

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Henry B. Bissell House
other names/site number Bissell-Roberg House

2. Location

street & number 202 Maple Street not for publication N/A
city, town Litchfield vicinity N/A
state CT code CT county Litchfield code 005 zip code 06759

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>1</u>	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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. See continuation sheet.

John W. Shannahan 7/23/90
Signature of certifying official JOHN W. Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

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. Betty J. Savage 9-7-90
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:)

Jor Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone: granite

walls stone: granite

roof fiberglass

other N/A

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Located on the highest point of its nine acre lot that includes both open, rolling meadows and woodlands in the rural countryside just north of the village center of Bantam in the town of Litchfield, the ambitious ashlar granite Greek Revival farmhouse is oriented to the west and the panoramic vista of the Litchfield Hills. The two-story three-bay modified side-hall plan house with a recessed, one-and-one-half-story rear, kitchen ell is set gable end to the street. It is constructed of locally quarried granite that is laid up in the most distinctive coursing of any mid-19th century house in the community (Photograph 1). Three shades of gray granite are utilized, with the lightest hue used for the watertable, quoins, and pedimented lintels and sills for the doors six-over-six windows. The walls themselves are laid up in random-coursed medium-gray ashlar blocks, with the darkest stones used for narrow, header-like fillers. The distinctive work is of the highest quality, and the mortar, finished with a plain, weather-struck joint, appears to be original. The stonework, with its boldly articulated architectural elements, endows the house with a stateliness that is matched by the detailing and proportioning of the offset entrance bay. Set beneath a massive stone pedimented lintel, as are the doors on the secondary elevations, the main entrance bay is filled by a tripartite doorframe with a narrow small-light transom and side lights set over deeply paneled spandrels with flat fields and applied Grecian moldings. The reveal is paneled to correspond to the panel arrangement of the six-panel Greek Revival entrance door (Photograph 4). A six-over-six window fills the gable end, and the gable roof is finished with continuous, boxed, overhanging eaves with an applied, Grecian molding profile cornice. Fenestration is symmetrically spaced on the west (front) and north elevations, while that on the south elevation is positioned to correspond to the interior plan where the windows flanking the door service the dining room (Photograph 2). A secondary entrance to the dining room is a common mid-19th century regional feature.

The one-and-one-half-story kitchen ell, with oversized gabled dormers set at the eaves, is recessed on the south elevation. The dormers have the same overhanging eave with an applied molded cornice as the main roof. Both the south and flush north elevations of the ell have

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an original four-panel door flanked by six-over-six windows. A late-19th century verandah, with a roof deck on the second level that was serviced by a door in the western dormer, deteriorated and was removed prior to 1950 (Photograph 2). The second-level door was replaced by a six-over-six window. Extending the kitchen ell is a two-story, wing, plank-sided and barn-like, which, like the main house, is finished with overhanging eaves. While built with post-and-beam framing, some of which is obviously salvaged material, the wing is not as heavily framed nor as well constructed as most barns, suggesting that it was added to the house later in the 19th century. It is known to have been in place during the second decade of this century. Six-over-six windows are used on the first level, while the second level, which is unfinished on the interior, is set with fixed six-light sash. The western portion of the first level is a utility space and is finished with board walls, while the eastern half, built on grade with a dirt floor and serviced by modern double-leaf plank doors on the south elevation, was used as a wood house this century (Photograph 2). The eastern wall of the plank-sided well is badly deteriorated.

The interior of the house is arranged on the modified side-hall plan. While some historic alterations to the original plan were made in the course of the 135 years that the house remained in the original family, the initial pattern of rooms is still discernible. Most of the original woodwork, representative of the country Grecian and vernacular tradition, also survives.

The front half of the house was divided into two rooms with a small entrance hall and the two-bay-wide front parlor. The wall between the rooms was removed sometime during the middle part of this century, but the scarring to indicate exact location of the original partition is clearly visible. Reflecting its status as the most important room in the house, the parlor is finished with boldly detailed Grecian woodwork that is representative of the restrained, chaste mode for which the style is noted. Each of the three windows in the room is accented by a paneled spandrel and full-length architrave with bold Grecian moldings in the backband as well as a paneled reveal (Photograph 3). Matching woodwork was reproduced for the window in the original entrance hall when the partition between the two rooms was removed. The same two-step architrave is repeated for the four-panel door architraves. Many of the doors throughout the house are fitted with the original hardware. After 1920 the fireplace was modified by Bernard Roberg to accept a heatilator. It is remembered that elements of the original mantel, with a deep frieze panel and side pilasters, were reused. The wide oak and chestnut floorboards have been patched in places, but there is every indication that most of the flooring is original, since it is

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throughout the house. The dining room and corresponding chamber to its north are simply detailed. Neither appears to have been heated by a firelace as the opening in the parlor is apparently the only one ever in the house. A stove was located in the dining room, and it served as the main source of heat until a central system was installed after 1940. Where the stove was vented is uncertain. Both rooms are simply finished with plaster walls, four-panel doors, and plain baseboards that, like the door architraves, serve as plaster stops. The windows, as well as those throughout the house, have paneled reveals.

