

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JUL 23 1985

date entered AUG 23 1985

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

1. Name

historic Pratt House

and/or common Pratt House

2. Location

street & number 19 West Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town Essex N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Middlesex code 007

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, Connecticut, Inc.

SPNEA
street & number C/o Harrison Gray Otis House, 141 Cambridge Street

city, town Boston N/A vicinity of state Mass. 02114

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Essex Town Hall

street & number 29 West Avenue

city, town Essex state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 So. Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> original site	
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved	date Circa 1648-70 section only
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Pratt House is an exceptionally well-preserved early 18th-century three-part structure. (Sketch A) The 1732 section is a rectangular two-and one-half story gable-roofed frame dwelling with two distinct gambrel-roofed ells dating from 1702 and possibly between 1648-70. Strong documentation and local tradition combine to suggest a possible late 17th century date. (Photographs #1 & #2) It faces south on the north side of West Avenue several blocks west of the commercial center of Essex in a residential area of older, preserved homes. The 2.05 acre lot has a 125' frontage on West Avenue and an over-all depth of 450'. In the northwest corner is a small, deteriorating barn. Mature trees border the west and east sides of the lot which, except for a gravel drive which runs the depth of the property, is in lawn. A picket fence and a post-and-rail fence delineate a patio, walk and herb garden on the north and west sides of the structure.

Exterior:

The three sections of the Pratt House rest on cut-stone foundations. The entire house is sheathed in clapboards. Each section has a wood-shingled roof. The two chimneys, one in the 1732 section, the other in the 1702 section, are laid up in common bond brick. The 1732 section rests on foundation stones that are dressed on the facade and side elevations. One row of wide foundation clapboards blends into narrower, horizontal oak clapboards which cover the structure and are trimmed out with corner boards. The facade of this section of the Pratt House features five bays. (Photograph #1) A two-panel door with reproduction hardware is framed by pedestal-supported, fluted pilasters with entablature over a four-light transom. Windows are double-hung sash with simple surrounds and six-over-nine and six-over-six panes. Windows on both side elevations are symmetrically arranged. The steeply pitched, end-gabled roof with rakeboards features slightly overhung front and rear eaves and a center chimney.

The 1702 portion is attached at a right angle to the rear of the 1732 section. (Sketch A, Photographs #2 & #3) This oak clapboard-sheathed ell with doors on the east and west sides features six-over-six and six-over-nine double-hung sash windows. The gambrel roof has paired shed dormers on the east and west exposures. A chimney pierces the wood shingle roof near the north wall where it attaches to the older, back portion of the Pratt House. These two sections face east and form a 41' ell behind the 1732 section.

The section purported to date between 1648-70 is set-back on the east side about seven feet from the foundation line of the 1702 section. (Sketch A) On the west side are several rows of very old and wide hand-hewn weatherboards. (Photograph #3) The north and east sides are covered with narrower clapboards. The six-over-six sash windows, although old, bubbled, bluish, handblown glass, are not original. This section according to local tradition and family history was originally located on South Main Street below Essex Square several blocks from where it is today. It is not possible to verify whether it was the 1648 construction or part of a 1670 addition that was moved in 1701. A local historian has indicated it was the earlier portion.¹ Surviving visually available fabric does not immediately corroborate the 17th century dating beyond the few extant siding materials and general architectural design. Specific dating is therefore open to further documentation.

Architecturally the Pratt House has evolved from the north to the south because of the requirements of the various generations of the same family who inhabited it for three centuries.

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Essex, Ct. Item number 6 Page 1

Representation in Existing Surveys:

Connecticut River Estuary Regional Planning Agency Survey x State
1980

Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Ct.

