

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

TOP COTTAGE

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United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: TOP COTTAGE

Other Name/Site Number: HILL-TOP COTTAGE

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 24 Potters Bend Road

Not for publication: \_\_

City/Town: Hyde Park

Vicinity: \_\_

State: NY

County: Dutchess

Code: 027

Zip Code: 12538

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: \_\_

Public-State: \_\_

Public-Federal: \_\_

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: \_\_

Site: \_\_

Structure: \_\_

Object: \_\_

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

\_\_

\_\_

\_\_

1

Noncontributing

4 buildings

\_\_ sites

1 structures

\_\_ objects

5 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

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**4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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   meets   does not meet the National Register Criteria.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Certifying Official

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
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 of Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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**6. FUNCTION OR USE**

Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Vacant/Not in Use

**7. DESCRIPTION**

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: Late 19th and 20th Century Revival:  
Colonial Revival/Dutch Colonial Revival

**MATERIALS:**

Foundation: Stone & concrete block

Walls: Stone

Roof: Asphalt Shingles

Other:

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**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The following description quotes in large part from the Historic Structure Report written by John G. Waite Associates, Architects in 1997.

Franklin D. Roosevelt's Hill-Top Cottage is located on a wooded site on Dutchess Hill, the highest point in Dutchess County, where it originally commanded a magnificent view of the Hudson River and the Catskill mountains. The design of the house was inspired by Roosevelt's interest in local Dutch colonial buildings and relied on simple forms, scale, steeply-pitched roofs, and the texture of the rubble fieldstone walls for architectural interest.

The 32-acre nominated property was originally part of the vast Roosevelt family estate; the property's main house, Springwood, is located west of Top Cottage and is situated on the banks of the Hudson River. Gradually, portions of the land between Springwood and Top Cottage were sold off and a modern residential subdivision now separates Top Cottage from the main Roosevelt estate complex on the Hudson River. However, the land between Top Cottage and Eleanor Roosevelt's retreat Val-Kill (to the west) remains undeveloped and, in the future, there may be an opportunity to re-connect these historically linked properties. The nominated boundary was drawn to include all of the property that is now associated with Top Cottage. With the exception of a small group of mid-twentieth century dependencies, the property retains integrity to President Roosevelt's period of ownership and use. At this time, access to Top Cottage is through a mid-twentieth century suburban residential neighborhood to the east. A narrow asphalt driveway off the intersection of Potters Bend Road and Val-Kill Drive leads up to a low rise where the house is situated. The driveway circles around the east and south sides of the house. Mature trees and plantings surround the stone building. On the west side of the house, a steep hill drops away toward the Hudson River. Its dense stand of trees obscure the original view of the Hudson valley.

Top Cottage is a one story, seven bay stone cottage with a central block, flanking wings and three separate but connected gable roofs. The building retains a high level of integrity from the historic period, including the original 1938 design and the subsequent early 1940's modifications -- all of which were supervised by President Roosevelt. The building's overall mass is broken up into three distinct parts -- the prominent central block, which thrusts westward toward the Hudson River view, and the attached north and south wings. The center block and wings have steep gable roofs covered in asphalt shingles. Wood gabled dormers punctuate the roofs of each wing. The majority of first floor windows have single openings with double-hung sash, wood trim and shutters. The roof dormers on the wings have double wings with double hung sash. The stone gable ends of the north and south wings contain a set of three windows with double hung sash and wood trim. A large sliding glass door provides access from the center block to the enclosed west porch, which was originally open. The porch has a low shed roof, which continues the sloping roofline of the central block and is slightly concave -- reminiscent of porch roofs on early Dutch houses in the Hudson Valley.

The house is symmetrical in massing, with a large central block facing west, and north and south wings that are set back towards the east. The central block is three bays wide by two bays deep, and measures approximately 40'-4" wide x 23'-9" deep, while the two wings are two bays wide by two bays deep. The north wing is approximately 35'-10" wide x 23'-0" deep; the south wing is 3'-0" wider. An enclosed porch (originally open) extends fully across the west

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facade of the central block. A smaller, enclosed porch is attached to the north elevation of the north wing.

The walls are random fieldstone rubble, laid up in concrete mortar, generally in wide, irregular joints. The foundation walls are also random fieldstone rubble, supplemented with interior walls of concrete block.

