rising through its own stack, break up the slated slope of the roof.

The south elevation of Branford House sweeps a broad vista of the Bay and the Sound today as it has always done (Figure 5). Asymmetrical but balanced, the water face is anchored by the gable ends of the two lateral wings. The roof ridges of the wings extend at right angles from the main axis of the house. Covered porches, one story high, extend beyond both of the flanking wings. The western wing is actually crowned by two gable faces above the second story string course: as usual, the major gable is triangular, the smaller face has a Flemish-style curved form. Most of the windows in the west wing's south elevation are mullioned pairs. The transoms originally had leaded glass, but now have clear lights.

The central section of the south elevation is symmetrical. It is centered by a tall chimney stack surmounted by four flue shafts. Like the other major chimneys set on the exterior walls of Branford House, this one carries a large ornamental stone tablet. On each side of the chimney, a bank of twelve windows (four windows wide in vertical tiers of three) is framed with stone mullions and surmounted by elaborately cast-stone lintels. The second-story stringcourse runs over these window banks, and above each bank a Flemish-gabled dormer with paired windows rises in front of the slope of the roof.

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The low, dark-colored vestibule provides a perfect foil for the visitor's entry to the high, light-washed space of the great hall. The south wall - the first view into the room - consists of the massive marble mantelpiece flanked by two high, wide banks of windows through which a bright white south light streams, making the heavy chimney-piece seem to float, mysteriously, on the insubstantial surface of the wall (Figures 7-11). The mantelpiece consists of a heavy, white marble shelf with embossed frieze below, carried on massive golden-colored freestanding marble columns with Ionic capitals. The firebox is lined with embossed iron plates, and faced with marble.

The great hall rises two full stories in height. Its east and west walls are wainscoted halfway up with oak or walnut pilastered and panelled and surmounted by a modillioned cornice with a Jacobethan variation of triglyph-and-metope frieze. Doorways into the west wing are set in round keystone arches surmounted by heavy, bracketed lintels carrying massive triple pinnacles echoing the design of the overmantel. The north side of the great hall is an elaborate arrangement organized by a broad, triple-arched screen which rises from the floor to second-story level and is surmounted by an arcaded handrail. A passage connecting the east and west wings of the second floor crosses this side of the great hall as a kind of mezzanine overlooking the south half of the room. The spaces accessible through the three arches from the floor of the great hall are, of course, only one story in height because the mezzanine passage runs above them. The westernmost arch leads to an alcove opening from the hall, the center arch frames the concave niche whose curved end contains the double doors to the vestibule, and the eastern arch frames the broad stair which ascends to the mezzanine passage above.

The triple-arch wall itself is an elaborate and intricately carved piece of woodwork. The composition consists of the three broad segmental spans with circular medallions and other decorative carving in the spandrels, separated one from the other by pairs of stop-fluted columns set in antis, their lower shafts carved with rich Flemish-style strapwork. The columns and arches carry the modillioned cornice which surmounts the room's panelling at the second floor level, and above this cornice the elaborate wood handrail, arched between rusticated piers, guards the mezzanine passage.

The ceiling of the great hall is ornamental plaster in a design of intersecting circles, some of which form bases for plaster pendants.

The dining room in the east wing is entered through the great hall (Figure 14). Basically square in plan, this room includes the polygonal turret on the south face of the house, which adds an appealing, light-filled alcove. The plaster ceiling is coffered in a pattern of squares, each square centered by a rosette medallion. The fireplace, on the east wall beside the polygonal alcove, is enframed by slender wood pilasters which carry the wainscot architrave over the mantel. A wood overmantel

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carved with a segmental-arched design rises to the ceiling. The marble mantel itself is set within its wood surround and consists of a carved shelf carried on brackets supported by slender columns. The other dining room wall surfaces are wainscoted to a point about three feet below the ceiling, the molded panels separated by pilasters trimmed with floral and foliate designs inlaid in rare woods.

From the dining room alcove, tall French doors open to a glassed, brick-floored porch on the south face of the house which was used as a breakfast room by the Plant family.

