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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE
other names/site number OMICRON PI OMICRON CHAPTER HOUSE

2. Location

street & number 14 LEROY STREET not for publication
city or town POTSDAM vicinity
state NEW YORK code NY county ST. LAWRENCE code 089 zip code 13676

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

Request Purport 7/18/13
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. 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) _____

John Edson H. Beall 9.9.13
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: multiple dwelling (fraternity house)

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN: Italianate

LATE 19th and 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:

Classical Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: STONE

walls: BRICK

roof:

other: METAL, GLASS, WOOD

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Narrative Description

Summary Paragraph

SYNOPSIS

The Watkins-Sisson House in Potsdam, currently the home of the Omicron Pi Omicron fraternity, is a brick masonry dwelling which largely reflects two major building campaigns undertaken ca. 1863-64 and ca. 1903. The house was erected in the immediate pre-Civil War period for notable Potsdam resident Henry Watkins in the prevailing Italianate style of that era and received subsequent upgrades in the Classical Revival taste during its ownership by the Sisson family in the early twentieth century. The nominated building was built on an asymmetrical plan consisting of three distinctive sections: a two-story main block, hip-roofed and roughly square in plan; a gable-roofed service wing, two stories in height and built on a rectangular plan, which extends westward from the rear of the main block; and a smaller two-story wing, offset from the larger service wing. The hip-roofed main block was built with intersecting gables on the east, north and south elevations; that on the principal, east-facing elevation was later subsumed within a freestanding monumental portico added ca. 1903, along with a porte-cochere that accommodated access to the house from the drive aligning its north side. Existing finishes largely portray both historic periods of physical development, in addition to alterations made in more recent years. Of note is the principal staircase, a ca. 1903 alteration, the parquet flooring in the principal first-floor rooms, consisting of quarter-sawn oak, walnut and mahogany, also of that date, and the room behind the northeast parlor, which has cherry woodwork and a deeply coffered ceiling. All of these treatments reflect the house's occupancy by the Sisson family. Other intact features include struck plaster cornices from the original mid-1860s building campaign, which is also still represented on the exterior by the bracketed cornice work and round and segmental arched window openings, and the decorative plaster ceiling in the southeast, or main, parlor, the centerpiece of which is a foliate medallion. Although the house is suffering to some extent from deferred maintenance and some level of deterioration of exterior elements, in particular, is evident, it nevertheless survives with a high degree of integrity so far as ca. 1864-1903 historic finishes with a floor plan expressive of the residency of both the Watkins and Sisson families.

Narrative Description

LOCATION & SETTING

The nominated property is located on the southwest corner of Leroy and Broad streets in the Village of Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York. This location places the house immediately northeast of the center of the village, a short distance north of where U.S. Route 11 and Route 11B split off from one another, in a neighborhood of residential character with single-family dwellings. The Watkins-Sisson House occupies a large corner lot that consists of expanses of lawn with scattered deciduous and coniferous trees, along with some ornamental plantings; the dwelling was built on a site slightly elevated from the adjacent streets and sidewalks. A flagstone walkway approaches the principal entrance from the Leroy Street side; vehicular access to the property is via a driveway that communicates with both Leroy and Broad streets and which once accessed a carriage house northwest of the house, no longer extant.

EXTERIOR

The principal elevation faces eastwards towards Leroy Street and is five bays wide, two bays of which—the two northernmost ones—are recessed from the remainder of the façade. The prevailing architectural feature of this elevation is the freestanding order, a tetrastyle portico sustained by Roman Ionic columns, which is engaged with a porte-cochere that provided sheltered entry to the house from the driveway. The fluted

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columns that sustain the portico and the flat roof of the porte-cochere rise from square plinths between which are aligned sections of balustered railing. Wood panels with classically inspired geometric motifs screen the area beneath the corresponding porches. The portico is marked by a deep entablature which culminates in a denticulated and modillioned cornice, vocabulary repeated on the corresponding raking sections; the cornice sections extend beyond the plane of the entablature so as to form a prominent overhang. The tympanum is fitted with flush-board and centered within it is an elliptical form glazed fanlight.

The house's walls were erected with brick laid up in lime mortar in a stretcher bond pattern. That portion of the foundation which is above grade is faced with Potsdam sandstone, a cut-stone water-table marking the transition between the foundation and the brick superstructure. The foundation is currently obscured on the façade by the portico and porte-cochere, although it was originally exposed during the 1860s, as per historic images. The entrance bay, originally of an Italianate style type with double-leaf doors shielded by a cantilevered porch, now consists of a trabeated treatment with a single glazed door flanked by sidelights and topped by a transom with leaded glass. The windows to either side—those to the south and the two to the north, corresponding with the recessed section—are segmental-arched, have brick surrounds and are fitted with either one-over-one plate glass or two-over-two wood sash. Second-story windows are similar in scale and treatment but have round-arched heads. The recessed section of the east façade, which is not fronted by the freestanding portico, retains its original paired brackets from the 1860s building campaign.

The north elevation of the main block is three bays wide and includes the rounded end of the porte-cochere. At first story level there is a three-sided bay window and large segmental arched window, in addition to two windows with rounded heads at second story level. The window corresponding with the intersecting gable is a later change and replaced an oculus window that previously occupied that position, as per historic images. There are additionally two windows that pierce the raised foundation and correspond with the basement. The north elevation of the rear service wing is three bays wide and partially spanned at first-story level by an original Italianate-style porch sustained by wood columns with moulded capitals; this porch shields an entrance and also a window. To the right of this window is a tripartite window which has since been bricked in. Windows at second-story level are of a rounded-arch type and the cornice is marked by paired brackets. As for the north elevation of the smaller wing, which is recessed from the main wing, it is fronted by a pent-roofed frame addition, non historic, with two large corresponding bays. The bond work of this smaller wing's west wall shows clear evidence of having been reworked; however, under what circumstances it is not presently known. The three windows on this wall are spanned by segmental brick arches.