A projecting chimney mass centered on the east elevation is also constructed of stone rubble. Flat stone slabs cap the angled planes of the chimney shoulders. A stairway to the basement is concealed in the chimney mass.

The ground floor of the cottage consists of three joined stone structures. The central block, the heart of the small house, is flanked by two nearly symmetrical wings; the south wing is slightly greater in length.

The central block has a large living room and a covered, now enclosed, porch that extends along the west side of the block. An impressive stone fireplace, centered on the east wall, is the primary feature of the living room. The north wing houses secondary and service functions such as the entry hall, pantry, kitchen, and caretaker's quarters, including a bathroom. At the north end of the wing, there is an enclosed porch, probably added after 1945. The south wing includes two bedrooms, a bathroom, and a hallway. Access from one wing to the other is through the centrally positioned living room.

In general, the conditions that survive today can be traced to the original construction of the cottage in 1938-39, and to modifications and additions made for the President at a later date. On the ground floor, this later work essentially encompassed two campaigns: the work carried out in the north wing during 1940-41; and modifications to the south wing in 1942-43. In both areas, the work involved the creation of additional bedroom space for family, guests, and the caretaker in the attics of the north and south wings. On the ground floor, stairways were inserted for access to the new attic rooms. The north stair was placed in the food pantry next to the kitchen. The south stair was positioned in the area that was formerly occupied by the bathroom linen closet and the southwest corner of the small bedroom.

Additional modifications to the ground floor were made when the President's son Elliott occupied the house with his wife Fay Emerson and their children. Possibly the first project after 1945 was the painting of the wall surfaces in various rooms. The sand-finished and smooth plaster walls had remained unpainted during the FDR era, but apparently Elliott and his family wanted color added to the austere rooms. The entry hall and living room were painted a sunny yellow-gold, while the south hall and adjacent small bedroom were finished in a bright blue-green. The larger bedroom was painted pale pink and had a hand-painted floral motif on the south wall. The cabinets in the pantry and kitchen were covered in a bright grey-blue, and the kitchen walls were painted in a pale yellow-beige.

Significant projects that appear to have been carried out while Elliott and his family occupied the house include the enclosure of the west porch and possibly the addition of the north porch. The closets and vanity were probably inserted in the large south bedroom at this time. Some or all of these projects may have been carried out with the help of the architect Henry Toombs;

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in a list of his projects, the architect included an ambiguous reference to “Res. Alt” for Elliott Roosevelt.

Interior photographs taken in 1948 reveal that many of FDR’s furnishings and collections remained in the cottage, as if to memorialize the dead President. In 1952, many of these objects were sold through Hammer Galleries in New York City, thereby ending an important aspect of FDR’s presence at Top Cottage.

The steeply-pitched gabled roofs above the central block of the house and above each of the flanking wings shelter substantial attic space. As originally completed these were essentially unfinished spaces, although there is an indication that rough flooring was installed in at least two, and possibly all three, spaces. The area above the living room was to be used for the storage of trunks with access through the “door” in the north gable of the central block. Hatches in the ceiling of one of the north and south wing rooms probably provided access to the attics in those locations. Originally, there were no dormers or gable window openings included in the two wings.

The current room arrangement of the two finished attics is the result of two distinct efforts to provide additional bedroom space in the cottage.

Work in the north attic was carried out in 1940-41 with the intent of creating additional space for the caretaker, Christian Bie, and his family. The work included the insertion of a large window opening in the north masonry gable; the construction of the west dormer; and the creation of two rooms, a stair hall and a small toilet room, within the attic space. The rooms were very simply finished with fiberboard (*Celotex*), a material first developed in 1920.

The creation of the rooms in the south attic was carried out in a more substantial manner. This work was accomplished in 1942-43 and included the creation of two bedrooms, a full bathroom and a narrow stair hall. Windows were inserted in the north and south masonry gables of the wing. The bedrooms were finished with vertical oak boards. Plywood was used to finish the hall and bathroom.

No significant modifications were made to the attic rooms during the period that Elliott Roosevelt occupied the house.

The Potter family made additions to these rooms that affected the external appearance of the cottage. Prominent dormer windows were added to the wings: a single east dormer on the north wing and three dormers on the south wing (two on the east elevation and one on the west elevation). Minor changes included the placement of a shower stall in the north wing and the installation of plastic wall tiles in the second-floor bathroom.

