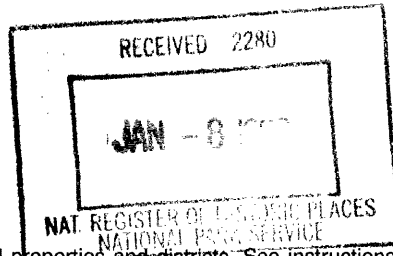


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form



110

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 352-4 and 358-60 Main Street not for publication

city or town Bridgeport vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06604

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 nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

John W. Shanahan 11/30/98
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
John W. Shanahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - 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:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Barbara George

2/22/99

~~Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses~~
Name of Property

~~Fairfield Co., CT~~
County and State

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.)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
_____	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
_____	_____	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)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

~~DOMESTIC/single dwelling~~

~~DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling~~

~~VACANT/not in use~~

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

~~MID-19TH CENTURY/Italian Villa~~

~~MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival~~

foundation ~~brick~~

walls ~~weatherboard~~

roof ~~asphalt~~

other ~~wood, brick~~

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Name of Property

Fairfield Co., CT
County and State

Bridgeport

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.

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 of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Ethnic Heritage/black
Women's History
Architecture

Period of Significance

1848--1883

Significant Dates

1848

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .21 acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	118	652130	4558970
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Charles W. Brilvitch, Consultant

organization Bridgeport Community Historical Society date August, 1998

street & number 426 Ridgefield Avenue telephone 203/333-3832

city or town Bridgeport state CT zip code 06610

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

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.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

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

name ABCD, Inc.

street & number 1070 Park Avenue telephone 203/366-8241

city or town Bridgeport state CT zip code 06604

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. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 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 Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Parks Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 7, Page 1

Narrative Description:

The Mary and Eliza Freeman Houses are two modestly scaled residential buildings of mid-19th century construction. They are located on the east side of Bridgeport's Main Street approximately one-half mile north of the entrance to Seaside Park, and one-half mile south of the city's central business district. Bridgeport Harbor, once within a few hundred feet of the structures, is now more than a quarter mile to the east following landfill operations. One and one-half blocks to the north is the main trackline of the Metro North Railroad (opened as the New York and New Haven the same year the houses were constructed). The buildings are surrounded on three sides by large-scaled warehouse, industrial, and residential/commercial structures (Photographs 1 through 3), while on the opposite side of Main Street is an expansive surface-level parking lot.

Both houses are of wood-frame construction covered with clapboard, two stories in height over a raised brick basement. They are compatible in terms of scale, cornice height, and setback from the street line. The Mary Freeman House to the north (left, Photograph 1) was constructed as a side-by-side duplex in the Italian Villa style with opposite side entries and paired low hip roofs. The Eliza Freeman House to the south (right, Photograph 1) was built as a Greek Revival single-family residence with a side-gable roof (the gable enclosing an oblong light) and side entrance. Both houses appear to have had matching verandahs across the facade, of which only that on the Mary Freeman House survives intact (detail, Photograph 5).

The houses were characteristic of working-class dwellings built in Bridgeport in the decades between the coming of the Housatonic Railroad (1840) and the onset of the Civil War. The Mary Freeman House is of a type called the "double house" locally. It provided for a spacious owner's apartment (north side), with a second unit of more limited size and detailing (south side) for rental income. The exterior of the house survives in relatively intact condition, missing only such features as the porch balustrade and entry steps and possibly roof parapet. Six-over-six double-hung sash survives in a number of the window openings (Photograph 15). A one-story flat-roof rear appendage was enlarged to a full two stories, probably circa 1907. The Eliza Freeman House has suffered from a number of remodelings and fire damage. A dormer in the Victorian Gothic style was added to the facade, possibly around 1862. A frame storefront was built across most of the first-story facade in 1907, obliterating all but the same original entry and its immediate surroundings (Photograph 18). At perhaps the same time, a one-story shed-roofed rear appendage was expanded to more than

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National Parks Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 7, Page 2

double its original size and raised up to a full two stories. More recently, a fire burned through the roof at the southwest corner and damaged several of the rooms on the second story of the original structure (Photograph 21).