Unlike most other houses from the federal and antebellum era in the vicinity, where the staircase is located in the central or side hall, the stairs are set in a transverse alcove off the small passage between the parlor and the dining room, located in the rear half of the front section. The plain straight-flight stairs terminate in a transverse stairhall on the second level and are enclosed on the sides by the original railing composed of a rounded top rail, turned newels at the head of the stairs, and delicate squared balusters (Photograph 5). The front two bedrooms on the second level, a small room over the original entrance hall and the larger main chamber corresponding to the size of the parlor, are accessed from the west side of the hall, while the eastern rooms and the large room over the kitchen ell are set off the eastern side of the hall. Like the secondary rooms on the first floor, the rooms are simply finished with plain baseboards, four-panel doors with latch hardware, and plain plastered walls. During the 1920s and 1930s the second floor served as the apartment for the elderly Mrs. Bissell, who resided with her daughter and son-in-law and their young family. The northeast chamber of the second floor was divided and converted into a bathroom and kitchen for Mrs. Bissell. It is now two bathrooms.

The original kitchen is housed in the one-and-one-half-story ell located to the north of the dining room and accessed through a deep opening in the load-bearing masonry rear wall. The room, which occupies the width of the ell, has a stove flue on the east end and exterior doors on the north and south side elevations. It also communicates with the finished utility room located on the same level in the frame wing added to the east side of the original house. The walls were apparently always plastered. The room has been improved to contain a modern kitchen, but the original plaster walls and woodwork, including doors, windows, and surrounds, survive.

8. Statement of Significance

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

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions) <u>Architecture</u> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Period of Significance <u>N/A</u> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	Significant Dates <u>1850</u> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
	Cultural Affiliation <u>N/A</u> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
Significant Person <u>Henry B. Bissell</u> <hr/> <hr/>	Architect/Builder <u>Unknown</u> <hr/> <hr/>	

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SUMMARY

The well-proportioned granite Greek Revival house was built in 1850 by Henry Benton Bissell, and it ranks as the finest example of antebellum stone masonry in the Town of Litchfield. One of two stone houses in the Village of Bantam built by the Bissell family from stone cut in their quarry located on the west side of Maple Street, the house, with its skillful and aesthetic use of three hues of granite to accent the individual architectural elements, is distinguished by masonry and pointing of the highest quality (Criterion C). Massed gable end to the street and arranged on the three-bay side-hall plan popular for Grecian dwellings during the 1840s and 1850s, the house is the only local example of the building type executed in stone. Of added significance is the fact that the ambitious farmhouse was constructed at a time when local agricultural interests and the economy on a whole were in decline. Henry Bissell, a prominent and progressive farmer, according to period literature, descended from one of the original settlers of Litchfield, and his descendents, who owned the house until 1985, chronicle the townwide shift from agriculture to a service-based community.

ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Built in a community noted for its impressive collection of 18th and early-19th century, frame buildings, the handsome, well-proportioned ashlar granite house stands as the most distinctive pre-1870 stone structure in the Town of Litchfield. 1 The years of operation of the Bissell quarry are not known, but the stone was used for the Italianate-style, Benjamin Bissell House, constructed ca. 1849 and located approximately one mile to the south of the Henry Bissell House, as well as for numerous foundations and steps in the Bantam area. 2 The Henry Bissell House is distinguished by its superb masonry, which features the effective use of three hues of gray

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation sheet

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

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 9 acres Litchfield Quad 1:24,000

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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--	--	--	--	--

--	--	--	--	--

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nine acres on which the house sits have historically surrounded it. They are all that remain in common ownership from the original acreage. The undeveloped land preserves the historic setting of the house.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Mary E. McCahon, Architectural Historian, Reviewed by John Herzan, National
organization _____ date March, 1990 Register Coordinator
street & number 17 Quorn Hunt Road telephone 203-658-7749
city or town W. Simsbury state CT zip code 06092

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granite to accent various architectural elements as well as to articulate the course pattern of the walls themselves. The well executed work, which represents a high level of craftsmanship in both the shaping and laying up of the stones, is unique in Litchfield. In addition to its distinctive material, the house is an excellent example of the Grecian taste, with the bold, chaste detailing and comely proportions for which the best of the style is known. It is also the only Greek Revival house in the locality executed in stone. The house is well preserved, with no modifications to the original stone portion. Even the mortar joints and Grecian molding profile cornice on the boxed overhanging eaves appear to be original.

