

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 93000672 Date Listed: 08/06/93

Catlin, J. Howard, House                      Litchfield                      CT  
Property Name                                      County                                      State

N/A  
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

8/6/93  
Date of Action

Amended Items in Nomination:

**8. Statement of Significance: Area(s)**

Industry and Conservation are the applicable areas of significance under criterion B associated with Catlin and Turner, respectively.

This information was discussed with John Herzan, National Register Coordinator, CTSHPO, by telephone.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without attachment)

PROPERTY NAME

J. Howard Catlin House, Litchfield, CT

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United States Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

JUN 21 1993

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: J. Howard Catlin House

NATIONAL REGISTER

Other Name/Site Number: NA

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 14 Knife Shop Road Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Litchfield Vicinity: Northfield

State: CT County: Litchfield Code: 005 Zip Code: 06778

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: \_\_\_
Public-local: \_\_\_
Public-State: x
Public-Federal: \_\_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): x
District: \_\_\_
Site: \_\_\_
Structure: \_\_\_
Object: \_\_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

2
\_\_\_
\_\_\_
\_\_\_
2

Noncontributing

\_\_\_ buildings
\_\_\_ sites
\_\_\_ structures
\_\_\_ objects
0 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this x nomination \_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

[Signature] June 17, 1993  
Signature of Certifying Official Date  
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- Determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- Determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 8/6/93  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling

Current: DOMESTIC Sub: single dwelling (vacant)

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: LATE VICTORIAN/Gothic Revival

Materials: Foundation: STONE/granite Walls: WOOD/clapboards Roof: ASPHALT/shingle Other Description:

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The J. Howard Catlin House, built c. 1879, is a frame gable-roofed structure facing north on Knifeshop Road, a few hundred feet east of State Route 254 in the center of the Northfield section of the Town of Litchfield. A companion barn is located near the house to the southeast. Both house and barn have been little altered since construction. (Photograph 1)

The ground plan of the house is irregular, but is basically a north-south rectangle with a wing to the west and a cross gable and bay to the east. (See Figure 1.) The foundation is made of massive cut granite blocks. The front entrance is in a shed-roofed porch covered with a standing-seam metal roof, located in the angle formed by the rectangle and the wing. Decorative details of the porch set the stage for the embellishment of the house as a whole, both interior and exterior. These decorative porch details include the porch-railing balusters shaped like Gothic arches, with perforated spandrels, the capitals of the square posts in a pendant motif, and board-and-batten spandrels under the ends of the shed roofs. (Photographs 2, 3)

In the first floor of the front elevation of the house are tall paired 2-over-2 windows under a low peaked pediment with raised embellishment, supported by small corbels. At the second floor are replacement 6-over-1 windows of normal size under similar pediment with added panel, while in the attic there are narrow pointed 1-over-1 windows. The upper sash of the attic windows are point-shaped. The substantial roof overhang is supported by flat C-shaped brackets. (Photographs 4, 5)

The east side elevation is divided by a gabled pavilion. North of the pavilion are single windows at first and second floors. In the north wall of the pavilion there is a single window at first floor only. The east wall of the pavilion has a flat-roofed three-sided bay at the first floor with second-floor and attic windows like the front elevation except they are single rather than paired. South of the pavilion there is a replacement porch leading to a door in the south wall of the pavilion. There are also two windows at the first floor and one at the second. (Photographs 4, 6)

The rear elevation of the rectangle has an added porch leading to a door to the kitchen, with a window to the east. Scars on the wall indicate that originally there was a wraparound porch from this door to the east door and perhaps around the bay. At the second floor are one tall window without peaked pediment and an added small bathroom window. A pointed attic window is under the eaves, which have no brackets. In the rear elevation of the wing there is an odd narrow door without steps, which opens to the bathroom. (Photograph 8) West of it is a single window under the eaves of the roof which slopes down to the first floor in this quarter of the house. (Photographs 6,7)

In the west elevation there is, in the wing, a single tall 2-over-2 window toward the rear, under the extended roof slope. Under the gable, fenestration at all three floors is similar to that of the front elevation except that, as on the east elevation, at the second and third floors windows are single instead of paired. (Photograph 7) In the front elevation of the wing are a window and the front door at the first floor and two windows at the second. The west wall of the front of the rectangle has two windows at the first floor, one at the second. (Photograph 1)

The two tall peaked glazed panels of the front door are etched frosted glass. (Photograph 9) The door opens to a small entrance hall and stairway to the second floor. The stairway is rounded in plan, and enclosed. Its newel is embellished with incised decoration. The entrance hall connects to the east to the dining room through a four-paneled door. The channeled surrounds of the door extend through circle corner blocks in an unusual manner, typical of all the door and window surrounds of the house. The window north of the door to the dining room has louvered shutters, as do all the first-floor windows. The chandelier is c. 1910, one of several in the house. Pocket doors separate the dining room from the front parlor. (Photograph 10) Both the dining room and the parlor have elaborate ceiling medallions.