Top Cottage is situated on 32 acres of land which were originally part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s estate. The Beaverkill Conservancy, a subsidiary of the Open Space Institute and the current owner of Top Cottage, is seeking to purchase three small parcels of land in order to reconnect the Top Cottage property to Val-Kill. The Val-Kill Cottage, which was built by FDR for Eleanor Roosevelt and her politically activist friends, is now part of the Roosevelt-Vanderbilt National Historic Site and run by the National Park Service. If Beaverkill is

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successful (two of the parcels have been secured to date), it will be possible to reestablish a wood road between the two historic sites which could be walked or, occasionally, used by 4 x 4 vehicles.

The Top Cottage land is largely rugged and wooded, but also contains an overgrown meadow to the south of the cottage. The historic view of the Hudson Valley to the West of the cottage is now obscured by trees but a significant portion of it could be restored by cutting the forest understory and opening vistas beneath the mature forest. Some of the trees in the vicinity of the house, and possibly some of the dog wood trees in the overgrown meadow, were probably planted under the direction of FDR who had a passionate interest in forestry. Waite Associates is currently conducting research on the history of the Top Cottage grounds which will be used to guide its restoration.

The nominated property includes five non-contributing mid-twentieth century resources, including:

- A small, two story wood frame, wood sheathed house with gable roof is located southwest of Top Cottage.
- A one story greenhouse with a masonry base is located east of the above house.
- A concrete in-ground swimming pool east of the greenhouse.
- Two small, one story wood frame, wood sheathed garages with shed roofs are located east of Top Cottage.

All of these properties are set within a mature landscape and do not intrude upon Top Cottage's immediate surroundings. For more information about the locations of these non-contributing elements, see the nominations's site plan.

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**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide:    Locally:   

## Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B X C    D   

## Criteria Considerations

(Exceptions): A    B    C    D    E    F    G   NHL Criteria:   2NHL Theme(s): IV. Shaping the Political Landscape  
4. Political Ideas, Culture, and TheoriesAreas of Significance: Politics/Government  
Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1938-1945

Significant Dates: 1938, 1940, 1942

Significant Person(s): Roosevelt, Franklin D.

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Toombs, Henry  
Roosevelt, Franklin DelanoHistoric Contexts: VII. Political and Military Affairs  
H. The Great Depression and the New Deal  
VIII. World War II  
C. Politics and Diplomacy During the War



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

Top Cottage is nationally significant because of its unique and highly personal association with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, one of America's greatest presidents. Constructed in 1938, during Roosevelt's second term in office, the small stone cottage served as his private country retreat for the rest of his presidency. Intended to be used as a refuge from the formality, stress and rigorous pace of presidential life, Top Cottage was also occasionally used to entertain distinguished visitors and foreign dignitaries. Top Cottage is situated at the top of a wooded hill east of the Roosevelt family estate (Springwood) and originally commanded a panoramic view of the Hudson River (now obscured by trees). Designed by architect Henry Toombs under the direction of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Top Cottage is additionally significant in that it embodies Roosevelt's strong interest in the early history and architecture of the Hudson Valley. A descendent of one of the region's prominent early Dutch families, Roosevelt was an avid student of the region's history and an avocational architect. As such, he became deeply involved in the preservation of Dutchess County's architectural heritage and exerted a strong influence over the designs of a group of notable Hudson Valley buildings, including his presidential library and museum in Hyde Park (1941), Eleanor Roosevelt's nearby country home Val-Kill (1924), and the U.S. Post Offices in Rhinebeck (1938), Hyde Park (1940) and Poughkeepsie (1937). All of these buildings were designed to recall the Hudson Valley's settlement period vernacular building traditions and exhibit characteristic features of the type, including plans, materials and details. Specifically, the design of Top Cottage resembles the eighteenth-century stone houses associated with the region's Dutch settlers and is characterized by a central mass with flanking wings, thick, uncoursed stone walls of locally quarried stone, steep gable roofs, a single-room-deep linear plan, and a "Dutch" type porch sheltered under the sweeping gable roof of the main block.

In addition, Top Cottage features a number of design features specifically intended to accommodate Roosevelt's personal needs for wheelchair accessibility, including an unobstructed linear plan with all of its primary living spaces on the first floor, long windows with low sills to provide views from a wheelchair, wide doorways and a large sliding glass door with a low threshold between the living room and porch.