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Interior:

The front door in the 1732 section of the Pratt House opens directly into the front parlor. (Sketch B) Here is a fireplace flanked by well proportioned, seven-fluted pilasters, overhanging moldings, and a handsome mantle. (Photograph #4) The wide-pine flooring, which, like floors in all other rooms except the kitchen is original, is surface nailed with handcut rose-head nails. The walls are plastered and painted. Except for the formality of the fireplace the details of the room are simple. Handhewn, boxed-in corner posts extend from the foundation sill to the roof plate. Their gunstock shape is visible especially in the second floor rooms. The oak and chestnut ceiling beams are handhewn. Immediately left of the front entrance is the L-shaped borning room which gets its shape because the chimney stack occupies the right quarter of the room. Simple bolection molding is featured around the opening of the brick-lined fireplace. Circa 1800 floor stencilling covers the plank floor except for a triangular area in the southwest corner where a corner cupboard originally stood.²

The large kitchen features feather-edged and beaded sheathing and mop boards. A fireplace with a brick oven has been well preserved and dominates the south wall. (Photograph #8) A door in the north wall opens to the 1702 section. All interior doors have raised panels but styles and ages vary. All the hardware is handwrought probably by Pratts who ran the Pratt Smithy in Essex. Against the south wall are original stairs to the cellar and second floor. A square newel post and open string stairs with inconsistent size runners have been well preserved. (Photograph #9)

The upstairs' rooms have original raised three-panel doors with hand wrought strap hinges and thumb latches. (Sketch C) In the two front bedrooms are fireplaces with well preserved wall panels, chimney cupboards and bolection molding. (Photographs #5 & #7) Chair rails are constructed as a continuation of the window stool and apron boards. An original two-section, roundheaded (semi-circular) corner cupboard dominates the right front-room. (Photograph #6) The paneling in the northwest corner bedroom dates from the late 1800s. Off the hall is an alcove, a northeast corner room, a door to the 1702 section, and stairs to the attic.

The attic reveals a common rafter system of handhewn and pegged oak timbers, one-piece corner posts extending from foundation sill to attic plate, and collar beams, the latter placed between the peaked rafters for strength because there is no ridge pole. (Photograph #11)

The 1702 section of the Pratt House is reached either by exterior doors or through interior connecting doors from the 1732 section on both floors. (Sketches C & D) The first floor door to the 1701 section opens into the east-side bedroom which, like the kitchen on the west side, opens into a large living-dining-sitting room space of the

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connected 1702 and circa 1648-70 sections (Sketch D) In the kitchen is a corner cupboard taken from the 1732 section borning room. In the center of the living-dining-sitting room is a two-sided fireplace. The south side features handplaned wood molding, a narrow mantel and a stone lintel. To the left is an oven and ash pit. (Photograph #10) On the side facing the sitting room the stone fireplace has a raised stone hearth and a large stone lintel. It is not possible to verify if any portion of this two-sided fireplace is original to the circa 1648-70 section. Because it is not located where both structures connect, it possibly was built behind the fireplace in the older section before that wall was removed. After its removal, the fireplace in the 1702 addition had fireboxes facing two directions to provide heating and cooking facilities to both areas. Handhewn oak and chestnut beams are exposed in both room areas. The walls are plastered and the floors are covered with wide, pine boards.

On the second floor in the 1702 section the rear bedroom reveals gambrel ceiling lines and handhewn corner posts. (Sketch E) The other bedrooms have dormers. The walls are plastered; the floors are wide-plank pine. The circa 1648-70 portion is one room.

1

Thomas A. Stevens. Potapoug Quarter (Essex: The Connecticut River Foundation at Steamboat Dock, 1984), p.43.

2

"William Pratt House, Essex, Open for 9th Tour of Homes," Hartford Courant, n.d. 1962.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
Criteria B and C		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1702, 1732, Builder/Architect Unknown
c. 1648-70

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Pratt House is significant as an example of early 18th-century Connecticut architecture which has survived intact. Since 1952 its integrity has been maintained through careful preservation. Not only does the exterior convey the important architectural details of its three periods of construction, but the interior details remain completely original. (Criterion C) Historically, the Pratt House is important to Essex because it was home to one of the early families who settled Essex. Numerous generations of the Pratt family, who were major contributors to the commerce, industry, and government of the area, have inhabited this structure during its more than three centuries of existence. (Criterion B)

Criterion C - Architecture

Pratt House has retained the mass and scale in which it was conceived by the builders of its three sections. Its well-preserved exterior and interior are illustrative of the evolution of one family's adaptive use of a property over two hundred years. Beginning with the building possibly in the last half of the 17th-century of the section that was moved to the site in 1701 and the construction of the 1702 addition, the structure was completed with the third and main section in 1732. The integration of these three sections was architecturally successful and in keeping with building customs of the colonial period.