The south elevation of the main block is three bays wide, the westernmost bay at first-story level being occupied by a three-sided bay window. The remaining first and second-story windows follow the pattern established on the façade, the lower ones being of a segmental-arched type, the upper windows being round arched, and all fitted with one-over-one plate glass sash. An exterior pressed brick chimney is present on this elevation and corresponds with a ca. 1903 fireplace inside. A metal fire escape is also present. A single-story brick bump out, which appears to be contemporary with the original building campaign, is present where the main block and principal wing meet; it has since been built up with a frame second-story, possibly added at some point as a sleeping porch. A ca. 1903 porch aligns the remainder of the first-story of the principal wing's first story, sustained by Tuscan columns. The walls underneath this porch were painted with representations of a circus scene, including an elephant, a high-wire act, a clown, and a giraffe. There is a door and window at first story level, in addition to a window at second story level, the cornice being bracketed as it is on the other elevations.

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The south wall of the rear wing displays sparse fenestration, including segmental-arched windows corresponding with the basement, and narrow round-arched windows at first story level.

INTERIOR

The Watkins-Sisson house retains the bulk of those finishes representative of the original mid-1860s building campaign and the subsequent ca. 1903 updating, in addition to the arrangement of the principal interior spaces, which in the main block appears to largely portray first-period conditions. Four main rooms, in addition to the stair hall and vestibule, are contained in this section of the dwelling. The house's principal entrance, located beneath the portico, leads into a small vestibule that opens into the stair hall. The hall has plaster walls above paneled oak wainscot, which is carried up the wall of the staircase, the stair rising to an intermediate landing before turning to approach the second floor. The open stringer staircase has square wood balusters and newel posts, and terminates at the base in a curtail step. The floor is laid in parquet, and the struck plaster cornices from the original building campaign remain in place. The flanking front parlors are accessed from this hall through doorways with round-profiled wood mouldings. The southeast parlor's floor is laid in parquet, and the doors and windows therein are trimmed with rounded mouldings; a struck plaster cornice marks the transition between the plaster wall and ceiling surfaces. Against the south wall is a ca. 1903 firebox with a wood mantel of Federal-style inspiration. The moulded wood baseboards, along with the door and window architraves, plaster cornices, and moulded aprons below the windows, would appear to represent original ca. 1860s treatments. On the opposite, north side of the hall is the northeast parlor, which like that opposite has parquet flooring, plaster wall and ceiling surfaces, in addition to a projecting bay window. The projecting chimney breast against the west wall is original to the 1860s, as evidenced by the extension of struck plaster cornices around it; however, the firebox has been reworked and the mantel, with paneled pilasters and frieze, is of later vintage. One brick in the fireplace is stamped "ELK CO SPECIAL," indicating it to be fire brick manufactured in St. Marys, Pennsylvania by the Elk Fire Brick Company.

The two rear rooms of the main block's first floor also retain any number of first and second generation finishes. The room occupying the northwest corner of the plan has a deeply coffered ceiling, high paneled wainscot and doors crafted from cherry wood, and parquet-laid floors. There are additionally full-height glazed cabinets occupying corner positions in the angled portions of the north and south walls. The room to the immediate south, occupying the southwest corner of the plan, appears to have been wainscoted in some manner, given the presence of a chair rail matching that of the adjacent room. This room also has some cherry woodwork and retains the original bay window treatments, with paneled aprons and jambs, in addition to a decorative plaster ceiling with central medallion, from which a lighting fixture is suspended. The finishes in these two rooms largely portray their reworking ca. 1903 following Sisson's acquisition.

The room in the bump-out, adjacent to the southwest room of the main block, contains a bathroom. The first floor of the service wing contains a kitchen and a service stair.

The second-floor bedrooms, corresponding with both the front block and service wing, are accessed from a long hallway that extends on an east-to-west axis. A plaster archway with paneled wood jambs separates the front portion of the hall from a small room at the front (east side) of the plan, while paired arches provide visual separation between the front of the hall and that section of it which is west of the stair portal. The paneled central post and one of the corresponding wall pilasters that form part of this double-arch composition represent an extension of the staircase treatment, and both it and the front arch represent ca.

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1903 modifications of the original treatments. The two rooms occupying the north side of the main block both are roughly square in plan and measure approximately 15' by 16,' slightly larger then the room in the southeast corner of the plan. The largest chamber is that referred to as the master and it occupies a portion of the south side of the plan. Finishes on the second floor include strip flooring, plaster walls and ceilings, and moulded wood door and window casings from the original ca. 1860s building campaign. There are also chambers contained in the attic of the main block, within the hipped roof; finishes here consists of wood wall and ceiling surfaces and medium-width pine floor boards.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

INDUSTRY

Period of Significance

ca. 1863- ca. 1955

Significant Dates

ca. 1863-64; ca. 1903; 1913

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance cited, ca. 1863- ca. 1955, is initiated with the construction of the house for Watkins and continues until the end of Sisson family ownership, in the mid-1950s. This period encapsulates the house's two major building campaigns and the residencies of both George W. Sisson and Henry A. Watkins.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

N/A

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Watkins-Sisson House is an architecturally and historically significant resource in the Village of Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York. Built in the mid-1860s as a residence for prominent Potsdam citizen Henry A. Watkins (1819-1891), the house was erected in the prevailing Italianate style of that era with brick and stone masonry. Watkins, who was engaged in manufacturing and mercantile pursuits and who also proved a critical figure in the establishment of Potsdam's Normal School, of which he served as president, lived in the house with his family from the time of its completion until his death in the early 1890s. The house is additionally associated with a second figure of considerable importance to Potsdam, George Wing Sisson, Sr. (1829-1913). Sisson, who came to this area from Glens Falls, Warren County, in the immediate post-Civil War period, was an influential figure in Potsdam's industrial and mercantile enterprises in the latter stages of the nineteenth and the first years of the twentieth century. He was instrumental in the development of the lumber trade there and a pivotal figure in the establishment of the Racquette River Paper Company, 1892, of which he and his immediate family were the principal players for many years. Sisson acquired the nominated house in 1903 and immediately set about making renovations in the Classical Revival taste then popular; on the exterior this included the addition of a monumental portico and porte-cochere to the original square plan, hipped-roof front block. The house's direct affiliation with both the Watkins and Sisson families lends it particular importance in the context of the community's nineteenth and early twentieth century history. The property has been deemed significant in association with Criterion A, in the area of industry, given the house's direct association with Henry A. Watkins and George W. Sisson, Sr., both of whom were major figures in the industrial interests of Potsdam in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Heirs of Sisson maintained ownership into the 1950s. Additional significance is being claimed under Criterion C, in the area of architecture; the house retains any number of character-defining elements from the ca. 1864 and ca. 1903 building campaigns and today represents an amalgam of the Italianate and Classical Revival styles and the occupancies of both the Watkins and Sisson families.