In 1940 and 1942, Top Cottage was altered, again by Henry Toombs, under specific direction of the President. As part of this building program, the attic spaces were converted into bedrooms in order to provide additional overnight accommodations. Other than these changes, the building retains a high level of integrity to its original design and accurately recalls Roosevelt's period of association.

Of all the buildings associated with Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Top Cottage is the most poignant and personal reminder of his private life while serving as president of the United States. Drawing upon both his personal interpretation of the region's cultural history and his own physical needs, the design of Top Cottage is a unique symbol of Roosevelt's character and some of the values that he brought to the presidency.

Top Cottage is of great significance as the private retreat of Franklin D. Roosevelt, President of the United States and world leader. While it was intended as a place to get away from the

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hubbub of his mother's house, it was where he entertained distinguished visitors, most memorably King George VI and Queen Elizabeth as America and Britain were forging the alliance that would result in victory over the Axis powers. Additionally, Top Cottage is important as a reminder of the personal enthusiasm of this shaper of the twentieth century: his deep-rooted preoccupation with history, his love of the land, his constant need to be building, and his preference for the simple and unpretentious.

Roosevelt, according to Archibald MacLeish, was "a political leader whose intellectual preoccupation was history." FDR was both an amateur historian and amateur architect. With professional help from Henry Toombs, he designed Top Cottage to resemble the old, eighteenth-century fieldstone houses of the Hudson Valley, some of which had been built and occupied by his own Dutch ancestors. He was a member of the Holland Historical Society (open only to male descendants of early Dutch colonists) and supporter of historical research on the region--notable in sponsoring the publication of *Dutch House in the Hudson Valley before 1776* (1929) by his friend Helen Wilkinson Reynolds.

Franklin Roosevelt supported the preservation of Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and it is clear that FDR looked to Jefferson as his model of the president who designed buildings. When it was necessary to defend his identification as "architect" of Top Cottage, Roosevelt cited Jefferson as precedent. Jefferson's hilltop Monticello ("little mountain") with its extensive vistas may well have helped inspire Roosevelt to build atop Dutchess Hill and orient the cottage to take advantage of the view to the West over Roosevelt-owned land to the Hudson River and hills beyond. FDR could be pedantic in demanding strict adherence to Dutch colonial architecture precedent (as he had been in arguing with Henry Toombs about an arched window Toombs had designed for Val-Kill Cottage), but he so valued the western view from Top Cottage that he called for broad, un-Dutch, sliding glass doors connecting living room and western porch which served as a platform for taking in the view.

Roosevelt did love to build, both for his own use and for the public. In Dutchess County he designed or contributed to the design of his mother's house, his wife's cottage, the village library in Hyde Park, three post offices, and the presidential library. At Warm Springs, Georgia, he designed (with the aid of Henry Toombs) cottages for himself in the regional historical style, and oversaw the design and construction of the polio treatment center there. In Washington, he directed alterations to the White House and personally oversaw the design of numerous federal buildings while taking a particularly active role in sponsoring John Russell Pope's proposal for the Jefferson Memorial.

FDR believed in continuity--no radical disruption of American democracy in the New Deal and no overthrow of monumental classicism in Washington's government buildings. In Hyde Park continuity meant maintaining the local colonial tradition of simple, sturdy construction in fieldstone, whenever possible using stones from old stone walls on his land. Top Cottages's plain shapes both outside and in (where the stone fireplace is remarkable for its rugged simplicity) might even teach a lesson. In 1936 Roosevelt had stated that "The spirit of

simplicity of the homes of our ancestors...is a good influence on a civilization which to some of us seems to be reverting to the more humble and honest ideals."

Although the son of Hudson River aristocrats, Roosevelt connected Dutch colonial fieldstone

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architecture with American democratic values of unpretending integrity. He also associated it with permanence. Much that he had accomplished in government he knew would be ephemeral. But, as he told a radio audience in his November 4, 1938, fireside chat, his "simple cottage" was nearly completed, and "once you build a house you always have it."

While he did not create a mechanism for the permanent preservation of the cottage (as he did for his mother's house and the presidential library), it is very clear that he was proud of it and wanted the public to associate it with their president. FDR and many other Americans identified George Washington and Thomas Jefferson with Mount Vernon and Monticello. By allowing widespread publication of photos and drawings of Top Cottage which named the president as client and architect, he apparently hoped Americans would recognize that the President of the United States preferred simplicity to magnificence, durable stone to shoddy alternatives. The cottage's style was neither foreign nor radically modern, but firmly linked to historical architecture of the locality. Joined to tradition but not a Williamsburg-like recreation of antiquity, it was designed with practicality in mind. It was a place for relaxation and informal entertaining, where King and Queen would encounter American democracy in the form of a picnic. And, as Geoffrey Ward writes, it was designed for a client in a wheelchair.