The small circa 1648-70 section was enlarged by the 1702 addition. Both grew into a significant 18th-century residence with the addition in 1732 of the two-story, center-chimney section which reoriented the structure from east-west to north-south. The 1732 construction created the major section of Pratt House behind which was an ell comprised of the two gambrel-roofed sections. The floorplans of each section have been preserved as this property evolved during the 20th-century. Pratt House retains original foundation stones, clapboards and window arrangements.

The same integrity is evident on the interior. The heavy wall and roof framing timbers are authentic and well preserved. Original wall sheathings remain intact. Hearthstones, firebox linings and chimney stones appear to date from original installations. Three massive stone fireplaces with bulky stone lintels contrast with the formality and grace of carved pilasters that flank one mantel and the raised wall panels and bolection molding around several other fireplaces. Handhewn chestnut beams and still-visible gunstock corner-posts of less detailed and refined construction techniques enhance the delicate curves of a corner cupboard in an upstairs bedroom. A walk through Pratt House reveals details of construction and materials consistent with the domestic architecture characteristic to Connecticut in the late 17th-and early 18th-centuries. The wrought iron work of hinges and latches on doors, cupboards and in nails throughout Pratt House is also representative of that turned out by the business enterprise run by ten generations of Pratts, most of whom inhabited the structure. The total effect of the structure today is that its parts make up a pleasing architectural whole.

Criterion B - Exploration /Settlement, Industry, and Commerce

William Pratt emigrated from Stevenage, England, in 1633, settled first in Newtowne (Cambridge), Massachusetts, and in 1636 came with the Reverend Thomas Hooker to Hartford.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.05 acres

Quadrangle name Essex, Ct.

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	7	1	8	9	6	0	4	5	8	1	0	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

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 verbal boundary descriptions of Pratt House may be found in Vol. 70, p. 660, Vol. 36, p. 136, Quit-Claim Deed & Certif. of Devise, 27 Sept. 1974/17 & 22 Sept. 1953, land records of Town of Essex, Essex Town Hall, 29 West Avenue, Essex, Ct.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries N/A

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gail Gene Nettles, Consultant Edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Connecticut Historical Commission date October 30, 1984

street & number 56 South Prospect Street telephone 203-566-3005

city or town 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 National Park Service.

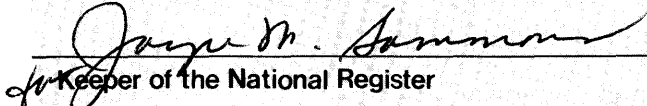
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director: Connecticut Historical Commission date July 2, 1985

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

Entered in the National Register date 8/23/85


Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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In 1637 as a member of an expedition that destroyed the Pequot Indian camp at Mystic, Pratt was awarded 100 acres of land in Hartford which he sold when he relocated to Old Saybrook in 1647.¹ With the help of the Indians Pratt surveyed the "outland" which later became Essex.² He chose land near Potapaug Point to build a home in 1648, on what is today referred to as the Osage Inn site on South Main just below the Essex Square.³ This original settler and his wife Elisabeth Clark raised eight children. Pratt served in the Pequot War, was made a lieutenant in 1661, and from then until his death in 1678, served as a representative to the General Court for twenty-three sessions.⁴ Pratt's land holdings, now Essex, included all land south of Main Street from the Connecticut River west to South Main Street, south to Middle Cove, and south and north along a line now Main Street. When he died, he was the largest land holder in Potapaug Quarter (Essex), Deep River, and Chester.

