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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

~~NATIONAL HISTORIC~~
~~LANDMARKS~~

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
 TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC Noah Webster Birthplace

AND/OR COMMON Noah Webster Birthplace

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 227 South Main Street

CITY, TOWN	West Hartford	___ VICINITY OF	___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION	CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
STATE	Connecticut	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
		09	Hartford	003
			First	

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	___AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	___PRIVATE	___UNOCCUPIED	___COMMERCIAL ___PARK
___STRUCTURE	___BOTH	___WORK IN PROGRESS	___EDUCATIONAL ___PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	___ENTERTAINMENT ___RELIGIOUS
___OBJECT	___IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	___GOVERNMENT ___SCIENTIFIC
	___BEING CONSIDERED	___YES: UNRESTRICTED	___INDUSTRIAL ___TRANSPORTATION
		___NO	___MILITARY ___OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Town of West Hartford

STREET & NUMBER Office of the Mayor

CITY, TOWN West Hartford VICINITY OF STATE Connecticut

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, Town Hall
 REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

STREET & NUMBER South Main Street

CITY, TOWN West Hartford STATE Connecticut

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey (5 photographs)

DATE 1967 FEDERAL ___STATE ___COUNTY ___LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN Washington STATE D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

- EXCELLENT
- GOOD
- FAIR
- DETERIORATED
- RUINS
- UNEXPOSED

CHECK ONE

- UNALTERED
- ALTERED

CHECK ONE

- ORIGINAL SITE
- MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Noah Webster House is a good example of a modest eighteenth century farmhouse. It may date from about 1700 and was surrounded by 80 or 90 acres of farmland when Noah Webster was born there, supposedly in the north upstairs room, October 16, 1758.

The simple frame house is a basic rectangular two-story gable-roofed structure with two rooms on each floor, one on each side of a large central chimney. The exterior is clapboarded and the few sash windows have nine-over-six panes. An unusual one-story brick addition was added to the house, presumably at an early date since it was used as a kitchen. An interesting feature is a stone sink and a connecting trough that runs to the outside of the house. Later an ell was added to this back section.

No substantial research has been done on the architectural history of the house so that the dates of construction and changes are imprecise and the extent of alteration from the original eighteenth century period are, as yet, unknown.

During an extensive restoration project in 1968 the clapboarding and trim were repaired and painted red, and considerable other structural work was done before opening the house as a museum, owned by the town. In the past year a large, modern, one-room museum was added to the little ell at the rear of the house. The ell was renovated as a modern kitchen area.

The museum is barnlike in appearance, with vertical clapboarding on the exterior. It was built at a lower level than the original house so that, although large, it is not taller than the Webster house itself. It extends to the edge of the property line in the rear, leaving little space behind the house. The interior is a modern museum, with paneled walls, tract lighting and a overhanging balcony work area. The Noah Webster Foundation is still in the process of collecting Webster memorabilia and artifacts to display in what is supposed to become West Hartford's local history museum.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1758-1780

BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Noah Webster, the famous lexicographer and spelling book author, was born in this house in 1758. He left the farm at the age of 16 to attend Yale, and, after graduation, returned to the homestead while he taught school in Hartford and West Hartford. The house is a two-story frame structure, which may date from 1700, and has an unusual brick addition on the rear.

Webster graduated from Yale University in 1778, and intended to enter a legal career. However, he became interested in lexicography and soon began to devote his full time to this subject. His first dictionary was published in 1806, and the printing in 1828 of his notable work, An American Dictionary of English Languages (2 volumes), was probably the most ambitious publishing project undertaken up to that time in America.

Biography

Noah Webster was born in October 16, 1758, on his father's 90 acre farm in the "Western Division" of Hartford, Connecticut. In 1774, when Noah wanted to attend Yale, his father had to mortgage his farm to pay his son's college bills. Noah Webster decided upon a legal career when he graduated and he had to finance further studies himself.

From the beginning of his professional life Webster was interested in education. In correspondence with Washington and Franklin, Webster discussed his proposed phonetic alphabet, and in a letter to Washington proposed the adoption of Franklin's radical phonetics as "a very simple plan of reducing the language to perfect regularity," a plan so progressive it had to be given up.