As the Historic Structures Report on Top Cottage prepared by Waite Associates states: "Top Cottage is unusual as one of those few buildings designed by a United States President while in office. In this respect, it is comparable to Thomas Jefferson's Poplar Forest, Jefferson's rural retreat near Lynchburg, Virginia, constructed between 1806 and 1819. Like Poplar Forest, Top Cottage was the expression of a President's clearly thought-out architectural ideas for his own house. Top Cottage also embodied Roosevelt's ideas about the appropriate architectural style for the Hudson Valley and the importance of the valley's Dutch heritage."

Top Cottage survives little changed and deserves National Historic Landmark designation as a building which will continue to tell the public something about the thirty-second president's respect for the history and continuity with the past, his affection for the land and building stones drawn from the land, and his preference for informality and simplicity as an expression of democratic principle.

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**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Complete Presidential Conferences of Franklin D. Roosevelt.* New York: DeCapo Press, 1972.

Dows, Olin. *Franklin Roosevelt at Hyde Park.* New York: American Artists Group, 1949.

“Historic Structure Report for Top Cottage,” John G. Waite Associates, 1997.

Mason, Joseph B. “Building a House for F.D.R.” *American Builder* (November 1938).

Rhoads, William B. “Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Dutch Colonial Architecture.” *New York History* (October 1978).

Roosevelt, Franklin D. President’s Personal Files, 1G, 119 et al; President’s Secretary’s Files, 139 et al. Franklin Delano Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York.

Toombs, Henry. Papers, Georgia Department of Archives & History, Atlanta, Georgia.

Ward, Geoffrey C. *Closest Companion, The Unknown Story of the Intimate Friendship between Franklin Roosevelt and Margaret Suckley.* Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995.

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):

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**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 32 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	A 18	592457	4624012
	B 18	592420	4624007
	C 18	592400	4623840
	D 18	592220	4623860
	E 18	592140	4623950
	F 18	592240	4624340
	G 18	592420	4624340

Verbal Boundary Description:

Boundary is indicated by the heavy line on the attached site map with scale.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated boundary was drawn to include all of the property that is now associated with Top Cottage. With the exception of the small group of mid-twentieth century dependencies, the property retains integrity to the Franklin D. Roosevelt period of ownership and use.

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**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: John F. Sears/Executive Director  
Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute

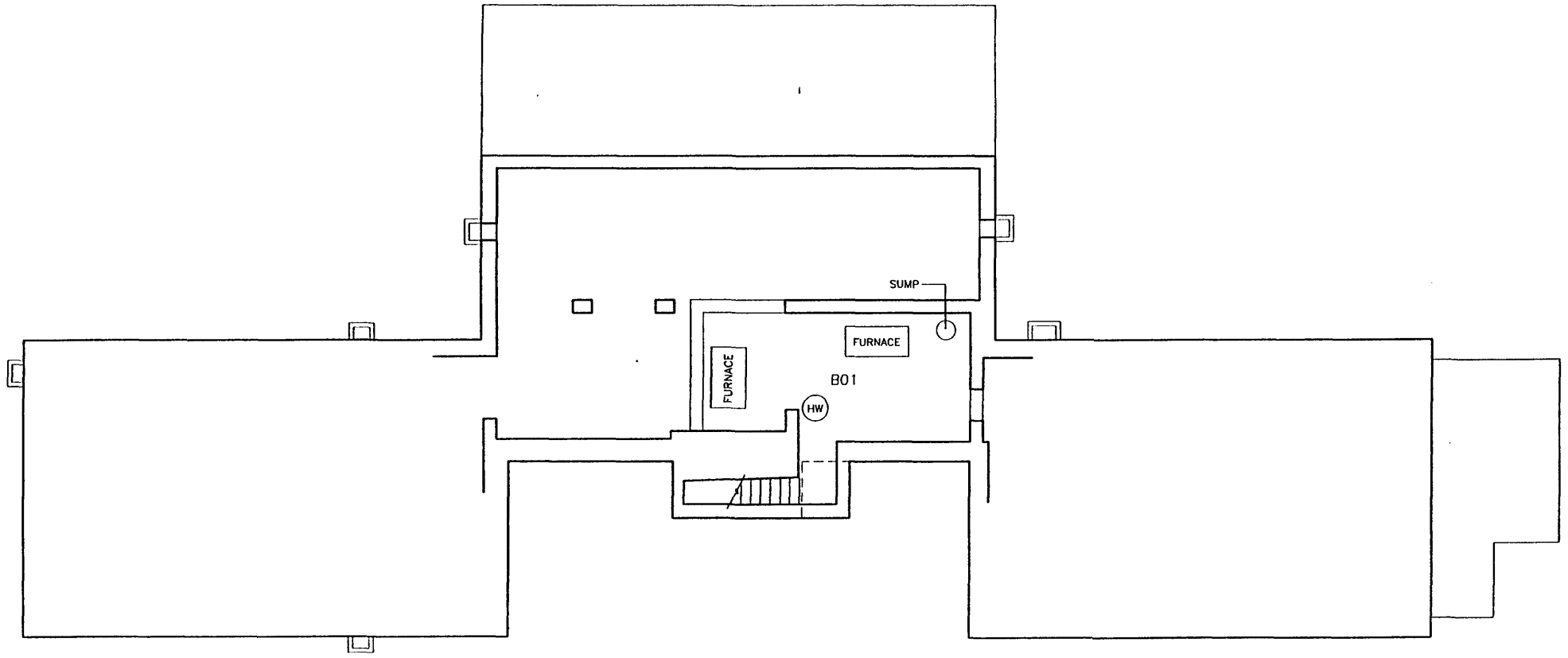
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Date: July 1, 1997