In 1670 Lieutenant William Pratt added a "new house" onto his 1648 structure, later described as "a certain dwelling house...being commonly called the old house and joineth the Entery of the new house."⁶ Pratt's son and grandson, Ensign John and John, Jr., moved part of this structure in 1701 to a five acre parcel of land on West Avenue owned by the younger Pratt. Local law required that a homestead be on property in order to prevent absentee ownership. John, Jr. became a farmer like his grandfather Lieutenant William Pratt instead of a blacksmith like his father who had established a smithy in 1678 in Saybrook.⁷ However, John, Jr.'s son, Captain John Pratt (John, III) learned the blacksmith trade as an apprentice to his grandfather Ensign John and moved the smithy from Saybrook Point to property on West Avenue which he inherited from his father.⁸ This included the 1732 addition he had helped complete that adjoined the 1648-70 home of Lieutenant William Pratt. In 1734 his father deeded him the western half of the total structure determined by a dividing line that extended from the road (West Avenue) through the chimney and well.⁹ For a time after his father's death in 1749 Pratt, his wife, and children shared the three-section house with his mother who had use of the "Great Room" at the east end (the right front bedroom, second floor, front section), half the cellar, and the "garden eastward."¹⁰ After her death the house became known as "the Captain John Pratt House." He had received by codicil on his twenty-first birthday, 27 June 1724 the following bequest in his grandfather's will: "My working Smithing tools...I give and bequeath to my grandson, John Pratt, son of John Pratt, husbandman, of Potapoug."¹¹

Captain John Pratt's son, Asa, took over the smithy in 1756, and in 1764, received from his sister, Mindwell Pratt, "all my interest in the house that standeth on a lot called the homelot - which land was my honored father's, Captain John Pratt's."¹² Asa saw the smithy through Essex's halcyon shipbuilding era when he supplied much of the iron work for the growing shipyards at Middle Cove on the Connecticut River. He passed the business on to his son John in 1811, who passed the forge to son Elias in 1827, the sixth generation of Pratt blacksmiths. The more substantial blacksmithing facility which he built in 1848 is within view of Pratt House.¹³

In 1870 Edwin took over as the seventh generation of smithy Pratts. In 1914 he was succeeded by James Lord Pratt, with whom the father-to-son line ended. His nephew Edwin (Ned) Pratt continued the business until a lack of iron during World War II necessitated closing the forge, ending what is thought to have been at that time the oldest business in America run continuously by one family.¹⁴

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Pratt House remained in the immediate Pratt family until 1909 when Augustus Pratt, Lieutenant William Pratt's sixth great-grandson, left it to his sister's son, Samuel Griswold, rather than his son. Samuel Griswold owned Pratt House until 1952, when it was bequeathed to the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities and became a museum.¹⁵

The Pratt family name in the United States had its American beginnings in Essex where Lieutenant William Pratt and his wife raised their eight children. In the late 19th century there were over 400 Pratts living in the Essex area. The contribution of Lieutenant William Pratt as founder and proprietor of the Essex settlement, an officer in the militia, and representative to the General Court for twenty-three sessions was considerable. The establishment and operation of the Pratt Smithy by his relatives was important to the economic life of Essex, especially as it effected shipbuilding for commerce, war, and pleasure.

Pratt House is significant as a well-preserved example of late 17th-and early 18th-century Connecticut architecture and, through its intimate associations with the Pratt family, important to the exploration/settlement, and industry of Essex.

1
Thomas A. Stevens, Potapoug Quarter: The First Settlers of Essex, Connecticut (Essex: The Connecticut River Foundation at Steamboat Dock, 1984), p.24.
2
Langdon G. Rankin, "The Essex Story," (Unpublished thesis, 1973-1980, 1980), p.21, Essex Library, Essex, Ct.
3
Ibid., p.6.
4
Stevens, Potapoug, p.40.
5
Ibid., p.40
6
Thomas A. Stevens, "Saybrook Valley: A Saga of Land and Sea," New Era, 22 November 1955, Series 6.
7
Stevens, Potapoug, p.44.
8
Saybrook Town Records, Vol.I, p. 80.
9
Stevens, Potapoug, p.44.
10
Ibid., p.59.
11
Nan Williams, Director, Essex Historical Society, "Pratt Smithy Line," Docent training literature, Essex Historical Society, Essex, Ct., p.4.

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- 12
Stevens, Potapaug, p.44.
13
Ibid., p44.
14
Williams, p. 5.
15
Ibid., p.1.
16
Essex Deeds, Vol.70, p.660.