The bay forms the east wall of the dining room, while a built-in cupboard is in the south wall. (Photograph 11) The shelves of the cupboard have a second set of doors on the kitchen side, making it a pass-through cupboard. Woodwork in the kitchen is grained, as, no doubt, was all the woodwork originally, although most is now painted white.

West from the kitchen, at the back, is a narrow bathroom, perhaps original, with marble-top sink and boxed-in copper tub. The odd narrow door is opposite the sink. (Photograph 8) Beyond the bath is a first-floor bedroom, as typically found in the era, and in front of the bedroom is a reception room, west of the entrance hall.

On the second floor a north-south hall runs along the western edge of the rectangle (Photograph 12), with three bedrooms to the east. The south bedroom has been altered to a kitchen for a second-floor apartment, and the bathroom at the south end of the hall has been modernized. A fourth bedroom is in the west wing. High on the wall in a closet of this bedroom is the pencilled date "Sept. 10, 1879" followed by an undecipherable name which is approximately Atwood or Alvord. The 1971 second-floor modernization included dropping the ceilings and installing new windows. The attic provides a good view of the intricate roof framing where the gables intersect with the main roof, and of the peaked attic sash. (Photograph 13)

The 1 1/2-story frame barn, located a few feet southeast of the house, has vertical siding and sliding doors. The gabled hood over the doors has a rounded brace in its soffit which is pieced by a flattened Gothic Revival trefoil motif. The windows have the stilted lintels of the High Victorian Italianate style. The gable roof overhangs broadly, the same as the house roof does, and is supported by the same flat C-shaped brackets. (Photograph 14) The louvered monitor on top of the barn has a low pyramidal roof with tall pointed finial from which rises a three-dimensional weather vane in the shape of a horse. (Photograph 15) A former greenhouse in the backyard no longer is standing.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

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

Applicable National Register Criteria: A\_\_\_ B x C x D\_\_\_  
33 Sunrise Hill Drive  
West Hartford, CT 06107  
203 521-2518

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

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
ARCHITECTURE	1879 1941	1879
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Significant Person(s): J. Howard Catlin  
Albert M. Turner

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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

The J. Howard Catlin House is significant architecturally because it is a good example of a rural interpretation of high style late-19th-century taste in an eclectic house. The elaborate interior and exterior details are outstanding. The house was built for J. Howard Catlin, an officer in the local knife manufacturing company. The second resident was his son-in-law, Albert M. Turner, who did pioneer work in the establishment of the Connecticut state park system.

### The Architecture

The Catlin House has a number of unusual features. Most striking is the elaborate ornamentation of the porch details, the window pediments, and the interior trim. Details with this degree of elaboration are seldom found in a house built for a local citizen of a remote village in the northwest hills such as Northfield. Regrettably, there is no indication in the record of the circumstances leading to selection of such details for this house.

The general plan of the house also is somewhat unusual. The disposition on both first and second floors of main rooms in a north-south row with a wing to the west is uncommon. Moreover, the layout, particularly of the first floor, is somewhat awkward. The entrance hall is small. The parlor can be accessed from the front entrance only through the dining room, which is unusual. The rounded closed-in staircase is seldom found, in comparison with the popularity of open stair wells in houses of this pretense.

Two features remain unexplained. One of these is the narrow outside door in the bathroom, for which no rationalization has been put forward. The other is the odd configuration of the long rear roof slope of the wing, down to the first floor eaves. One theory has it that this roof slope is an alteration, but examination of the roof structure and framing found no supporting evidence.

The question of what style this house may be is intriguing. The tall paired windows, roof overhang with heavy brackets, and three-sided bay are consistent with the Italianate. On the other hand, the tall paired windows, peaked attic windows whose sash literally are pointed, and the steep roof slopes are consistent with the Gothic Revival, as is the pierced trefoil in the brace over the barn door. The intricate porch trim reflects Queen Anne-style taste. And the barn adds to the pot-pourri with its High Victorian Italianate stilted lintels.