The interiors of both houses are of considerable interest. The Mary Freeman House retains its original floor plan and doors, casings, floors, and mantelpieces (Photographs 7 through 15). Walls and ceilings are surfaced with lime plaster bound with red cattle hair. When plumbing and heating systems were added in the early 20th century, they were installed without disturbing significant historic fabric. The Eliza Freeman House retains some of its original floor plan, woodwork, and plaster surface. Perhaps its most significant interior feature at the time of its construction, the main stair, remains intact (Photographs 18, 19, and 20). It is of simple folk design with a hand-planed molded rail.

There are no outbuildings or significant landscape features.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 1

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Summary Paragraph:

The Mary and Eliza Freeman Houses are significant as the last two houses to survive of "Little Liberia," a settlement of black freedmen in this area that began in 1831 and reached its apogee just prior to the outbreak of the Civil War. The original owners were two African American women of prominence whose family was instrumental in the development and sustenance of this community (Criterion A).

"Little Liberia"

The founding of "Little Liberia" coincided with the emergence of similar communities in other urban centers of the northern states. The 1830s was a time when northern blacks, almost all freed from the bonds of slavery, started to vacate isolated rural areas and to gather in central communities for mutual support and social betterment (other Connecticut examples are Trowbridge Square in New Haven and Jail Hill in Norwich). The origin of the name, based strictly on the oral tradition, is unclear, although "Liberia" or "Little Liberia" were common names for these settlements, whose inhabitants identified strongly with the new African nation established for freed American slaves. As with most such communities, the catalyst for the establishment of Bridgeport's "Little Liberia" seems to have been the organization of an African Methodist Episcopal church.

Bridgeport in the 1830s was evolving as the industrial and commercial center of southwest Connecticut. It was nationally important in the saddlery and carriage-making trades, and its port was the home of the largest whaling fleet in the state west of New London. Its population was more than doubling each decade as new residents arrived from the hinterlands to take advantage of its opportunities.

The Freeman family came from Derby, located 13 miles inland northeast of Bridgeport. Derby seems to have been something of a center for the state's African American population at this time, as it was the seat of the Black Governors of Connecticut from about 1800 to 1850. (Black Governors, comparable to "Kings" in Royal provinces, led the African American population and enforced order in the colonies of British North America and the states of the Early Republic. They were elected annually by slaves and black freedmen.) Derby's lands, however, tended to be steep and rocky, with rather limited agricultural potential. Parents Timothy Freeman (1761-1841) and Sebina

United States Department of the Interior
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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 2

Freeman (1766-1843) owned land at the "North End" of Derby village totaling 12 acres that constituted the "rock house lot" (Derby Land Records, Volume 24, page 265). Their children Joel, Eliza, Mary, and Franklin all left home to seek their fortunes in more promising urban centers.

Joel Freeman (1793-1865) was the first African American to purchase land at what would become Little Liberia, securing a building lot from David Curtis for \$95.12 on September 21, 1831 (Bridgeport Land Records, Volume 3, page 655). He subsequently purchased a vacant shop building from Rufus Shepard for \$30 and moved it to the site (*Ibid.* Volume 3, page 292).

An article in the *Bridgeport Post* on April 1, 1928 recounts the story of the organization of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church:

"A band of Negroes inhabiting the farms and woods around the embryo town of Bridgeport met one summer evening under the shadow of a great elm tree that stood where the public library is now situated. This huge tree constituted a sort of open air forum for the Negroes who were wont to meet under its spreading branches, hold divine service, and discuss the general situation." Joel Freeman must have been a man of influence in this community, as the church purchased land close by his house lot on June 17, 1835, and his name is listed first among three trustees of the organization. (*Ibid.* Volume 5, pages 100,101). The church cornerstone was laid July 5, 1835. That Joel was trusted by members of his peer group is evidenced by the number of times in the remainder of his life he was called upon to serve in positions of import, such as executor of the estates of deceased church members.

Little Liberia's growth began to take off with the construction of the church. A three-story, monitor-roofed hotel (listed in the 1855 *Bridgeport City Directory* as "Duncan House, Alexander Duncan, col'd., proprietor;" see *Ibid.* Volume 7, page 632) was constructed in 1840 at the northwest corner of Main and Whiting streets, and the Stratfield Special School for Colored Children was built in 1845 at the southwest corner of the same intersection (*Ibid.* Volume 11, page 395). The 1850 Collins and Clark map of Bridgeport (Figure 1) reveals a self-contained community separated from the main part of the town on lower harbor, with a "North African Church" and a "South African Church" (A.M.E. Zion Church had split in 1843 over a doctrinal dispute) and some 30

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National Parks Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 3

houses. The strivings of the community are exemplified by an article that appeared in the *Bridgeport Republican Farmer* on October 1, 1849:

The Colored People's Elevation Society, of this city, have undertaken to get up a library for their moral and educational improvement, and desire the assistance of our white citizens in their laudable enterprise. For this purpose they have appointed (a committee) to solicit contributions of such books as their white friends may be pleased to make....Those of our citizens who have useful books which they can spare without serious inconvenience to themselves cannot, we are sure, make a better use of them, than by appropriating them to this society.