The rest of the ground floor of the east wing is now and has always been a service area. Coast Guard era changes in the scullery and pantries have obscured the original floor plan, but the servants' dining room (immediately east of the main dining room) and the original kitchen (at the end of the angled wing at the northeast corner of the house) remain distinct. Original rooms in this section included a scullery (now divided into a bathroom and a passageway), butler's kitchen pantry (most of which is now a walk-in refrigerator), refrigerator room, butler's pantry and plate closet. An interesting feature of this part of the house is the hidden service passages that allowed servants to enter various rooms, or bypass rooms, without disturbing the owners or their guests. There is a door leading from the serving pantry into the great hall's stair alcove which is designed to masquerade as a shell-carved intaglio panel from the hall side. Another passage allowed servants to cross from the kitchen area to the west wing under the entry vestibule.

The west wing of the ground floor contains the drawing room, solarium, library and a hallway. The passage to the music room leads from this west wing.

The drawing room is entered by two doors from the great hall and divided into north and south sections by a heavy wood beam carried on a pair of columns. The room is wood-paneled to the ceiling, each section of panel separated by tall fluted pilasters which carry a full entablature. The fireplace is set on the north wall, and in comparison to the others in the main rooms, its marble mantel is relatively simple. Two tawny Ionic columns set in antis before plain piers carry the blocked-forward corners of the molded shelf. The frieze is carved with a Greek meander interrupted at the center by a panel carved with a male figure reclining in an attitude of despair. The west wall of the drawing room holds a screen of French doors opening into the solarium.

The solarium (Figures 12 and 13) is open to the light from above, its arbor-like wooden roof system originally covered with glass now replaced by a plastic material. Glass windows on the west elevation of the solarium are set into rock-faced stone piers carrying the stone lintel which supports the roof structure. The solarium has a quarry-tiled floor taken from a European building, inset with decorative ceramic tiles at intervals down the center.

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The library is the last of the formal suite of rooms on the ground floor. It is reached through a short passage which leads from the great hall past the stairway and elevator (which survives but is not in use) to the upper floors. While this room was called 'the library' by the Plant family, it contains no bookshelves. In plan, the library occupies the lateral wing at the northeast flank of the house, opposing the kitchen on the opposite end. The fireplace, on the northeast wall is set in a stone Tudor arch with a carved wood enframingent and elaborately carved wood overmantel. The pilasters carrying the mantel shelf are carved as Hermae set on foliate brackets. Above the shelf, the overmantel is organized into a composition of three elaborately carved panels separated and framed by four more Hermae surmounted by volute brackets which carry a second shelf. Above this shelf a pinnacled, strapwork crest rises nearly to the ceiling. The library walls are wainscot-panelled below a cornice molding about five feet below the ceiling. The ceiling is divided into square panels of ornamental plasterwork by carved wood members with delicate pendils at the corners. Carved wood brackets at intervals along the walls appear to "carry" the wood ceiling members.

The second floor contains the major bedroom suites. There are no rooms in the central section of the house, as the great hall rises through two stories; however, a passage on this level connects the east wing with the west.

The second floor west wing contains the master suite, which was originally designed for Morton Plant and his wife Nellie. It contains a large walk-through closet, and sitting room. This suite is lacking its marble mantel, and the bathroom has been altered.

Next to the master suite are the rooms originally designed for the young Henry B. Plant, Morton's and Nellie's only child. This suite contains bedroom, closet, bath and sitting room and there is in addition, a very small room with bay window known as "the tutor's room."

The second floor, east wing, features two handsome guest suites. One of these suites includes the second floor of the polygonal turret on the south elevation of the building (over the dining room alcove) (Figure 15). Henry B. Plant later had this room converted for use as a private dining room. Both suites have handsome bathrooms with elaborate marble floors, large pedestal sinks, and marble-and-mirror medicine cabinets; and each has a generous closet space. In addition to the guest suites, this wing has a small room which was used as a sewing or utility room.

On the third floor, the west wing contains two guest bedrooms smaller and plainer than the ones below. Although they are very simple rooms, they have fireplaces with wood mantelpieces, and the rooms are corniced. The central section, now one large open space with a terrazzo floor across the center, was originally divided. The terrazzo-floored strip was a passageway, with a long room on the north side which may

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have been a billiard and gaming room, and small closets and women-servants' bedrooms on the south side. The east wing held the upper servants' rooms: those originally living here were the housekeeper, the butler, and Plant's personal valet. These two last were the only male servants who originally lived in the house. The other men were housed in quarters over the barn and stable.