Narrative Statement of Significance

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This region of St. Lawrence County was settled in the first years of the nineteenth century. The first town meeting in Potsdam was held at the house of Benjamin Raymond in April 1806. Raymond, a land agent charged with advancing the settlement of this region, was among a group which traveled in 1803 to the vicinity of the present-day village of Potsdam and one of the first permanent settlers in the town. Satisfied that the location on the Racquette River afforded abundant power to sustain the development of a hamlet, Raymond oversaw the surveying of roads and opened a land office to service incoming settlers. A grist mill, which was begun in 1804 and put into operation the next year, was among the first improvements which Raymond oversaw. The first post office was established in 1807 with Dr. Pierce Shepard, the town's first physician, serving as postmaster. Until 1809 a ferry provided for communication with the opposite side of the river, until being replaced by a bridge.

Settlement of these lands continued to increase and by 1810 the town had a population of 928, though the village consisted of but a small number of buildings. While the War of 1812 raised the anxieties of the region's citizens it nevertheless stimulated development given the necessity of military provisions, and led to the improvement of overland transportation routes. By the conclusion of the war Potsdam had six stores and some two dozen dwellings. About 1821 a building of locally quarried Potsdam sandstone was built for Liberty Knowles, Sewali Raymond and Charles Partridge, in part to ascertain whether this local material was suitable for architectural applications. Knowles shortly thereafter commissioned the construction of a sandstone

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tannery and a distillery, among the first landmarks of early manufacturing in Potsdam. In 1823-24 Partridge had built a three-story stone structure known as the "Aqueduct Building," in which water was raised to supply the tannery and distillery; pump logs were laid to various parts of the village and the citizens were supplied with water at five dollars per annum. In 1849 Dr. Henry Hewitt, convinced that improvements to the Racquette River would allow for a thriving lumber trade, successfully petitioned for an appropriation to see to this work and thus helped establish lumbering as a principal industry in Potsdam. Both lumbering and the quarrying of local sandstone emerged as the major local industries during the nineteenth century. The Village of Potsdam was incorporated in March 1831.¹

The nominated house was built for Henry A. Watkins, a son of Moses and Lucinda Watkins, born in 1819 in West Rutland, Vermont. It was built on land purchased by Watkins in June 1863 from David and Margaret Clarkson, at the cost of \$1,400, and remained his principal abode until his demise later in the century. Watkins, a graduate of Middlebury College, Vermont, came to Potsdam to teach mathematics at the St. Lawrence Academy in the early 1840s. He also applied himself to industrial and mercantile pursuits as in 1841 he engaged in the foundry business and the following year established a business partnership with Charles W. Leete in the foundry and hardware trades. Among the products of the Watkins & Leete foundry, which had been established in 1830 by Judge Jabez Willes, were plows, stoves, potash kettles and mill irons. In 1856 Watkins & Leete purchased an interest in a local saw mill and continued as partners in this enterprise and the foundry and hardware trades until 1872, at which time their business arrangement was dissolved, with Watkins maintaining interests in the mill. Henry Watkins's greatest civic contribution to Potsdam was his work in association with the establishment of a New York State Normal School in the village, and in recognition of these efforts he was named president of the first local board to oversee it, a position which he maintained until his death. The Potsdam Normal School succeeded the St. Lawrence Academy in 1867. Watkins was, as noted in the *Our Country and its People: A Memorial Record of St. Lawrence County, New York*, "one of the solid and substantial businessmen of the place, and for half a century was closely identified with the social, moral and material life and growth of Potsdam." A member of the Presbyterian Church who took an active part in the construction of a new house of worship for that organization in the late 1860s, Watkins died of typhoid pneumonia in March 1891.²

At the time of the 1870 Federal census Henry Watkins, then 49, was residing in the house with his wife, Augusta, 43, son Henry A., 9, and a domestic servant, Ellen Driscoll, 30, a native of Ireland. Watkins was exceptionally wealthy by the standards of that time, as he claimed \$60,000 in real estate and \$41,500 in personal estate; his profession was noted as "Lumberman." Information on Watkins was also captured in the 1870 agricultural census, which indicated that Watkins's real estate holdings included 20 acres of improved land and \$500 worth of livestock, the value of two horses and one milk cow. By the time of the 1880 census, Watkins, noted as a lumber dealer, was residing in the Leroy Street house with Augusta, Henry A., servant Mary Manning, and two boarders, the occupation of the boarders noted as "teacher." These individuals were Mary Kyle, 40, a native of Canada, and Maggie Milne, 24, a New York-native born to Scottish parents. Both were affiliated with the Potsdam Normal School, further evidence of Watkins's affiliation with and personal interest in this institution.

¹ Information in the first two paragraphs gleaned from Gates Curtis, ed., *Our Country and its People: A Memorial Record of St. Lawrence County, New York* (Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1894), 462-470.

² Biographical overview of Watkins drawn principally from Curtis, *Our County*, W.R. Cutler, ed., *Genealogical and Family History of Northern New York*, vol. III (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1910), and David F. Lane, "Henry Watkins Mansion in Potsdam," *Old Houses of the North Country* no. 329. These articles by Lane were published serially in the *Watertown Daily Times*, 1941-1956.