Mary and Eliza Freeman

Mary Freeman (1815-1883) and Eliza Freeman (1805-1862) remained unmarried throughout their lifetimes. Apparently they lived in Derby until their mother's death in 1843 (Derby Land Records, Volume 32, page 10, states that they are "of said Derby" in 1842, but lists both of them "of the city and state of New York" on page 13 of the same volume, on May 2, 1844). Their activities in both Derby and New York in this period are little known; Mary is listed in the New York *City Directory* only for the year 1848 as a washerwoman.

On April 11, 1848, the sisters sold the family holdings at Derby consisting of a six-acre and 13-acre parcel for the sum of \$700 (*Ibid.* Volume 35, page 148). On May 5 of the same year Mary purchased a building lot around the corner from her brother Joel's Little Liberia home (Bridgeport Land Records, Volume 13, page 254) for \$150. On September 12, 1848, she refinanced the property "with buildings thereon standing" (*Ibid.* Volume 14, page 97) and her sister Eliza bought the lot adjoining to the south (*Ibid.* page 98). The plots were purchased from Seth Bouton Jones (1799-1870), prominent local real estate developer and proprietor of a saddle and harness manufacturing business (obituary, *Bridgeport Standard*, August 29, 1870).

For a number of years the Freeman sisters utilized their homes as rental property while they worked and resided in New York. Some time before 1855 Eliza moved back to Bridgeport, and around 1858 took employment as a domestic in the home of Catherine Maria Bassett, whose husband, Captain Freeman C. Bassett, had died that year. The

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Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 4

1860 census credits Eliza with real estate valued at \$3000 (in addition to her own home, this included two single-family dwellings at 16 and 18 Gregory Street and a five-unit row house on Whiting Street). Her household was shared in that year with four other African American women, all of whom had been born in Connecticut: Sarah Freeman, aged 58; Catherine Purdy, aged 50; Sally Roberts, 55; and Sernia Freeman, aged 45.

Eliza Freeman died July 19, 1862, at the age of 56. An inventory of her possessions at that time (Bridgeport Probate Records, Volume 18, page 471) suggests the attainment of solid middle-class respectability. Mary Freeman had also come to Bridgeport prior to her sister's death and she subsequently bought out the interest of other heirs in Eliza's properties. By the time of the 1870 census (where she is identified as "Jane Freeman") her real estate was valued at \$10,000 and her personal estate at \$2,000.

Mary Freeman's achievements over the ensuing years have never been chronicled. What is known is that she made a profit when the Whiting Street row house that had been bought by her sister for \$400 in 1852 (Bridgeport Land Records, Volume 17, page 349) was sold for \$2500 in 1870 to be demolished for the new Naugatuck Railroad freight yard (*Ibid.* Volume 40, page 102). Mary Freeman became the first black member of the First Methodist Episcopal Church of Bridgeport in 1858. Mary placed an eight-foot brownstone monument of obelisk form over the graves of her parents and sister in the Uptown Derby Burial Ground, giving the graves prominence in the cemetery. And, as if in deference, she was habitually listed in Bridgeport *City Directories* as "**Miss** Mary Freeman," a courteous distinction afforded no other African American woman enumerated.

The *Bridgeport Standard* for March 14, 1883 carried the following item:

Miss Mary Freeman, an old and well known colored lady, died at her residence at 114 Main Street yesterday of intermittent fever. The deceased was about sixty-eight years of age, and had during her life accumulated considerable property, which is variously estimated at from \$30,000 to \$50,000. She owned several houses on Main and Gregory streets.