The fourth floor contains unfinished attics which may have been used as storage space, and there is a large observation platform on the roof which commands a striking view over Long Island Sound.

Branford House had a central heating system from the beginning. The furnace, which was probably coal-fired, does not survive, but steam heat was delivered to the rooms through pipes concealed within the walls. Radiator-like pipes survive in some of the rooms behind decorative wood panels under the windows. The house was originally lit with a combination of gas and electricity, and in fact some of the original light fixtures survive in use throughout the house.

The basement contains an interesting original laundry room. The drying apparatus is worth notice: a coal stove heated coils which extend under a large closet which is filled with sliding racks. Wet laundry, spread on these racks, was slid into the warmed closet to dry. Another basement room contains a pair of large black cylinders with 1897 patent dates which appear to be original. Their intended use is not clear, but they may have been part of a water filtering system.

Other Branford House Buildings

The Plant estate at Avery Point contained a number of auxiliary buildings, most of which survive today (Figure 16 shows the original buildings salted into the Coast Guard development). These include the gate lodge and adjacent entry gate, the barn and stable with courtyard between, the wood-frame boathouse, and a few other structures which are less ambitious in design such as the garage, a building now used for paint storage, and a few simple stone outbuildings.

The gate lodge (Figures 17 and 18) was completed in the late autumn of 1903, well before the house was finished. During the building period, the site superintendent lived in the lodge to be near the work. The building reflects the architectural vocabulary of the main house: Jacobethan in style, its walls are of locally quarried rock-faced random ashlar masonry, trimmed with smoother, tawny-colored stone. Pitched roofs of gray slate at continuous height, with major gables and dormers, create picturesque asymmetrical massing on every elevation. All of the design motifs in the lodge follow from those used in the main house. The roof ridge has a crenelated crest, dormers and gables are crowned by trim-stone finials, windows are

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stone-mullioned with diamond-paned transoms above clear plate below. Window surrounds are of trim stone, with Gothic-style label moldings above. Chimneys have separate flue stacks, porches are Tudor-arched, bay windows, oriels, crenelated parapets all follow the style set by the vocabulary of the main house.

Next to the gate lodge, flanking the drive as it approaches the mansion, a pair of stone posts (Figure 19) originally held a pair of wrought-iron gates and a delicate wrought arch from the center of which a lantern hung.

The barn and stable building face each other across an open court well to the north of the house, between the outer entry to the estate and the gate lodge entry to the residence area. Figures 21 and 22 illustrate these structures as they were built, and as they look today. These structures were built during the summer and fall of 1903, so that they could be used before the house was ready. The stable's original use is clear from its name, and it included on its second floor, residences for most of the male servants employed at Branford House. The barn was originally used as a cowhouse and dairy, with a residence for the estate farmer above. Branford Farms, outside the original 41-acre residential estate was a working dairy and chicken farm the products of which supplied the house, the Plant-owned Griswold Hotel in Groton and were also marketed in the area. The farms were an important business in their own right and were to some extent overseen by Nellie Capron Plant, Morton Plant's first wife.

Now used to house Project Oceanology, the original boathouse (Figures 23 and 24) is a Shingle-style building, the only surviving original estate structure which is not built of stone. It stands at the seawall overlooking the Sound at the south-eastern tip of the point. The wharf upon which it stands was completed in early summer of 1903, and that fall the boathouse was "quickly designed and built to be immediately used." Although its broad, slightly overhanging gable fields and its siding place the building architecturally in the Shingle style, the crenelated tower, the interesting ridgelines, and the paired windows with their wood simulation of mullions relate the boathouse stylistically to the other buildings on the property. The original form of this building is still apparent, although a low extension was added during the Coast Guard era, and white paint has been applied over the original light brown shingles.

Other early buildings on the Branford House estate include a stuccoed garage and a paint locker which stand next to each other at the northeast corner of the property (Figures 25 and 26), and two small stone structures a short distance east of the barn and stable complex (Figure 27).

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Non-contributing Buildings Included in the National Register Nomination

The only non-contributing buildings located within the boundary of the Branford House Nomination are the Modern Heating Plant (Figures 1 and 21) and the University of Connecticut at Avery Point Library (Figures 1 and 31). The inclusion of these buildings was unavoidable. Their impact on the historical environment of Branford House is minimal.