THE BISSELL FAMILY AND LOCAL CONTEXT

The Bissell family was established in Litchfield in the mid- to late-1720s by Isaac Bissell, the third generation of the family in Connecticut. He built "the old red house," as his ca. 1740 or ca. 1750 house was known, on North Street in the Borough of Litchfield on the grounds of what would later become Sally Pierce's female school. When the house was demolished in 1853, it was reportedly the oldest house in town.³ His youngest son, Zebulon, died on his way home from the American defense of Fort Washington in New York City in the fall of 1776. Builder of the house Henry Benton Bissell (1812-1897) was a great-grandson of Zebulon Bissell, grandson of Benjamin Bissell, who married Ester Benton in 1779, and son of farmer Nathaniel Bissell (1786-1872).

The Bissell family was the largest landowner in the northeast section of the Bantam district of Litchfield. Located only two to three miles west of the center of the Borough of Litchfield, the cultural, mercantile, legal, and ecclesiastical center of town, Bantam, which never had its own parish, developed its small center around a host of water-powered industries located on the banks of the Bantam River since 1735. Members of the Bissell family operated a grist mill and granite quarry in or near Bantam center, but outside of the small-scale 19th-century industries clustered in the center, the surrounding land was dedicated to agrarian pursuits, with the Bissells ranking among the most prominent and successful farmers.

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In the custom of the day, land held by the Bissell family for several generations passed from father to son. Henry Benton Bissell began receiving land in the Maple Street area from his father as early as 1841, but the house lot, an 11-acre parcel located "two miles west of the Courthouse" in Litchfield and bounded by his own land on the south and east, was not conveyed from his father until 1848.⁴ The 1850 date of construction for the house is established by a biographical sketch contained in the 1896 Biographical Review The Leading Citizens of Litchfield County, which states that "in 1850 Deacon Bissell (elected a deacon of the Litchfield Congregational Church in 1858) erected his present residence, which stands on a rise overlooking the village (Litchfield) three miles distant, the granite used in its construction having been quarried on his own farm."⁵ Noted as a "respected and prosperous agriculturalist," Bissell was farming 72 acres in 1860 with 5 milk cows, but by 1870, his farm, the 150 improved and 40 unimproved acres, was one of the highest valued in Litchfield, according to the 1870 agricultural census. He produced a variety of products, including butter and cheese, but his production levels ranked as average in the town. With the coming of the Shepaug Railroad to Litchfield in 1872, the town became an important dairy center, with daily shipments for the greater New York area via the Shepaug line, which maintained a depot in nearby Bantam. Bissell, like many other farmers in the community, apparently concentrated more of his efforts into the dairy aspect of his operation, and his 1896 biography states that he had a herd of 20 cows, up from 9 in 1870. He is cited as operating a "profitable dairy business." Unfortunately, none of the freestanding buildings associated with the dairy business survive. The hay barn burned about 1900. The cow barn was located southeast and below the hill on which the house sits.⁶

After Henry Benton Bissell's death in 1887, the house, barns and eight acres passed to two of his children, Francis and Amelia Bissell, who had lived in the old homestead with their father. Francis apparently continued the dairy business and was responsible for the care of his unmarried sister. He himself married Almira Piper, and they had a daughter, Clarissa, who early this century married Bernard C. Roberg, an immigrant from Sweden who was educated at Mt. Herman School in Massachusetts and Wesleyan University. The Robergs resided in the Bissell family homestead, and after trying to continue the dairy farm, Mr. Roberg gave it up in favor of a career in education, serving first as a seventh- and eighth-grade teacher in the Bantam school and later as its principal.⁷ While dairy farming continued to be a profitable agricultural pursuit during the first half of the 20th century in Litchfield, many small dairymen ceased their operations during the early decades of the century.