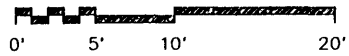
Edited by: Susan Kline and Carolyn Pitts  
National Historic Landmarks Survey  
National Park Service  
1849 C. Street, NW, NC 400  
Washington, DC 20240

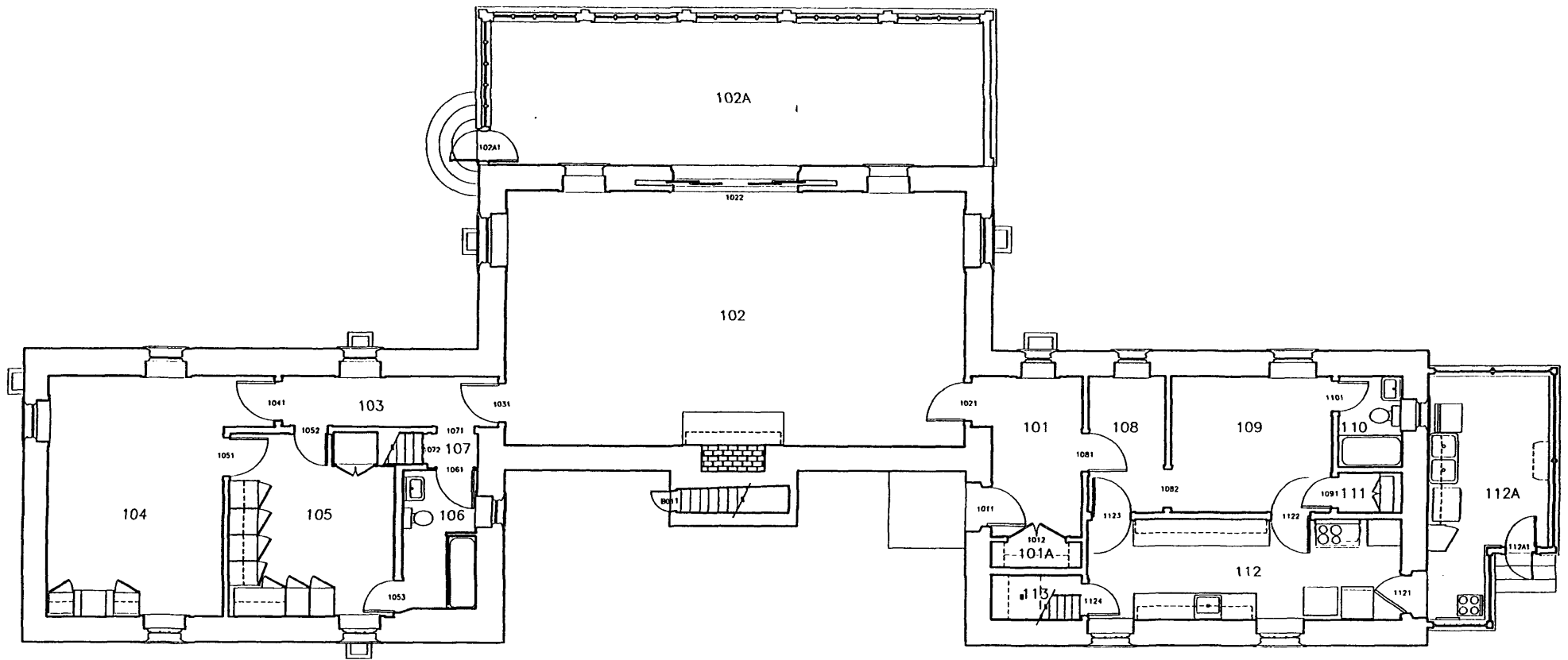
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NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY  
January 6, 1998