Avery Point Buildings Not Included in the National Register Nomination

The Avery Point property includes a number of buildings added after the estate became a U. S. Coast Guard Training Station in 1942. Figures 1, 16 and 30-32 show the arrangement of the buildings at Avery Point and the relationship of the Coast Guard to the original Branford House buildings.

Most of the newer buildings were built in a period of wartime shortage of materials and labor. They were built quickly, with resources that were ready at hand. Most of them are masonry structures with walls of precast cement blocks which were tinted a reddish sandstone color. Interior bearing members are steel beams. Although as a result, the buildings are plain and utilitarian in appearance, there is a surprise. Their builder, loth to waste all of the architectural materials that had been in the estate's gardens, recycled some of them in porticoes, balustrades, a little court or two, for his otherwise pedestrian structures.

Most of the new buildings stand to the north of the mansion, between it and the stable and barn complex, old power house and garage. They occupy a part of the Point which, during the Plant years, was parkland, rose gardens and greenhouse. They are part of the visitor's perception of Avery Point.

Original Appearance

The Branford House structures have been changed very little, and today they look very much as they did when they were finished in 1905. The grounds though, have been modified so much by the Coast Guard installation that the original setting of Branford House should be described. Figure 28 is an aerial view of the estate when its grounds were still intact, and Figure 29 shows the front garden. Also accompanying this nomination is the original plan, "Branford House and Grounds, residence of Morton F. Plant Esquire" (Figure 3).

The south elevation of the house overlooked the water across a broad, treeless lawn, while the facade looked northward toward a large garden laid out in formal parterres with pools and fountains. An arched balustrade similar to the great hall's gallery rail acted as a retaining wall between the driveway circle in front of the house and the garden itself, which was terraced on a level below the house.

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Within the broad loop of the driveway as it approached the house from the gate lodge, trees were planted to create a shaded park. Beyond the park, on the north part of the estate, south of the road, stood the barn and stable complex beside a large glassed-in greenhouse which stood before a formally organized planting garden which included a rose arbor.

The Branford House gardens are completely gone today, but the grounds were originally intended to be a major part of the estate's appearance. They were designed by the renowned Boston architect and landscape designer, Guy Lowell (1870-1927).

Lowell, educated at Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, spent four postgraduate years in Europe in the ateliers of the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, where he studied art history and landscape design. Later, out of his office in Boston, Lowell was responsible for many major residential and institutional buildings, along with country estates and formal gardens. Lowell's work includes the Georgian Revival buildings at the Phillips Academy at Andover, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts and its Art School, the President's House at Harvard, some buildings at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island, and Simmons College in Boston, and New York County Courthouse in New York.

Lowell designed country estates for many wealthy clients, including Frederick L. Ames, North Easton, Massachusetts; Robert Gould Shaw, Hamilton, Massachusetts; B.F. Goodrich, York Harbor, Maine; and Clarence McKay on Harbor Hill in Roslyn, Long Island. He built or altered New York townhouses for J. P. Morgan and Andrew Carnegie and Morton F. Plant, and for Plant, Lowell designed the Branford House gardens as well.

Guy Lowell's book Italian Villas and Farmhouses was the kind of architectural source book popular with other architects, wealthy estate builders and libraries around the turn of the century.

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of Albert L. Avery, who planned to develop his family's waterfront land into a watering place and summer resort. The scheme was successful, and by 1871 there were already thirty-eight houses whose owners had organized themselves as the Harbor View Cottage Association to lay out streets and provide other services and amenities. These spacious wood-frame houses are a National Register historic district today: nowhere nearly as large or expensive as Branford House, they nevertheless gave a summer-resort character to the place which Plant could have found attractive.