Mary's will (Bridgeport Probate Records, Volume 32, pages 142-143) provided evidence of financial attainments unusual for African American women in the 19th century, including reference to "My large cottage known as the Hillman Cottage, at Sea

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Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 5

Cliff, Long Island....” She requested “a decent burial as near the place of my deceased mother in a burial ground in the town of Derby in New Haven County, as may be suitable and convenient and within a reasonable time thereafter, to cause to be inscribed upon a monument I have erected upon the ground aforesaid my name with the time of my birth and death.”

Mary’s will naming as executor the Reverend Albert Nash, pastor of the First Methodist Church of Bridgeport in 1860-61 and executor of Joel’s estate in 1865, was revoked on March 12, 1883, the day prior to her death. A new will, witnessed by three close neighbors, was substituted that named her physician, Dr. Arthur Almon Holmes (1839-1910: see 1899 *Commemorative Biographical Record of Fairfield County*, page 206), executor as well as primary beneficiary. Perhaps significantly, her name was never inscribed on the family monument in Derby.

Mary Freeman’s brother, Franklin Freeman, a resident of Boston, Massachusetts, filed suit to overturn the new will. His claims were apparently of sufficient merit to enable him to obtain a mortgage against the two properties in the amount of \$4,000 on December 15, 1888 (Bridgeport Land Records, Volume 81, pages 478-80), although the case had not yet been adjudicated. It may be that these were funds needed during his last illness, for in the next recorded transaction in Bridgeport land records on May 23, 1889 (Volume 81, page 669), he is noted as “deceased.”

Mary appears to have had an ongoing association with the Reverend Nash that extended long after he departed his Bridgeport congregation in 1861 and moved on to charges in East Norwalk, Connecticut, and Brooklyn, New York. As a man of some property, with \$5,000 in real estate in the 1860 census, it is possible that he may have served as her financial as well as spiritual advisor. By 1889 he was 77 years of age, retired, and living in Otego, New York, 175 miles distant from Bridgeport. For reasons unknown, he bought the Mary and Eliza Freeman houses on May 23 of that year (*Ibid.* Volume 82, pages 188, 552). He continued to reside in Otego and apparently rented out the properties.

The Reverend Nash retained ownership until his death on May 14, 1900 (*Ibid.* Volume 168, page 35). His heirs, two sons and a granddaughter, conveyed the properties in September 1906 to Ithamar H. Zimmer (*Ibid.* Volume 21, pages 272-4). Zimmer erected the storefront in front of Eliza’s house (first listed in the 1908 Bridgeport *City Directory* occupied by Max Gottesman, grocer) and rented out Mary’s house as four

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National Parks Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 8, Page 6

apartment units. The houses were occupied in this manner over much of the present century.

During their lifetimes the Freeman sisters overcame significant obstacles as women and as African Americans in 19th-century society. They appear to have personified a statement made by their contemporary, the Honorable Ebenezer D. Bassett (American minister to Haiti during the administration of President Ulysses S. Grant and an African American himself) on his early life:

My success in life I owe greatly to that American sense of fairness which was tendered me in old Derby, and which exacts that every man, whether black or white, shall have a fair chance to run his race in life, and make the most of himself (quoted in *Harper's Monthly* magazine, March 1894).