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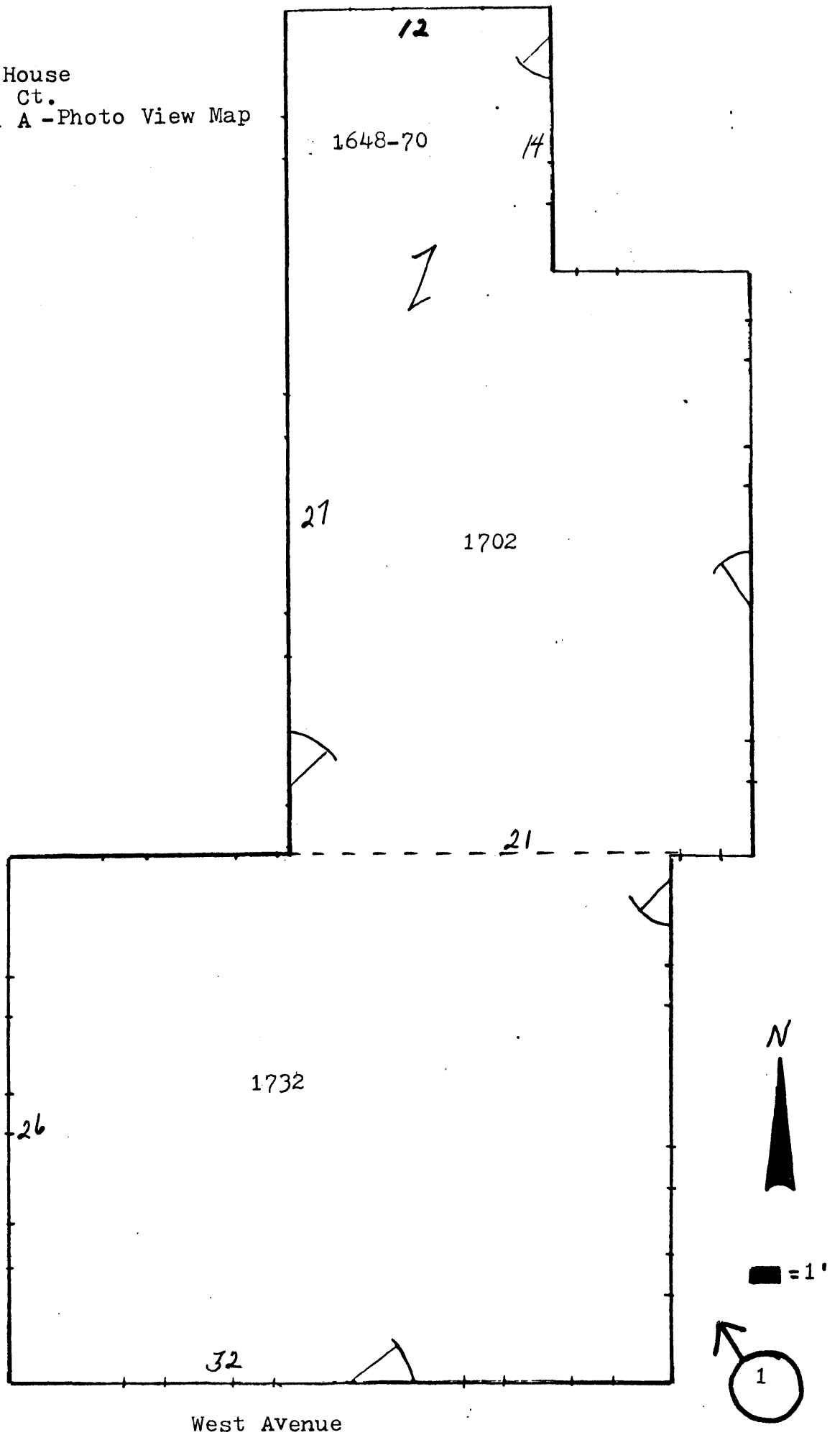
Item number 9

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- Williams, Nan. "Pratt House Tour," "The Pratt Smithy Line," and "William Pratt." Docent material, Essex Historical Society, available at Essex Historical Society, 22 Prospect Street, Essex, Ct.