Branford House is a typically grand example of a summer house of this period. By the end of the nineteenth century, the eclecticism that had come to inform the stylistic revivals had given way to a more academic realism. Historic forms of architecture were still being adapted, but far more literally. "For the American newly rich," writes Alan Gowans, "wealth and social position might be manifested not merely in the size and lavishness of one's house, but in the degree of accuracy with which the architect had copied acceptable European models." American palaces could appropriately follow almost any European mode from the late Medieval through the early Renaissance, but in order to really reflect the ideal images of their designers and their owners the houses had to be literate, their historical allusions had to have some symbolic meaning to their creators, they had to incorporate "real" materials sensitively handled, and, almost obviously, they had to be large and costly. In their brand-new suburban estates, the vastly rich Americans of the new century created a new vision of the world, with themselves as the self-acknowledged productive nobility. Style, grace, tradition and pace were taken from European countrysides and transplanted in America with the care and concern a gardener would give a delicate plant in a new environment. These estates were the seats of this short-lived vision of stately country life on a European pattern in America.

Branford House is clearly modelled on English country-house precedents. It is interesting to note that the manor houses it resembles architecturally were built as the residential seats of great inland working farms. Branford House (along with many other houses like it) follows the manor-house farm, on an oceanfront site. In the early twentieth century, the American rich were not tied to inherited land, and could build wherever the landscape suited their taste. Morton Plant, who was an enthusiastic yachtman with strong ties (through the Seawanhaka-Corinthian Yacht Club) with Long Island's north shore, found an ideal location for his favorite pastime at Avery Point.

Branford House with its extraordinary ocean view, its suites of grand and exquisitely detailed public rooms and expansive guest rooms served by efficiently planned service areas, is clearly designed as a setting for country life in the grand manner.

The building is very clearly an early twentieth century mansion, but its forms and details tell us that its historical affinity is with the English Gothic of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The statement is elegant and well-informed: the

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crenelated corner turrets, the pinnacled gables, the mullioned windows, even the introduction of Flemish detail are founded in careful observation of the architectural models. The house suggests to those who look at it that the people who inhabit it are heirs - through possession - to the noble leisure on the English countryside.

Robert Williams Gibson (1854 - 1927)

Robert W. Gibson was one of the gentleman-professional architects from whose ranks most of the American mansion builders came. Born in Essex, England, in 1854, Gibson was two years younger than his client Morton F. Plant, and appears to have moved in similar social circles, at least closely enough so that he and Plant could have become acquainted at a club both men belonged to. Gibson studied architecture at the Royal Academy of Arts in London, graduating with several prizes to his credit in 1879. After a tour of Europe, he immigrated to the United States in 1881, where, although he was not yet thirty years old, he was commissioned to build the still uncompleted Protestant Episcopal Cathedral in Albany.

Gibson moved to New York City in 1888, and rose to professional distinction there with such buildings as the United States Trust Company on Wall Street, the Coffee Exchange, the New York Botanical Garden Museum building, the Collegiate Reformed Church on West End Avenue, the New York Eye & Ear Infirmary, the chapel at Sailors' Snug Harbor on Staten Island, the National Cathedral School in Washington, D.C. and many other large commissions.

Robert W. Gibson was active in America from 1881 through about 1925. His biography suggests that he was a major figure in the New York architectural profession in his day: he was twice president of the New York Architectural League, he undertook dozens of commissions for major buildings, and he moved in the social-club circles familiar to the city's wealthy and powerful men. It is surprising that no architectural historian has undertaken a study of Gibson's work or made a catalogue of it. The examples of Gibson buildings which are illustrated in professional periodicals show that the architect was well-grounded in architectural history and could design buildings for his own era detailed with literal translations of the European styles late Victorians approved.

Although Withey's entry on Robert W. Gibson makes a passing reference to country houses in New England and New York, a check of the periodical literature, the Northeast Historic State Preservation Offices, and knowledgeable architectural historians has yielded examples of no suburban estates other than Branford House. There certainly must be other examples of Gibson summer cottages - the architect did live in the affluent Long Island town of Woodbury, and his clients included other influential men who could have retained him to build houses. The fact that Branford House is the only known example of its type attributable without question to Gibson adds to its interest for architectural historians who might be able to use stylistic evidence from it to identify other buildings.

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Most of the buildings Gibson worked on were large projects. Early in his career, while he was still in Albany, he had a successful experience with the Commercial Bank, which led him to make a study, and later something of a professional specialty, of bank buildings. Gibson built banks in New York City, Syracuse, Albany, Buffalo, Utica, Providence, St. Paul and elsewhere.