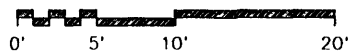


BASEMENT PLAN 1997  
TOP COTTAGE, THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT HOUSE  
HYDE PARK, NEW YORK

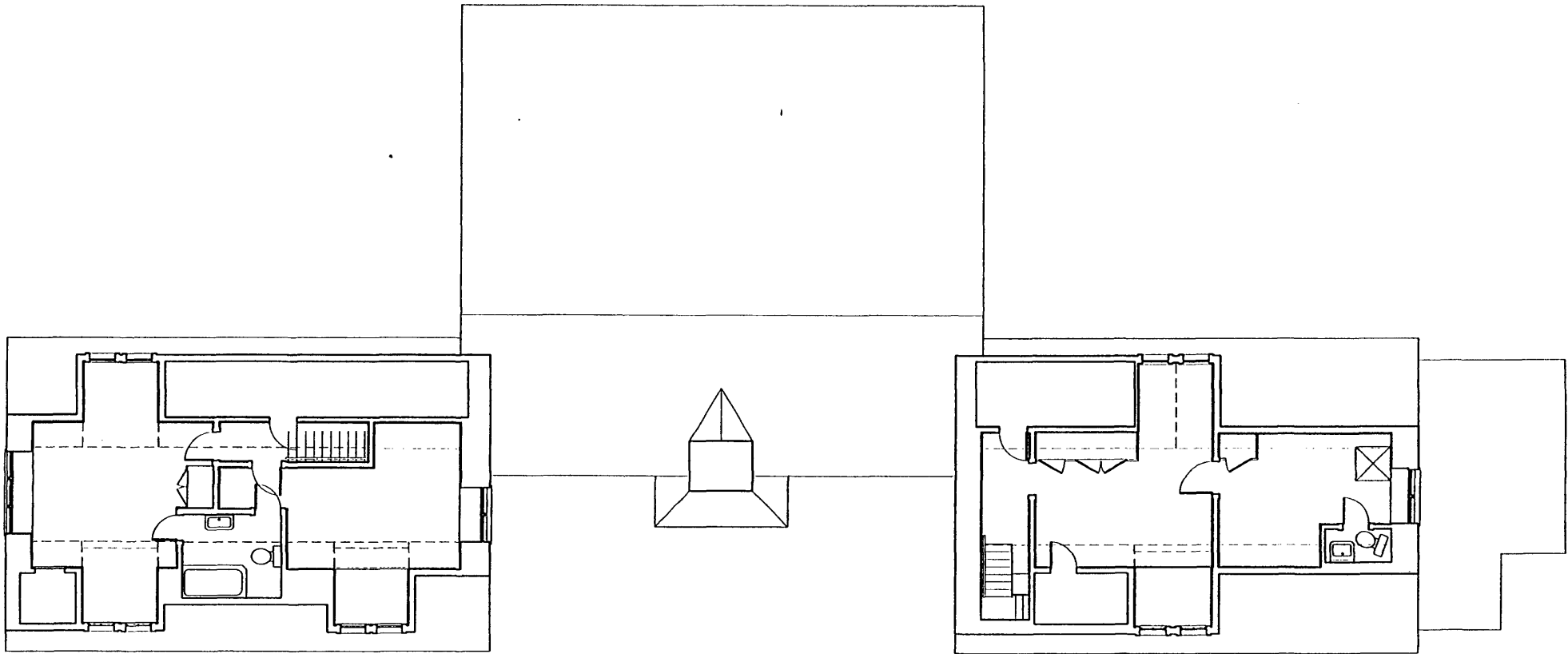




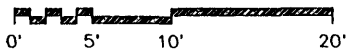
FIRST FLOOR PLAN 1997  
TOP COTTAGE, THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT HOUSE  
HYDE PARK, NEW YORK