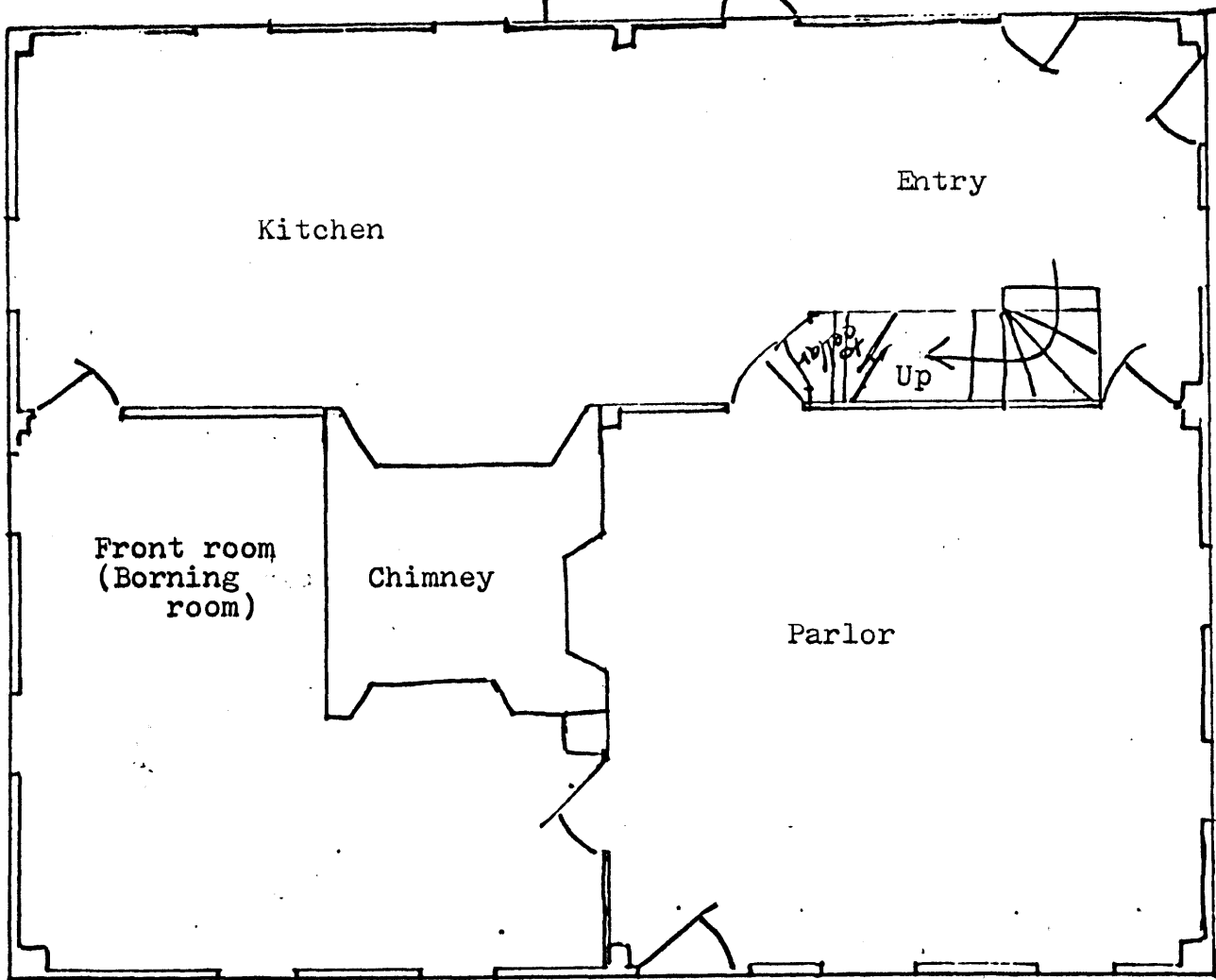
Pratt House
Essex, Ct.
Sketch A - Photo View Map