Another clear specialty of Gibson's was churches. After his first Albany cathedral, the periodicals report on seven others, as well as church-related buildings like a mission house on Park Avenue and a library near his chapel at Sailor's Snug Harbor.

Gibson built at least three large hotels, one of which was for Marion Plant on Eastern Point, close to Branford House, in Groton. Research for this nomination has resolved a question about the history of this structure, the Griswold Hotel. Gibson's building occupied the site of an older Eastern Point hotel, but photographs of its construction published in the Architectural Record in 1906 show that the old mansard-roofed predecessor, which was much smaller than the 1906 building, was totally demolished before construction on the new design. The Griswold Hotel stood on Eastern Point until 1969.

Fewer examples of Gibson's domestic architecture than his ecclesiastic or commercial architecture are known. The most interesting one, for this report, is the townhouse built at 631-651 Fifth Avenue at 52nd Street for Morton Plant. Constructed between 1903 and 1905, the house was built at the same time as Branford House. A designated New York City landmark (LP-0271), the elegant Fifth Avenue mansion survives today as Cartier's jewelry store, after alterations were made by C. P. H. Gilbert in 1917. A comparison of Branford House and the Cartier store is illuminating. The Fifth Avenue mansion is a smooth and polished residence in the Renaissance Revival style, while Branford House is Jacobethan, and it rises on its stony oceanfront site with walls laid up in granite quarried right on the site.

Gibson was close to New York's social and cultural elite: with Morton Plant he was a member of the exclusive Seawanhaka-Corinthian Yacht Club in Oyster Bay. Interestingly, Gibson was the architect for the club's handsome yet unostentatious Shingle-style clubhouse, and this may have been one of the connections between architect and client which led to the Branford House and other Plant commissions. The relationship between architect and client was apparently strong. In 1902, immediately as he came into possession of money that had been tied up in his father's estate, Morton commissioned Gibson to build Branford House. At about the same time, Gibson built the Fifth Avenue mansion which Plant traded to Pierre Cartier in 1917 for a string of black and white pearls. The Architectural Record, reporting the collaboration of architect and owner of the Griswold Hotel, illuminated on some of the characteristics of the relationship:

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The architect, Mr. R. W. Gibson of New York, had, beside a previous experience in hotel work, an aptitude for haste and methods of business with which the building owner was familiar . . . in short,² an organization already working upon other things was waiting for the enterprise.

There is a strong family tradition that the original design for Branford House was done in her student days by Nellie Capron Plant, Morton's wife, who is said to have studied architecture.³ There is no documentary evidence for Nellie Plant's participation in the design of the building, but inspection of the house reveals a careful attention to domestic details like closets and convenient service areas that bespeak the hand of a competent household manager. Nellie Plant has left a reputation for having been a skilled and energetic supervisor of not only her house, but of the entire estate and its outlying farms as well.

Historical Significance

Branford House was built in the prime of the period of affluence when wealthy Americans were mansion-building. It was originally the summer home of railroad developer Morton F. Plant, who is reported to have spent around three million dollars on its construction. The noted architect and landscape designer Guy Lowell of Boston created formal gardens, which no longer survive, for the estate.

The building of Branford House was photographically documented throughout construction by the architect, and a resulting scrapbook was presented by Gibson to Morton Plant at Christmas in 1906. This interesting book describes the site before building began; it shows the rock-blasting for the house foundations, it documents the sequence of work on all of the original buildings, and it even names some of those men who worked on the building and tells some stories of life as it was on the construction site from late in 1902 through 1904.

A second series of photographs were taken around 1910 by Plant's chauffeur Henry Reis. These pictures show the estate fully developed, the gardens blooming, the house richly furnished and already looking mellow and established. Cooks and housemaids smiled for Reis' camera outside the house, babies look out of perambulators. In one shot Reis caught Nellie Plant's new automobile, a gift from her husband, overturned by Nellie on an early test drive.

Branford House was home only to the Plant family: the first group were Morton and Nellie and their son Henry Bradley Plant. After Nellie's death in 1917, Morton brought a second wife, May Caldwell Manwaring, and her son Philip into the house.