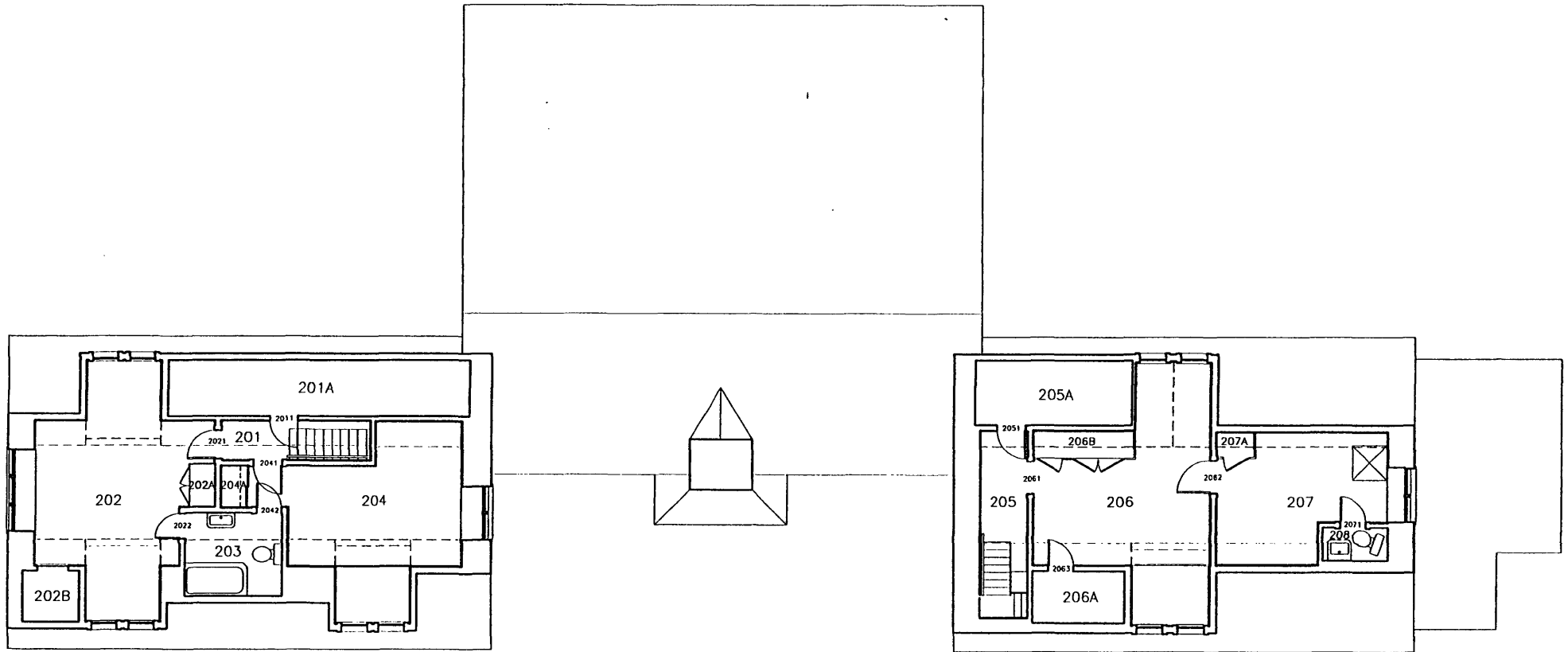




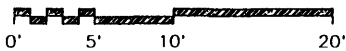
SECOND FLOOR PLAN AFTER 1945  
 TOP COTTAGE, THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT HOUSE  
 HYDE PARK, NEW YORK



- SECOND DORMER ADDED TO NORTH ATTIC ROOMS, EAST ELEVATION
- THREE DORMERS CONSTRUCTED FOR SOUTH ATTIC ROOMS



SECOND FLOOR PLAN 1997  
TOP COTTAGE, THE FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT HOUSE  
HYDE PARK, NEW YORK



Top Cottage  
Dutchess County  
Site Map

Scale: 1 inch = 400 feet