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The Leroy Street house and associated property changed hands a number of times at the turn of the twentieth century. They were owned for a brief period by St. Lawrence County judge Clarence S. Ferris immediately prior to their acquisition, in May 1903, by George Wing Sisson, Sr. (1828-1913). Sisson, like Watkins before him, was a prominent citizen engaged in the civic, social and economic life of Potsdam. The house's direct affiliation with both the Watkins and Sisson families lends it particular importance in the context of the community's history. Sisson and his wife, Sarah Hamilton Sisson, moved to Potsdam from Glens Falls, Warren County, after the Civil War, in 1867. At one time engaged in lumbering, Sisson was among a group of investors which founded the Racquette River Paper Company in 1892, and he served as the company's first president. By 1901, he and his sons owned all of the capital stock and operated the company. The mill started service with pulpwood grinders and one paper machine before adding a second paper machine and a sulfite pulp mill the following year, and was producing newsprint and sulfite manila papers. The company soon began to modernize and expand operations, becoming a three-machine mill while also adding converting operations producing tabulating card stock, printed and embossed wrapping, bag and wet-strength papers. The Racquette River Paper Company was well-known as being an innovative leader in the paper industry. The Sisson family owned and operated the mill until 1955, at which time it was sold to Orchard Paper Company.³

Sisson's association with the house is noted in the 1910 Federal census. Sisson, then 81, noted his profession as "manufacturer of lumber and paper," and lived in the house with his wife, Sarah, and two children, James and Grace, both in their 40s and without listed occupations. The following overview of Sisson's life was offered following his death in trade publication devoted to the paper industry:

George W. Sisson Dead

Potsdam, N.Y. Feb. 3—George Wing Sisson, president of The Racquette River Paper Company and the A. Sherman Lumber Company, died at his home in this village to-day, in the eighty-fifth year of his age.

George W. Sisson was born in Glens Falls, N.Y., December 19, 1828, a son of James Sisson and Gulielma Shaw Wing. His early business life from 1849 to 1860 was spent in Coxsackie, an active town on the Hudson River, and in 1860 he returned to Glens Falls and established a large drug and mercantile business which he conducted with great success for many years.

Glens Falls was at the time a noted lumber and sawmill town, and some of its lumbermen were becoming interested in the forests and mills on the north slope of the Adirondacks. The outlook in this business so appealed to Mr. Sisson that he closed out his drug business in the spring of 1867 and engaged at Potsdam, St. Lawrence County, New York, in the manufacture of lumber, having purchased a half interest in the sawmill property then known as the Pomeroy & Pierson mill.

In the business reverses of 1873 Mr. Sisson met with financial disaster but in 1875, having been joined by Augustus Sherman, a wealthy lumber manufacturer of Glens Falls, N.Y., their concern, the A. Sherman Lumber Company, now having abundant capital, started on a business career that proved to be prosperous, Mr. Sisson, being the resident and active managing partner. Mr. Sherman died in the fall of 1884, and January 1, 1886, his grandsons, William R. Weed and Frederick A. Weed, succeeded him in the partnership. Later their interests were sold to Mr. Sisson and the business of the A. Sherman Lumber Company was incorporated, the capital stock all being owned by Mr. Sisson and members of his immediate family.

Mr. Sisson was one of the projectors and largely instrumental in establishing the Racquette River Paper Company

³ Information on the Racquette River Paper Company's mill operation as recounted by Potsdam Specialty Paper, Inc., which presently oversees this paper mill operation.

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in Potsdam, N.Y., which was incorporated in 1891. He became its first president, an office which he held until his death. Its plant is on the Racquette river, three miles north of Potsdam village, and is of the most modern construction for the production of both ground wood and chemical pulp, and the manufacture of No. 1 manila and wrapping fibres of the highest grade. The daily capacity of the plant is 70 tons of finished paper, made from pulp produced within the plant itself. The raw material for this plant is secured from the company's lands in the Adirondacks, tributary to the Racquette river. Its holding, together with the A. Sherman Lumber Company, aggregate 83,000 acres, which insures them a supply for many years to come.⁴

Sisson, whose forebears settled in coastal New England at an early date, was in faith a Presbyterian and politically a Whig who joined the Republican Party at the time of its formation in 1856. In 1901 he largely handed the reins of his business enterprises to his sons, George Wing Sisson, Jr. and Francis Ten Eyck Sisson. Their mother continued to reside in the house until her death in 1916, as did their sister, Grace, for two years. In 1918 the remaining Sisson heirs quitclaimed title to Sarah Thompson Sisson, wife of Francis Ten Eyck Sisson, who died in 1939.⁵ The house remained in Sisson family ownership until the mid-1950s, when it was acquired by Omicron Pi Omicron, the present owners.

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The nominated dwelling portrays two major building episodes, the original mid-1860s building campaign undertaken for Watkins and the subsequent ca. 1903 renovations dating to the acquisition of the house by Sisson. The house built for Watkins was erected in the prevailing domestic architectural mode of that era, the Italianate style, which found expression for a range of applications from the 1840s into the 1880s. The foundation of this style in America, derived in some measure from English precedents, was laid in the antebellum period by the authors of architectural pattern books, among them Newburgh horticulturist and landscape architect A.J. Downing and architects Samuel Sloan, Gervase Wheeler and William Ranlett. The style blossomed in the later 1860s and early 1870s before being supplanted by new modes of design ushered in with the Late Victorian era following the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial Exposition; during the 1870s its popularity ran concurrent with the Second Empire style. The dwelling as originally built displayed many features associated with the Italianate style, namely the use of a cubic-massed main block with hipped roof, round and segmental-arched window openings, bay windows, and bracketed cornices. The façade's cantilevered entrance hood and porch, both removed during the early twentieth century remodeling, were also expressive of this taste, as were interior treatments such as the decorative plaster and wood work, which exhibited characteristic rounded moulding profiles. The building's erection with brick masonry and cut-stone dressings marked it as among the better class of houses in Potsdam at that date. On the interior, the plan provided for a clear differentiation between public and service spaces and sustained a standard of living commensurate with Watkins's social and economic standing in the community. Given the information provided in the 1880 census the commodious dwelling allowed for the accommodation of both domestic staff and boarders associated with the Potsdam Normal School. No specific information regarding the house's design, whether drawn by a professional architect or otherwise derived from a pattern book, nor the specifics of the construction campaign, is yet known. The dwelling was the centerpiece of a large land parcel which at one time included a carriage house and landscape components.