The high style yet idiosyncratic details of the house and the awkward nature of its floor plan suggest that the structure was planned by an ingenious but untrained amateur. The rounded stair well and the pass-through dining room-kitchen cupboard reflect an inventive mind. But the sum total is odd. It may be that Catlin or his builder shopped the house-component catalogs, selecting items that appealed, without giving sufficient attention to the question of overall unity and workability.

Both house and barn are in a fine state of preservation in the sense that they have been little altered since construction. Both are incorrectly painted white. Both are in need of maintenance. The house is now vacant.



The Owners

J. Howard Catlin (1847-1933) was descended from the first settlers of Northfield. He attended nearby Gunnery School before entering a retail business in which his family had an interest. In 1865, with his brother Franklin H. Catlin (d. 1912), he bought the plant and waterpower privileges of the Northfield Knife Company, successor in 1858 to the Northfield Manufacturing Company, whose product had been wagons. The dam and factory were a few hundred feet east of the house; the site is now identified by a marker.

Under Catlin management the Northfield Knife Company became widely known for quality pocket cutlery. The firm's products were displayed at world fairs in Philadelphia, 1876; Paris, 1878; Melbourne, 1880; Chicago, 1893; and Buffalo, 1901. However, over time the business declined, and was sold in 1919.

Catlin took an interest in civic affairs through participation in the Village Improvement Society and the Cemetery Association. For many years his interest in music found expression in his service as organist and choir director of the Congregational Church. Six volumes of his diaries, 1867-1892, generally are filled with matter-of-fact entries recording where he went, who he spoke to, and what he did, such as "removed stones from pipe at reservoir so water came a little more freely." Of above average interest are rather cryptic entries concerning a strike by factory workers, concluding with the entry of December 20, 1880, "Grinders came in about the middle of the afternoon and agreed to go to work tomorrow morning 21st on same terms as when they 'went out.'" And on the following day an entry on an entirely different subject reads, "Met at home of L.S. Wooster with 4 others to prepare for Christmas singing - - but went home without singing at all."

J. Howard Catlin was a prominent citizen of Northfield, as evidenced by his elaborate house and his entrepreneurship in the nearby factory. The existence of his diaries, which are primary documentation giving insight into his business and personal life, is unusual. The account of early labor negotiations and the plaintive record of Christmas singing gone wrong are significant first-hand social records,

Catlin's daughter Helen (Nellie) married Albert M. Turner, an 1890 engineering graduate of Yale. They lived in the house. Turner became first secretary of the Connecticut Park and Forest Commission, serving in that capacity from 1914 to 1941. He directed the initial acquisition and development program for state parks and forests, establishing the framework of the system as it is known today. Of particular significance were his untiring efforts to secure and develop three shoreline state parks, Sherwood Island, Hammonasset, and Rocky Neck.

Nellie M. Turner conveyed the property to the State of Connecticut by testamentary gift in 1941.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Catlin, J. Howard. Diaries, six volumes, over the years 1867-1892. At the Litchfield Historical Society library.

\_\_\_\_\_ Obituary. Unidentified newspaper clipping marked with pencil notation 1933. At the Gilbert Library, Northfield, CT

Litchfield Assessor's Records.

Litchfield Land Records, volume 102, page 203. September 8, 1941.

McCahon, Mary. Historical and Architectural Resource Survey, Statewide Historic Resource Inventory. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Commission, 1985.

White, Alain C. The History of the Town of Litchfield, Connecticut, 1720-1920. Litchfield: Enquirer Print, 1920.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary Location of Additional Data:

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

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: one

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A	<u>18</u>	4617680	657600	B	__	_____	_____
C	__	_____	_____	D	__	_____	_____
E	__	_____	_____	F	__	_____	_____

Verbal Boundary Description:

The property is described as parcel 1 at Litchfield Land Records, volume 102, page 203, September 8, 1941.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary is drawn to encompass the land that has gone with the house since it was built.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

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

Org.: Connecticut Historical Commission

Date: January 3, 1993

Street/#: 59 South Prospect Street

City/Town: Hartford

State: Connecticut

ZIP: 06106

Telephone: 203 521-2518

## Photographs

Photographs were taken in November and December 1992 and in February 1993 by David F. Ransom. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Photograph 1  
View east