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Bernard and Clarissa Roberg purchased the homestead from Francis and Almira Bissell in 1921, but in the 19th- and early-20th century tradition of the extended family, Mrs. Francis Bissell (Almira), then a widow, continued to live with her daughter and son-in-law and their children. A separate apartment was maintained for her on the second level of the house. The Robergs had six children, and the house passed to Theodore, also an educator, who cared for his mother, Clarissa, after the death of his father. He inherited the house from Clarissa Roberg's estate in 1966, and in 1979 it passed to his widow, Sylvia. She sold the house in 1985, marking the first time in its history that it passed out of the Bissell family.

ENDNOTES

1. The conclusion is based on the findings of the three architectural surveys undertaken by the Greater Litchfield Preservation Trust with grants from the Connecticut Historical Commission in 1986 and 1987. Only two other stone dwellings were identified (Benjamin Bissell House in Bantam and the Goddard Estate on Goshen Road north of Litchfield), and neither possesses the tri-color masonry of the Bissell-Roberg House.
2. Ransom, David, and Greg Andrews. Cultural Resources Survey of the Villages of Bantam and Milton. Connecticut Historical Commission, 1987.
3. White, Aline. History of Litchfield Connecticut 1720-1920. p. 112.
4. Litchfield Land Records. 51:180, 51:430.
5. Biographical Review of The Leading Citizens of Litchfield County. Philadelphia, J.P. Lippincott & Company, 1896, p. 109.
6. Smith Francis. Interview, February, 1988.
7. Ibid.

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

. Biographical Review The Leading Citizens of Litchfield County.
Boston: Biographical Review Publishing Company, 1896.

. County Atlas of Litchfield, Connecticut. New York: F. W. Beers
& Co., 1874.

Devlin, William. Cultural Resources Survey of Northfield. Connecticut
Historical Commission. 1986.

Lewis, J.S. History of Litchfield County. Philadelphia: Press of J.P.
Lippincott & Co., 1881.

Litchfield Land Records.

McCahon, Mary. Cultural Resources of the Borough of Litchfield.
Connecticut Historical Commission. 1987.

Ransome, David and Greg Andrews. Cultural Resources of the Villages of
Bantam and Milton. Connecticut Historical Commission. 1987.

Smith, Frances Roberg. Interview with Mary McCahon and Robert Vare.
February, 1988. Mrs. Smith is the daughter of Bernard Roberg, and
she lived in the house from her birth in 1917 until she was married in
1940.

United States Census Office. Manuscript population, and agricultural
schedules, 18540-1880. Connecticut State Library.

White, Alaine. History of Litchfield, Connecticut 1720-1920.

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Geographical Data: Verbal Boundary Description

Located on the east side of Maple Street beginning at a point marked by an old iron pipe on the easterly side of Maple St. at the southwesterly corner of land now or formerly of Elinor Sharp, said point being the northwesterly corner of the premises hereby described; running thence north 80 degrees 22 minutes east a distance of 328.7 feet, more or less, to a point marked by an old iron pipe; running thence south 40 degrees 36 minutes east a distance of 445.6 feet to a point marked by a drill hole in base of wall; running thence south 25 degrees 18 minutes east a distance 419 feet to a point; running thence south 55 degrees 25 minutes east a distance of 34.2 feet to a point; running thence south 19 degrees 1 minute east a distance of 123.2 feet to a point marked by an old iron pipe; running thence south 69 degrees 16 minutes west a distance of 362 feet to a point marked by an old iron pipe; running thence south 69 degrees 16 minutes west to a point on the easterly side of Maple Street; running thence north 19 degrees 28 minutes west along the easterly side of Maple Street a distance of approximately 1066.5 feet to the point and place of beginning, excluding from within described premises all that certain piece of land with no improvements thereon as described in a deed from Hans P. and Kari Bauer to Lenore D. Skilton, dated December 3, 1985 and recorded in Volume 184, Page 196 of the Litchfield Land Records.

Source: Litchfield Land Records Vol. 184, page 195.

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INDEX TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Note: Items 1 through 5 are identical for all photos. The entry Henry B. Bissell House in item 1 is the same for all entries.

1. Henry B. Bissell House.
 2. Litchfield, Connecticut
 3. Mary E. McCahon
 4. February, 1988.
 5. Connecticut Historical Commission.
 6. West (front) and north elevations from northwest.
 7. Photograph 1 of 5.
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6. South elevation from southwest.
 7. Photograph 2 of 5.
-

6. Interior; parlor looking northeast. Shows original window and door detail.
 7. Photograph 3 of 5.
-

6. West elevation; detail of door from west.
 7. Photograph 4 of 5.
-

6. Interior; detail of second floor stairhall looking east.
 7. Photograph 5 of 5.
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