The recasting of the building in a Classical Revival vein reflected the desire of the Sisson family to update the house in a manner reflecting contemporary architectural taste; many elements of the original building campaign

⁴ Obituary published in *Paper: A Weekly Illustrated of Information on the Manufacture, Uses and Sale of Pulp and Paper* (New York, New York), vol. X, no. 8, 5 February 1913.

⁵ *Old Houses* no. 329.

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were nevertheless retained. It was at the turn of the twentieth century that interest in classical forms and architectural vocabulary was revived in America, driven to some extent by public exhibitions such as the 1893 World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago and the 1904 Louisiana Purchase Exhibition in St. Louis. The nominated house was one of three Sisson houses in Potsdam of Classical Revival design. In addition to the Leroy Street house were two dwellings built in the 1890s, one on outer Sisson Street built for George W. Sisson, Jr. and one on Elm Street built for Rufus L. Sisson, son of George Wing, Sr., and later the home of Walter Sisson; both featured facades marked by prominent freestanding orders. Unlike these houses, however, the nominated house's reworking in a classical vein was largely bound to the existing design. The result was an amalgam of earlier and updated features as expressed both on the exterior and inside. Notable, however, was the extensive use of quality hardwoods for a variety of applications, hardly surprising given Sisson's direct connection with the lumber trade. Floors in the principal first-floor rooms were re-laid in parquet crafted from quarter-sawn oak, mahogany and walnut, and cherry was also employed for cabinetry and paneling, in addition to doors on the first and second floors. Among the more extensive interior alterations were the replacement of the original stair with the existing version and the addition of an end wall hearth with exterior chimney on the south elevation. Nevertheless, much of the original ca. 1860s finish is still discernible and was retained at the time the interior was updated.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

N/A

WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Name of Property

County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

Curtis, Gates, ed. *Our Country and its People: A Memorial Record of St. Lawrence County, New York*. Syracuse: D. Mason & Co., 1894.

Cutler, W.R., ed. *Genealogical and Family History of Northern New York*, vol. III. New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1910.

Lane, David F. "Henry Watkins Mansion in Potsdam." *Old Houses of the North Country*, no. 329.

Paper: A Weekly Illustrated of Information on the Manufacture, Uses and Sale of Pulp and Paper. New York, New York, vol. X, no. 8, 5 February 1913.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 1.17 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u>18</u>	<u>501423</u>	<u>4946473</u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary for the Watkins-Sisson House NRHP nomination is shown on the two enclosed maps, both of which are entitled "Watkins-Sisson House, Potsdam, St. Lawrence Co., NY." The maps were drawn at 1:24,000 and 1: 3,000 scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nomination boundary contains 1.17 acres of land, all of which is historically associated with the property and the cited period of significance, ca. 1863- ca. 1955. It represents a reduced amount of acreage from that time when the estate was first developed by

WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Name of Property

County and State

Henry Watkins.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William E. Krattinger

organization NYS Division for Historic Preservation, Field Services Bureau date April 2013

street & number Peebles Island State Park telephone (518) 237-8643 ext. 3265

city or town Waterford state NY zip code 12180

e-mail William.Krattinger@parks.ny.gov

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Photographs by William E. Krattinger, March 2012, TIFF format

- 0001 EXTERIOR, view looking roughly west showing south and east elevations
- 0002 EXTERIOR, view looking west showing east façade
- 0003 EXTERIOR, view looking south showing north elevation
- 0004 INTERIOR, view showing detail of principal staircase and parquet flooring in first-floor stair hall
- 0005 INTERIOR, view showing woodwork, cabinets and coffered ceiling of northwest first-floor room, main block
- 0006 INTERIOR, view showing original struck plaster cornice work and architrave, northeast parlor
- 0007 INTERIOR, detail view of first-floor parquet work
- 0008 EXTERIOR, painted circus scene on porch, south elevation of main block

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Omicron Pi Omicron Alumni, c/o Cordell Pearce