Photograph 2  
View east

Photograph 3  
View southeast

Photograph 4  
View southwest

Photograph 5  
Detail of  
Photograph 4

Photograph 6  
View northwest

Photograph 7  
View northeast

Photograph 8  
Narrow door  
View north

Photograph 9  
Front door  
View northeast

Photograph 10  
Dining room  
and parlor  
View northwest

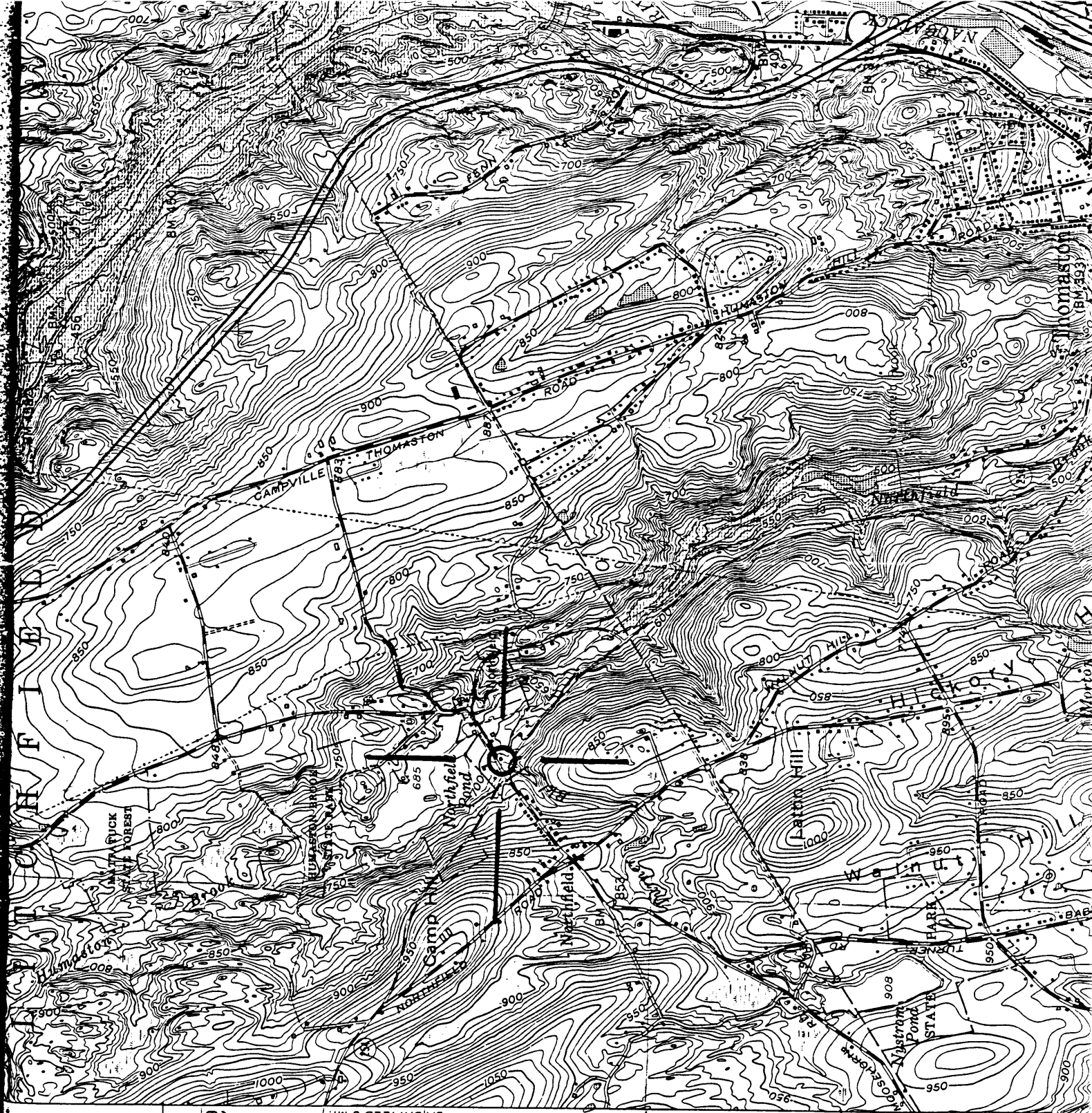
Photograph 11  
Dining room  
View southeast