After Morton's death, Henry and his second wife Amy Warren Plant, took over the house, occupying it seasonally until Henry's death in 1938. The mansion then reverted to Morton Plant's estate. After a public auction, the estate passed to the State of

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Connecticut, which leased it to the U. S. Coast Guard for a war-time training center. In 1967 the State transferred the use of the building and grounds to the University of Connecticut as a regional campus, and in 1978 Branford House itself was opened as an executive conference center.

Morton F. Plant (1852-1918)

Morton F. Plant, born in Branford, Connecticut, was the only son of Henry Bradley Plant, Florida's greatest nineteenth-century railroad developer. By the time H. B. Plant died in 1899, he had developed a system of railroads that connected the major cities of the north with the west coast of Florida, opening that side of the state to tourism and to profitable commercial agriculture. Plant's company was organized to run railroads, but the development of the Gulf Coast had to keep pace with the improvements in transportation. To see that this happened, Plant and his company built and developed hotels, steamship lines and telegraph systems. Some of the hotels, like the 1888 Tampa Bay Hotel, which reportedly cost some four million dollars, drew welcome attention to formerly sleepy Florida towns, and Northern investors began to come and look. By the last years of the nineteenth century, Florida fruits and vegetables were being sped on Plant lines to winter-deprived markets in the North, and Northern vacationers and invalids were taking Pullman cars south to the sunny resorts on the Florida coast.

When Henry B. Plant died in 1899, his son Morton became vice president of the Plant Investment Company, which owned the railroads, and president of some of the larger subsidiary lines. Henry's estate had been left in trust for Morton's son Henry Bradley Plant II, leaving Morton Plant with no access to the capital. This arrangement displeased Henry's second wife, Margaret, and by 1902 she succeeded in her attempt to break the trust so that Morton could inherit his father's multi-million dollar estate directly. The Florida railroad was sold to the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company, in which Morton became a director. The hotels and other Florida businesses stayed in the Plant company until after Henry Bradley Plant II's death, well into the twentieth century.

Immediately upon Morton Plant's inheritance, Branford House was begun. The mansion was in some way a celebration for the fifty-year old Morton, who had been for so long in his father's shadow. Morton himself continued to be active in the successors to his father's development company, and he began some new enterprises, some of them entrepreneurial, some philanthropic, some merely indulgent.

Plant established the New London Ship and Engine Company (Nelseco), which developed into the well-known local enterprise known as the Electric Boat Company, which was related to his travel-related businesses. He founded and operated a trolley service, the Shoreline Railroad, from East Lyme, Connecticut, to Westerly, Rhode Island, with

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a spur to Norwich. Plant's street railway system may have been good business, but it also helped out another undertaking of much importance to him: the street railways drew fans to the games of the New London baseball team which Plant established and owned.

Morton Plant's important philanthropies include his founding endowment to the Connecticut college for Women, which opened in 1915, and his gift of the Town Hall to Groton, Connecticut, along with his issue of bonds to keep the town from bankruptcy. Plant's second wife, May Caldwell, endowed the Lawrence & Memorial Hospital in New London, and also gave important gifts to the Cedar Grove Cemetery where she and Morton Plant are interred.

Morton Plant, never brought intimately into the business by his father, was not the singlemindedly entrepreneurial figure his father was. Instead, his energies seem to have been diverted and diluted by his involvement in a range of the family's smaller enterprises. A comparison of Morton's career with his father's and of Henry B. Plant II with both of his forebears is an interesting case study of the effects of power and wealth on families. Morton Plant was not his father's direct heir: only at age fifty, and then through the intervention of his stepmother, did he actually receive the capital from his father's estate. A few years later Morton's first wife, Nellie, died, and Morton remarried under circumstances that seem eccentric: in love with a married woman, May C. Manwaring, Plant paid May's husband eight million dollars, thereby acquiring Manwaring's wife, their son Philip and Manwaring's real estate. Morton's own son, Henry Bradley Plant, was almost adult when this took place and the stories of resentment remain strong. No one remembers, for example where Philip slept. Morton Plant was interested in his hobbies, especially yachting, and in philanthropy. On his death in 1918 he left his property to May and to his son Henry.

Post-residential Use of Avery Point

After Henry B. Plant died in 1938, the entire 71-acre estate was sold at public auction and passed into the ownership of the State of Connecticut. In 1942 the State leased the property to the Coast Guard with the stipulation that it be used as a navigational testing center. During the Second World War the Coast Guard built a campus at Avery Point, siting new buildings in the old lawn and garden spaces between the stone structures of the Plant estate.