street & number 3799 Williams Street, Unit B telephone _____

city or town Denver state CO zip code 80205

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

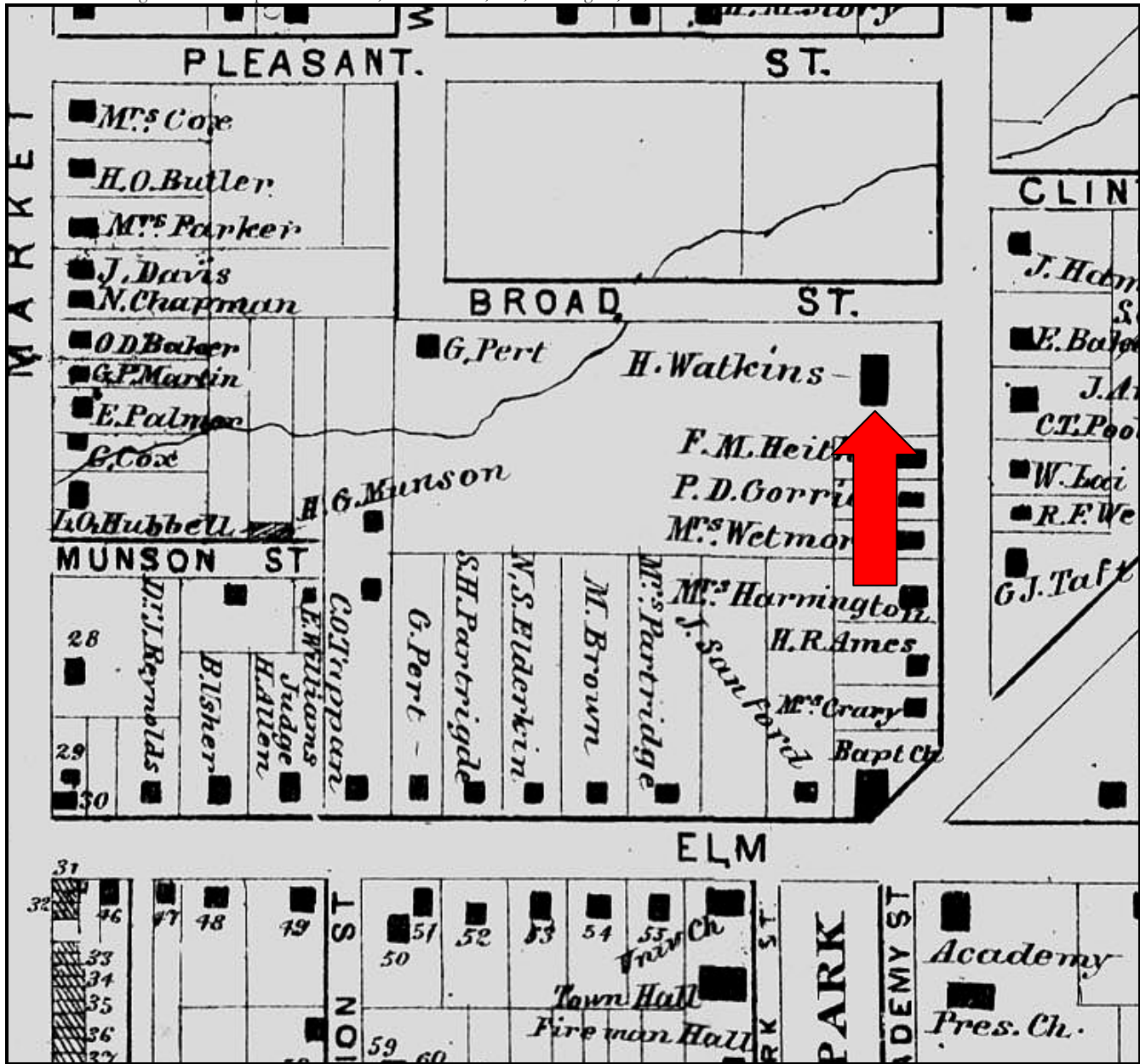
WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Name of Property

County and State

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



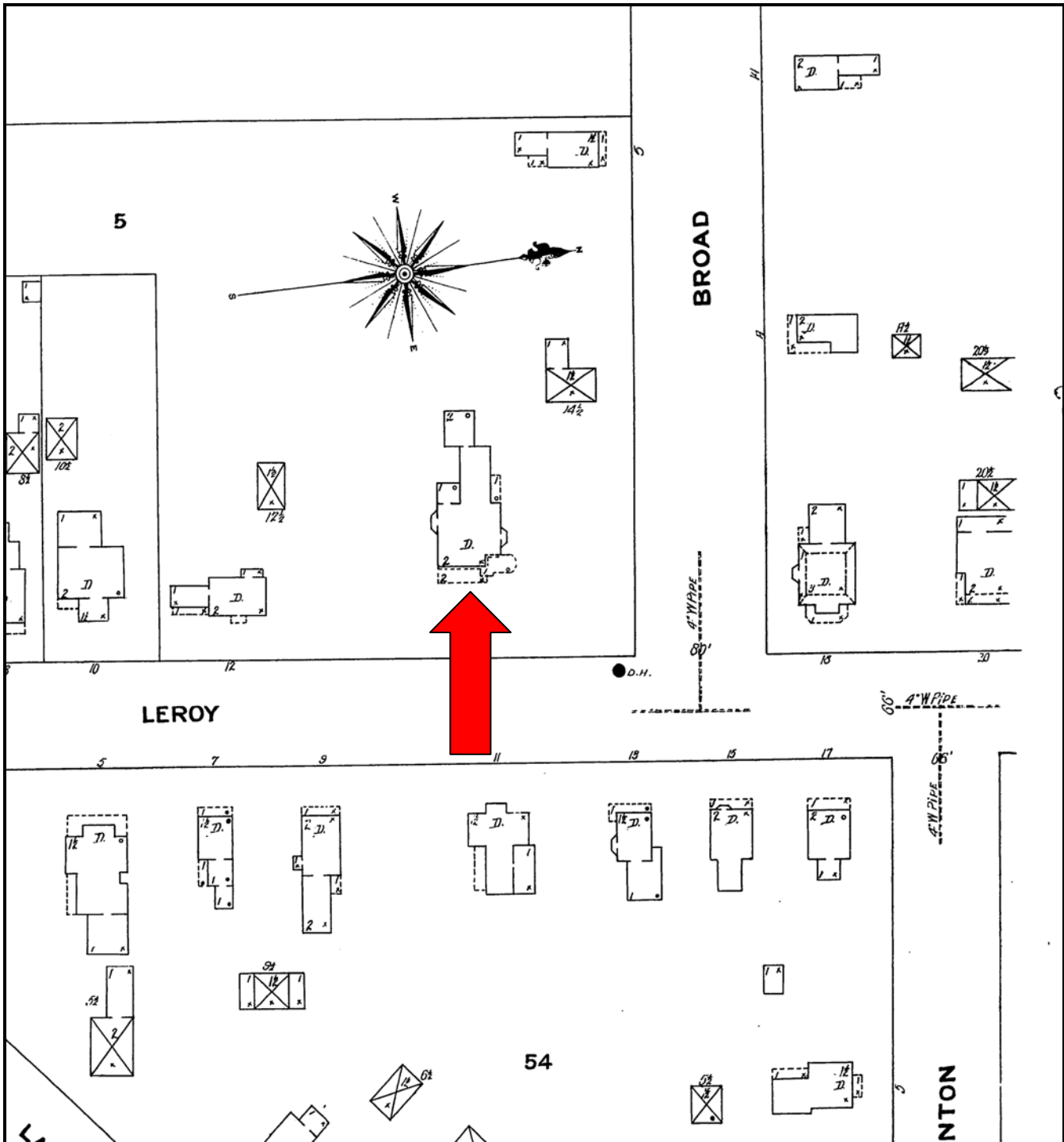
1865 Stone & Stewart map of Potsdam; location of nominated house indicated by arrow.

WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE

ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Name of Property

County and State



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1909, location of nominated house indicated by arrow.

WATKINS-SISSON HOUSE

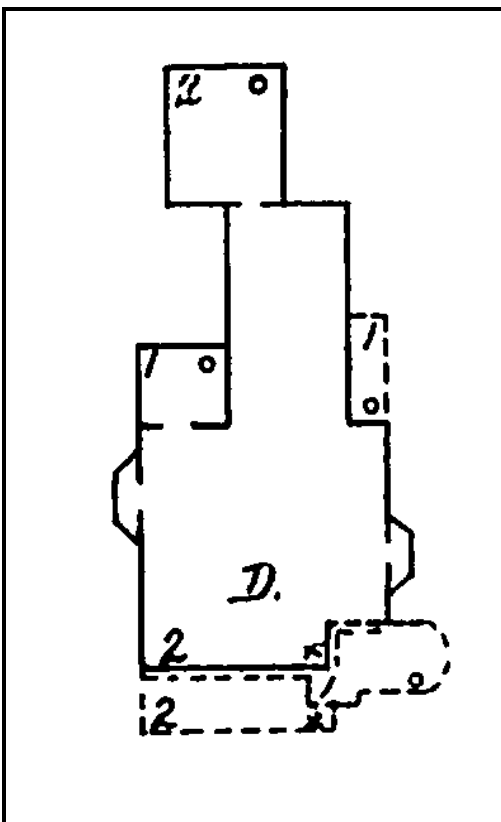
ST. LAWRENCE COUNTY, NEW YORK

Name of Property

County and State

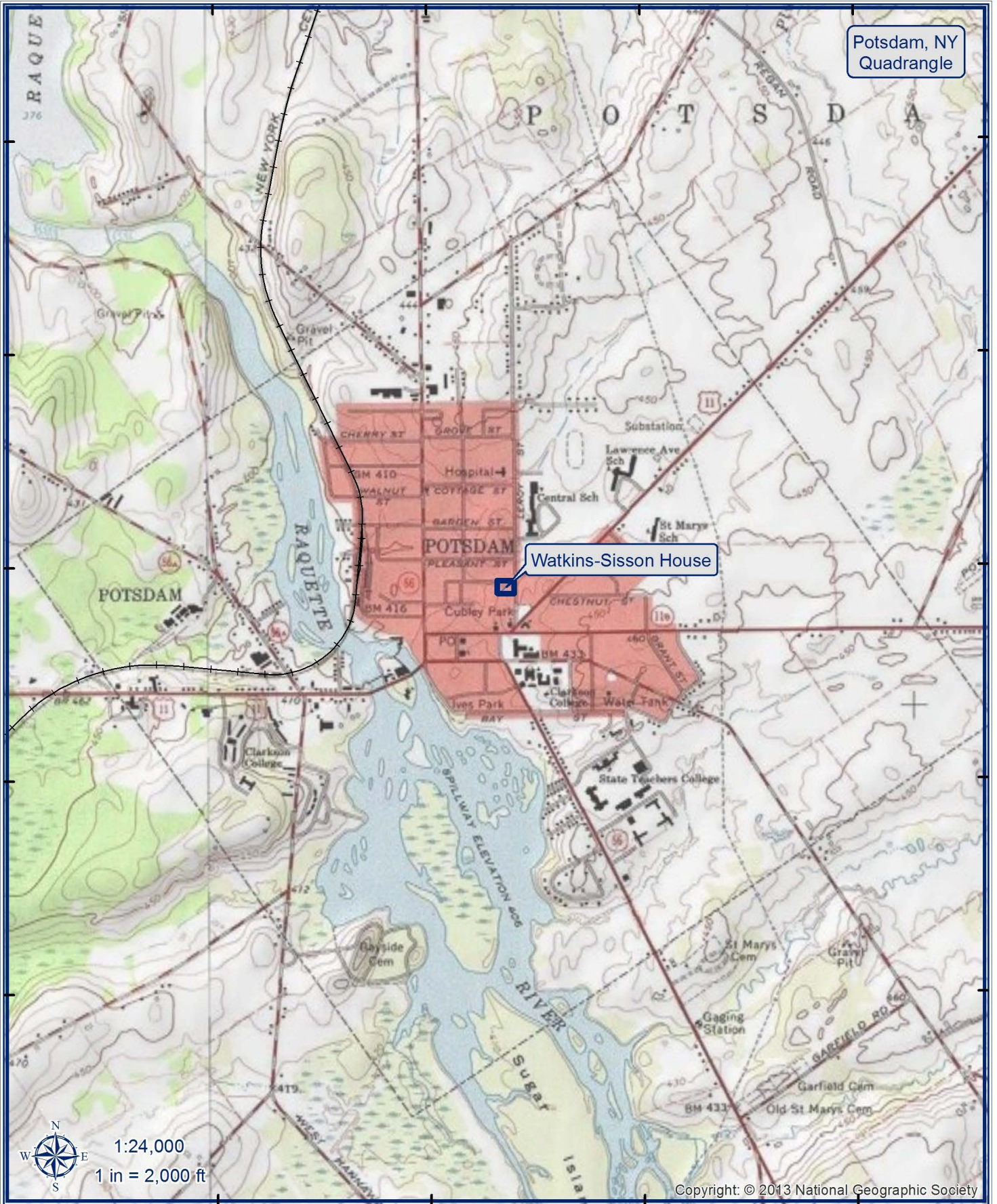


ABOVE, ca. 1915 view of house showing ca. 1903 updating; BELOW, corresponding footprint from 1909 Sanborn map