1648-70/1702

Pratt House
Essex, Ct.
Sketch B

First floor
Front
1732

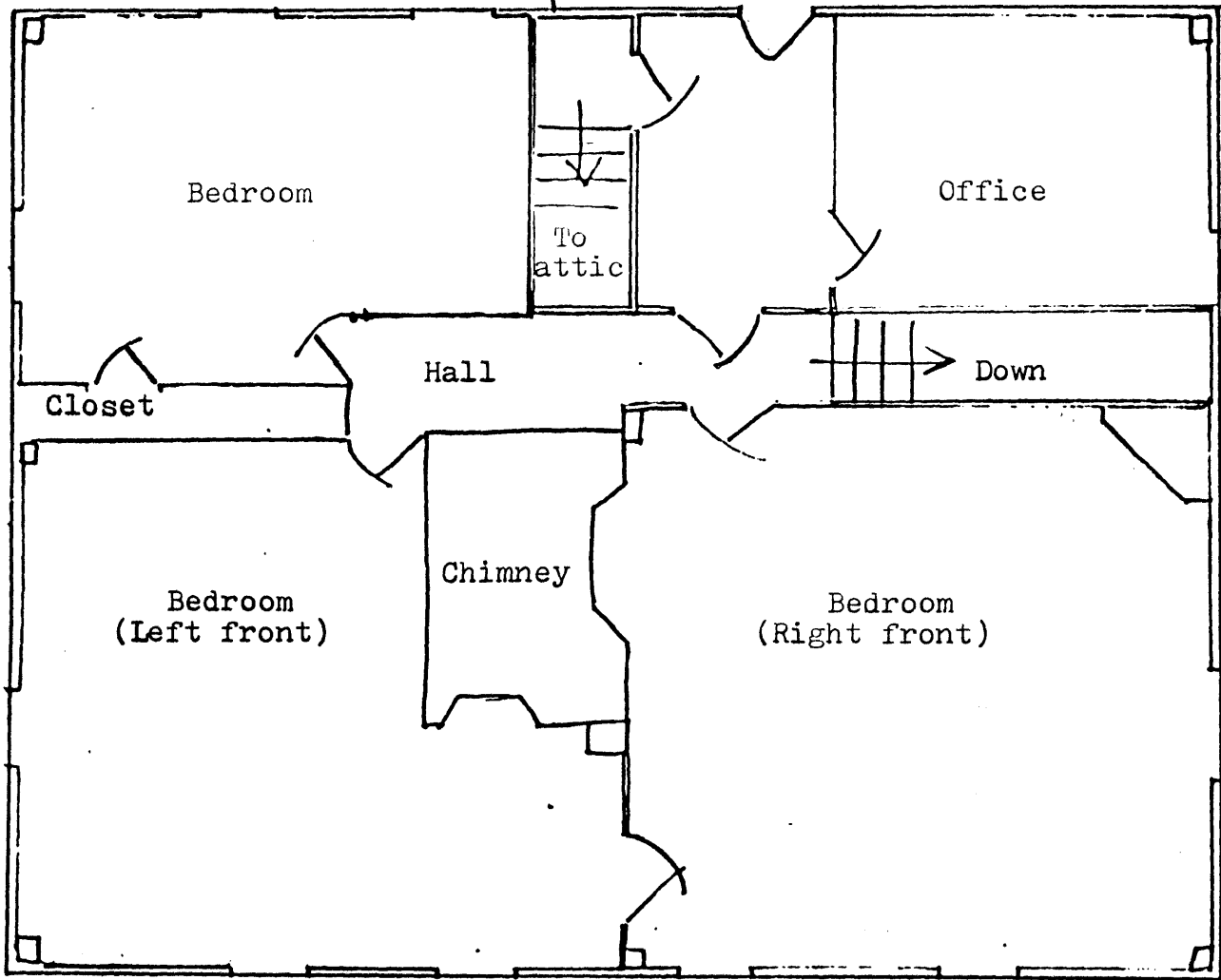


West Avenue

1" = 1'