The Avery Point installation provides basic training as well as advanced training for officers and civilians. In addition, training for the Coast Guard Reserve is also done at the Point.

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In 1967 the University of Connecticut joined the Coast Guard at Avery Point, establishing a branch campus where about five hundred students attend the first two years of the University's liberal arts program.

Other tenants at Avery Point include the Hartford Graduate Center, which runs an MBA program, Project Oceanology, a state-funded oceanographic science center for junior high school students, and a Marine Science Institute, which is affiliated with the University.

In 1972 the Coast Guard opened its Research and Development Center, where a method was invented to identify and trace vessels responsible for oil spills. This "fingerprinting" identification process is considered so dependable that its results are accepted as evidence in international law courts. This Center is scheduled to close in the spring of 1982 due to Coast Guard budget cuts.

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

Criterion C

Specific dates 1902–1904 **Builder/Architect** Robert Williams Gibson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Branford House is a sophisticated example of a Jacobethan "summer cottage," built between 1902 and 1904 by the English-born architect Robert Williams Gibson. It is one of the early twentieth-century American mansions, an architectural form unique in this country to the 1890–1920 period of expansive capitalism and the handful of major personal fortunes some men accrued before the advent of the personal income tax. Branford House is the only great house of its scale and architectural ambition in the Groton-New London area: it is related closely to the "gold coast" estates on Long Island's north shore, and to the summer cottages along Ocean Drive in Newport, Rhode Island. Morton F. Plant, the original owner, was a railroad developer who continued his father's ground-breaking work of opening the Gulf Coast of Florida with a railroad line begun in the 1880s, and encouraging the development of Florida towns as fashionable winter resorts. The house was occupied as a residence only by the Plant family. After Morton Plant's son, Henry B. Plant, died in 1938, the property was acquired by the State of Connecticut. In 1941 it was leased to the Coast Guard, and in 1967 the University of Connecticut established a branch campus on the estate.

Architectural Significance

American summer cottages like Branford House collectively embody some of the richest architectural imagination and the finest material craftsmanship apparent in the history of this country's building. In creating elaborate suburban houses for the wealthiest and busiest men in the country, a handful of leading architects were given relative freedom to realize their concepts of what elegant residences ought to be. The resulting mansions, each graced with gardens, stables, greenhouses, orangeries and gorgeous "follies," tell us much about the dreams and the ambitions of the people who dominated American life in the critical decades when Victorian style was giving way to the faster pace and larger scope of the world we recognize today. Branford House is in many ways for people alive today, a symbol for and a tangible link to a vanished way of life that is part of American history.

Avery Point

Morton Plant, choosing Avery Point to build his summer house, located himself away from the exclusive summering places of Newport, Narragansett Beach and Long Island's north shore enclaves. Since the Plant progenitor had settled in Branford, Connecticut, in the seventeenth century, this old tie could have influenced Morton Plant's choice. Then, Plant's interest in yachting and his involvement in Long Island regattas suggested a site on the Sound. And nearby Eastern Point had developed a reputation as an attractive summering place by the time Plant was ready to build his house. The summer colony already flourishing there was the brainchild

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Attached Sheets

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approximately 22 acres

Quadrangle name New London, Connecticut

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A	1 8	7 4 5 3 8 0	4 5 7 8 1 8 0	B	1 8	7 4 5 5 0 0	4 5 7 7 6 2 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1 8	7 4 6 1 4 0	4 5 7 7 6 2 0	D	1 8	7 4 5 7 8 0	4 5 7 8 2 6 0
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification See Figure 1 for boundary description. The boundary for the Branford House nomination was drawn to include those buildings and landscape features which retain their historical integrity, and to exclude as many of the newer, historically unrelated buildings constructed by both the United States Coast Guard and the University of Connecticut, as possible.

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 Ellen Fletcher Rosebrock - edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization American History Workshop date 15 February 1982

street & number 134 Beach Street telephone 617/542-1540

city or town Boston state Massachusetts

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 *John W. Herzan*

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date December 6, 1983

For NPS use only

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

Roger M. Wright date 1/23/89
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
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II. Robert William Gibson

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