Watkins-Sisson House
Potsdam, St. Lawrence Co., NY

14 Leroy Street
Potsdam, NY 13676



500064⁹⁹ 501064⁹⁹ 502064⁹⁹ 503064⁹⁹

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



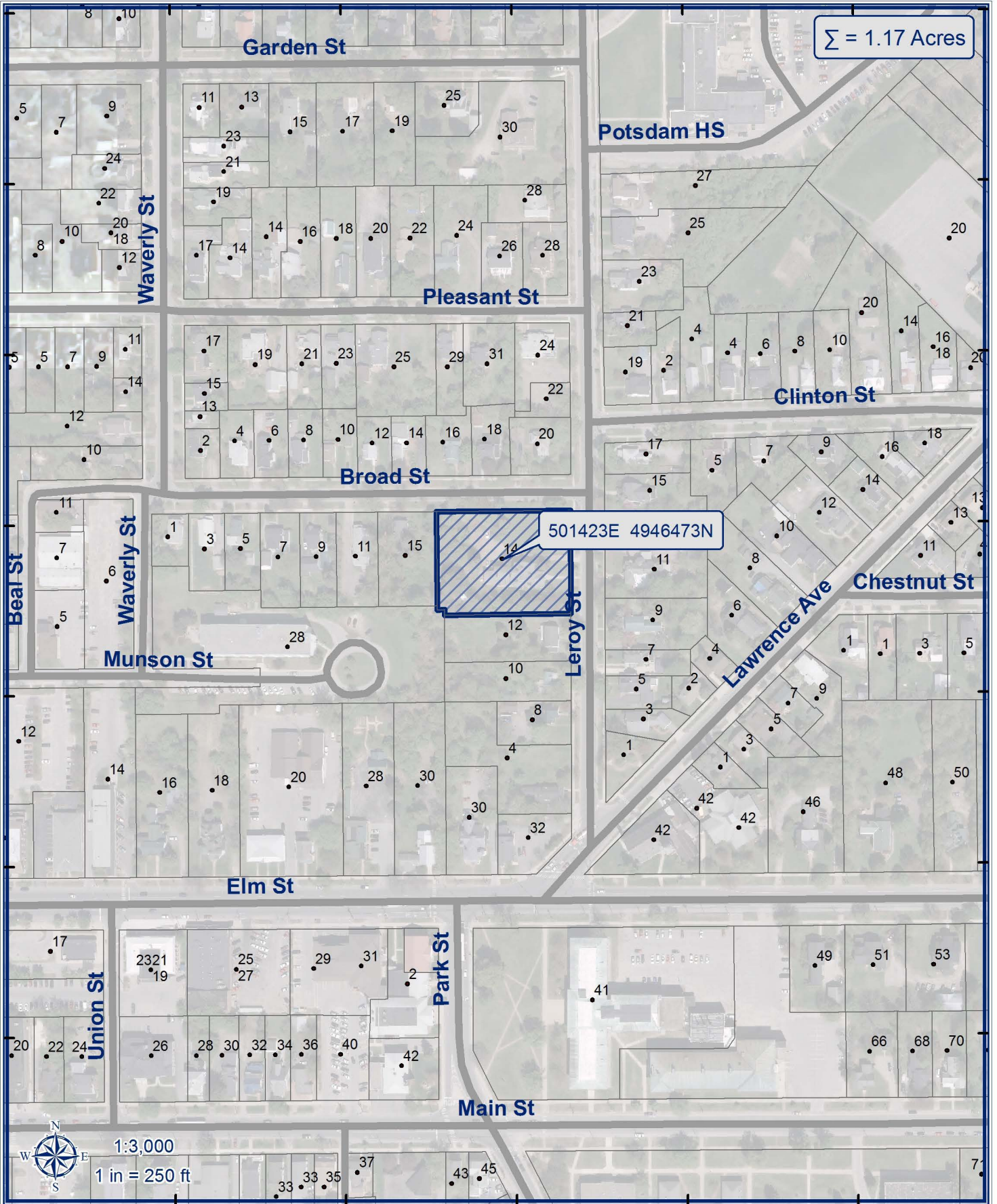
 Watkins-Sisson House

Tax Parcel Data:
St. Lawrence County RPS
opengeohost.com/maps/stlawrence



4946795 85
4946695 85
4946595 85
4946495 85
4946395 85
4946295 85
4946195 85

4946795 85
4946695 85
4946595 85
4946495 85
4946395 85
4946295 85
4946195 85



$\Sigma = 1.17$ Acres

501423E 4946473N

1:3,000
1 in = 250 ft

501230 36 501330 36 501430 36 501530 36 501630 36

Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



 Watkins-Sisson House

Tax Parcel Data:
St. Lawrence County RPS
opengeohost.com/maps/stlawrence



















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Watkins--Sisson House

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: NEW YORK, St. Lawrence

DATE RECEIVED: 7/26/13 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/16/13
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/03/13 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/11/13
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 13000697

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 9.9.13 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Entered in
The National Register
of
Historic Places

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____ DISCIPLINE _____

TELEPHONE _____ DATE _____

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.



**New York State Office of Parks,
Recreation and Historic Preservation**

Division for Historic Preservation
P.O. Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189
518-237-8643



19 July 2013

Alexis Abernathy
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1201 Eye St. NW, 8th Floor
Washington, D.C. 20005

Re: National Register Nominations

Dear Ms. Abernathy:

I am pleased to enclose two National Register nominations to be considered for listing by the Keeper of the National Register. Both nominations are submitted on discs:

Watkins-Sisson House, St. Lawrence County
First Presbyterian Church of Newtown, Queens County

Please feel free to call me at 518.237.8643 x 3261 if you have any questions.

Sincerely:

Kathleen LaFrank
National Register Coordinator
New York State Historic Preservation Office