1648-70/1702

Pratt House
Essex, Ct.
Sketch C



Second floor
Front
1732



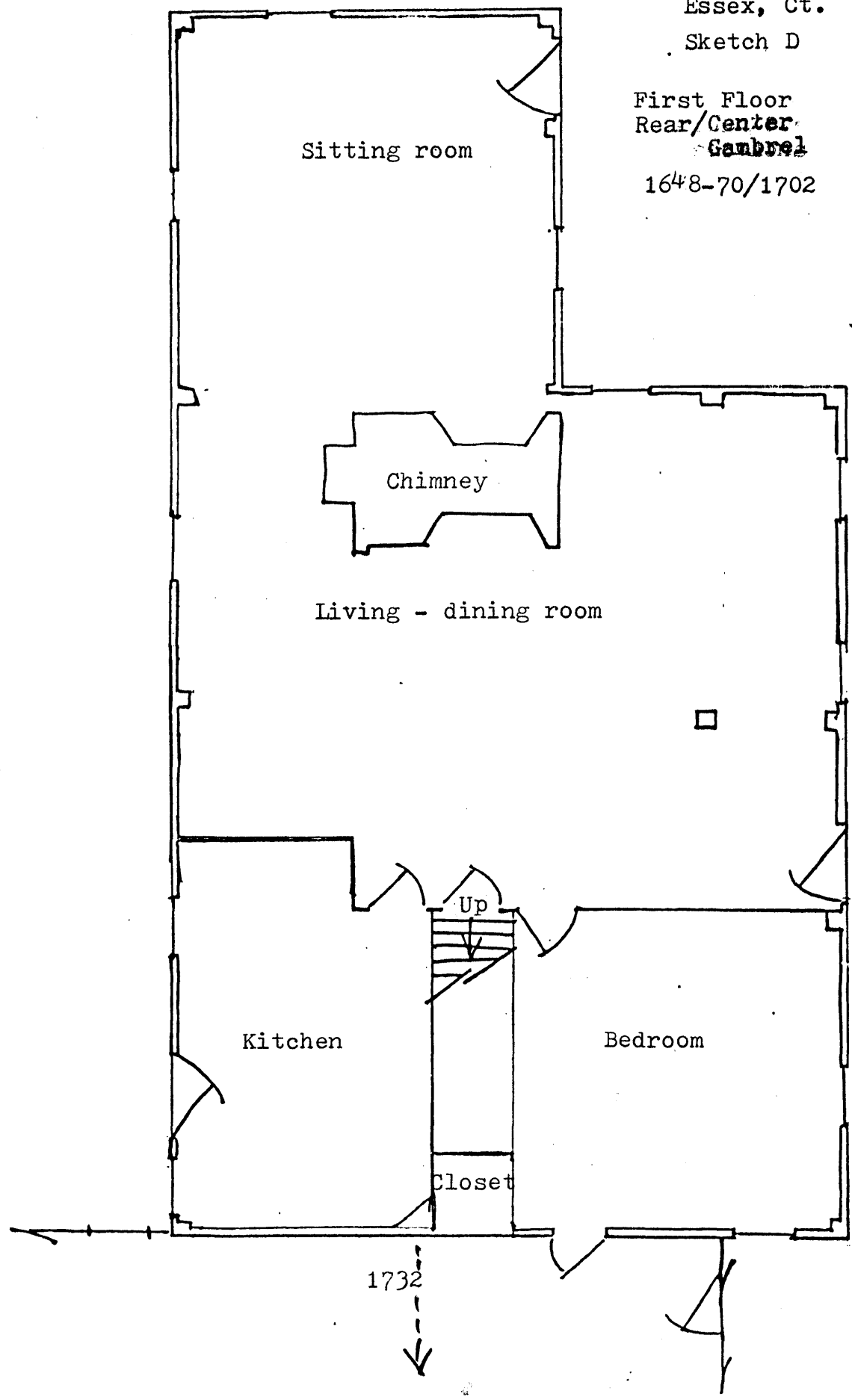
1" = 1'

West Avenue

Pratt House
Essex, Ct.
Sketch D

First Floor
Rear/Center
~~Gambrel~~

1648-70/1702



1" = 1'

Pratt House
Essex, Ct.
Sketch E

Second floor
Rear/Center
Gambrel
1648-70/1702

(Shaded areas indicate truncations
from roof)