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

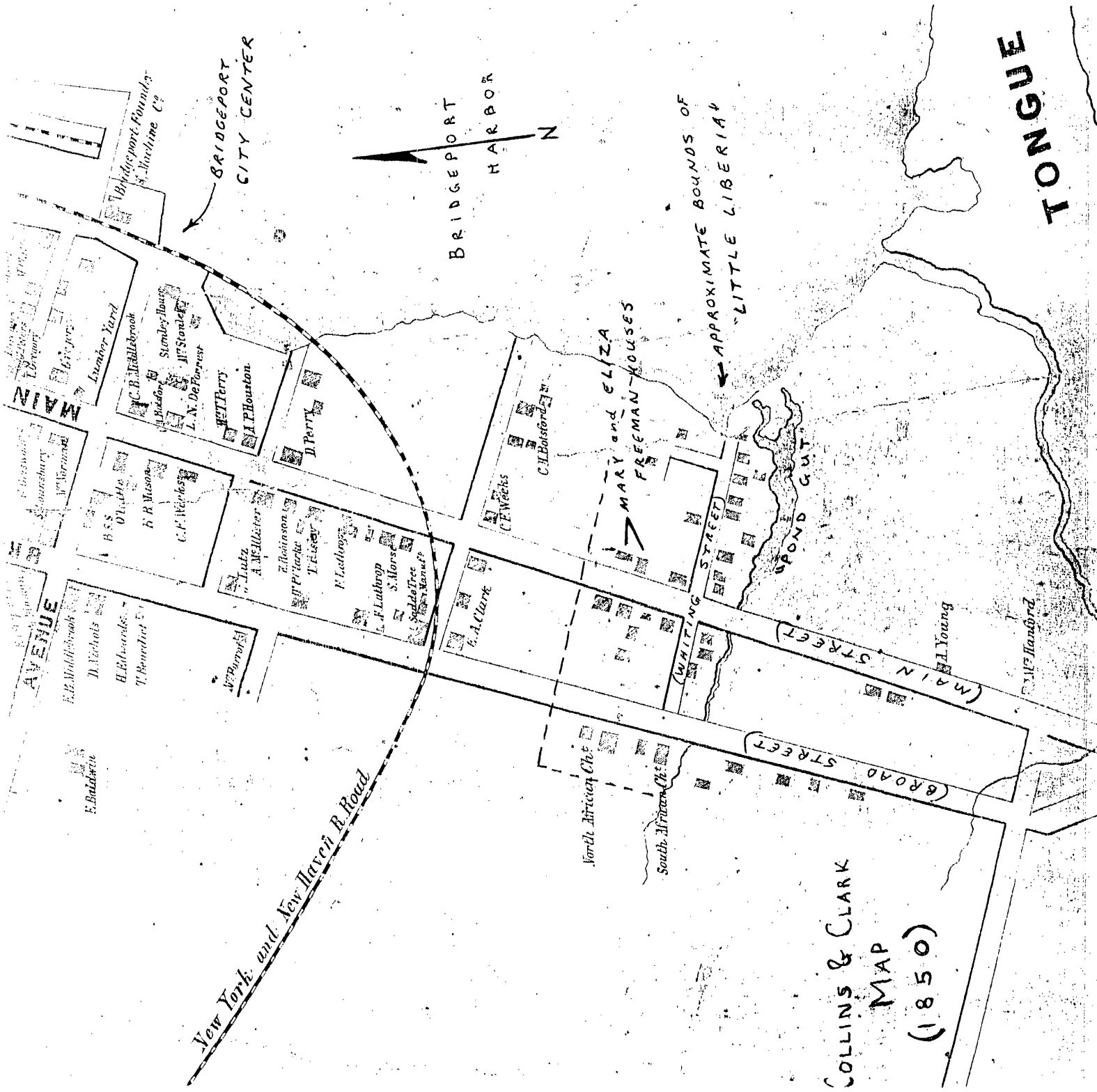
National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCRA use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 8

Item number 8

Page Figure 1



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National Parks Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 9, Page 1

9. Major Bibliographical References

Primary Sources:

Bridgeport Land Records
Derby Land Records
Bridgeport Probate Records
Bridgeport Vital Recrds
Derby Vital Records
Bridgeport *City Directories*, 1855-1908
New York *City Directories*, 1844-1858
Newspaper clipping file, Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public
Library

Secondary Sources:

Harper's Monthly, March 1894
*Commemorative Biographical Record of Fairfield County,
Connecticut*. Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co., 1899.

Maps and Atlases:

Collins & Clark. *Map of the City of Bridgeport from Actual Survey*.
Philadelphia, 1850.
View of Bridgeport, Connecticut. American Oleograph Company.
Milwaukee. 1875.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

**Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Bridgeport, Fairfield County, CT**

Section 10, Page 1

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property comprises the two parcels described in the City of Bridgeport Land Records in Volume 2866, page 193 (dated January 3, 1991).

Boundary Justification:

The nominated parcels encompass the property historically associated with the Mary and Eliza Freeman houses.

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 99000110

Date Listed: 02/22/99

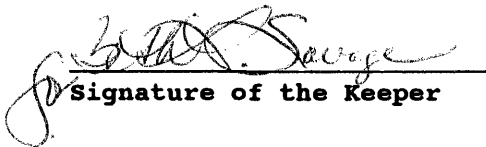
Freeman, Mary and Eliza, Houses
Property Name

Fairfield
County

CT
State

N/A
Multiple Name

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


Signature of the Keeper

02/22/99
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

8. Statement of Significance: Area(s)

Architecture is not an applicable area of significance.

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

DISTRIBUTION:

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