Photograph 12  
Second-floor  
hall  
View northwest

Photograph 13  
Attic  
View northeast

Photograph 14  
View south

Photograph 15  
View northeast



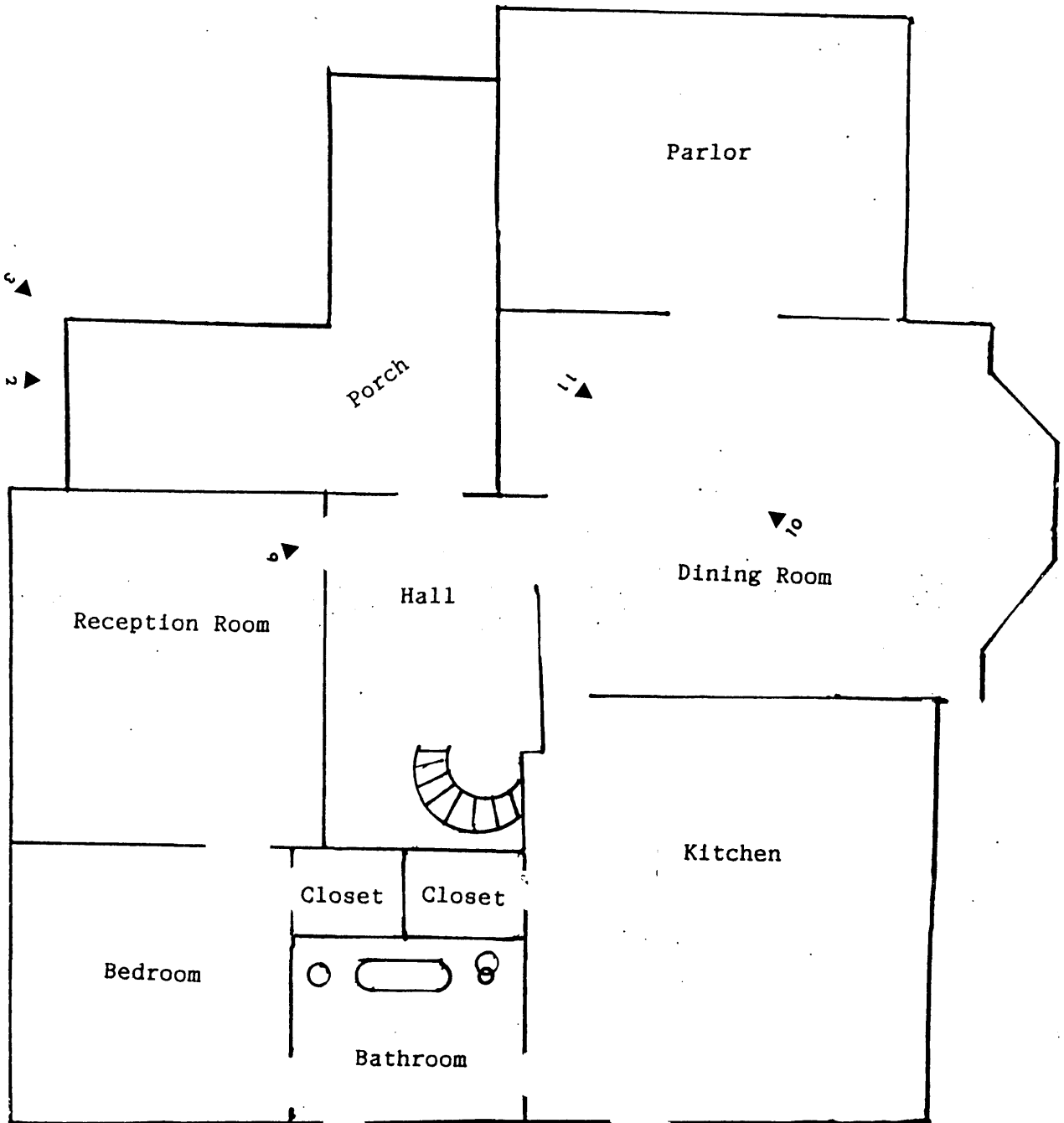
4619  
42'30"

4617  
6367 11 NW  
(LITCHFIELD)

4616

J. Howard Catlin House  
Litchfield County  
Connecticut

UTM Reference  
18/4617680/657600



**J. Howard Catlin House**  
 Litchfield, CT  
First-floor Photo Key  
 Scale: 1" = 6.5' prox.  
**Figure 1**