Webster's interest in education followed another direction, when from 1812 to 1822 he lived in Amherst, Massachusetts, where he could live more economically. He became very involved in higher education and was one of the founders of Amherst College.

The work that made Webster famous began in 1783, when he published an elementary spelling book as the first part of A Grammatical Institute of the English Language. The Institute was completed with the addition of a grammar in 1784 and a reader in 1785. This was the beginning of many productive years during which Webster published as a journalist, essayist, promoter of copyright legislation, grammarian, pamphleteer, editor, publisher, author of schoolbooks, and lexicographer.

The breadth of his career is not widely known. He wrote upon economics, and has been described as "one of the best of the early economists of America." He wrote about

(Continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Malone, Kemp. "Noah Webster," in the Dictionary of American Biography
Vol. XIX, New York, 1936.

"A Living Language," publication of the Noah Webster House Foundation
(n.p., n.d.).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 0.32

UTM REFERENCES

A

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuation Sheet)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project

ORGANIZATION
Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE
January 6, 1974

STREET & NUMBER
1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE
202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN
Washington 20240

STATE
D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL LOCAL STATE

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

LOCAL Dec 29, 1962
Landmark Designated:
Boundary Certified:
Blanche Higgins Schroer 7-17-75
Chief, Hist & Arch. Surveys date

TITLE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	LOCAL <u>Dec 29, 1962</u>
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	Landmark Designated:
(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)	Boundary Certified:
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	<i>Blanche Higgins Schroer</i> 7/24/75
ATTEST:	Director, OAHIP date
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 1

medicine and his A Brief History of Epidemic and Pestilential Diseases (1799) was an important contribution to knowledge in this field. He was interested in history and edited John Winthrop's journal in 1790. He also was a student of physics, climatology, and population. Such wide-ranging interests were essential background for his later work as a lexicographer.

Webster wrote for the magazines of his period and was known for his progressive thinking about the importance of education to the future of democracy. In an article published in The American Magazine in 1787-88 he wrote:

Two regulations are essential to the continuance of republican governments: 1. Such a distribution of lands and such principles of descent and alienation as shall give every citizen a power of acquiring what his industry merits; 2. Such a system of education as gives every citizen an opportunity of acquiring knowledge and fitting himself for places of trust. These are fundamental articles--the sine qua non of the existence of the American republics...

Webster's first dictionary, A Compendious Dictionary of the English Language was published in 1806. This began nearly 20 years of continuous work, which resulted in An American Dictionary of the English Language in 1828. Prior to Webster, dictionaries recorded only literary words--not the whole of a "language"--and therefore they omitted many common words, especially scientific terms and colloquial expressions. Webster's American Dictionary was not faultless, but his principles of definition were sound, and the definitions in many cases cannot be bettered today, for "Webster was a born definer."

Noah Webster's first books, the Grammatical Institute with its reader and speller, were written for school children. They began a series of spellers and grammars, most notably The American Spelling Book and An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking. Webster, in 1837, estimated that 15 million copies of his spelling books had been printed. By 1890, it has been estimated, the number had risen to more than 60 million. In revised edition, and under various titles, his speller, commonly known as "The Blue-Backed Speller," was widely issued into the twentieth century, and is still available from at least one publisher today.

The linguistic principles that Webster urged in his spellers and his dictionaries live on today. Spelling books being written and used presently are direct descendants of Webster's. Dictionaries still use his rules for pronunciation and

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

definition. Their approach to language, as a living part of human culture and as an expression of the people who use it, comes directly from Webster's innovations in the preparation of his first American Dictionary of 1828.

In a note to the frontispiece of Webster's Third International Dictionary of 1961 (the eighth in direct line from the American Dictionary) the editors wrote in tribute to Noah Webster:

Webster brought out a revised edition of the Dictionary in 1841, just before his death. The Spelling Book had meanwhile undergone many revisions and improvements. These two books, written to illumine and explain to the American people both their language and their culture, were his contribution to American civilization.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

Early in the twentieth century the fields and orchards surrounding the Webster house were developed into very fashionable suburbs. Today the house stands on the westerly side of South Main Street, with the nearby homes quite nicely screened by landscaping. The house is situated approximately one mile south of the center of West Hartford at the intersection of Main Street and Farmington Avenue, and about a mile north of U.S. Route 84.

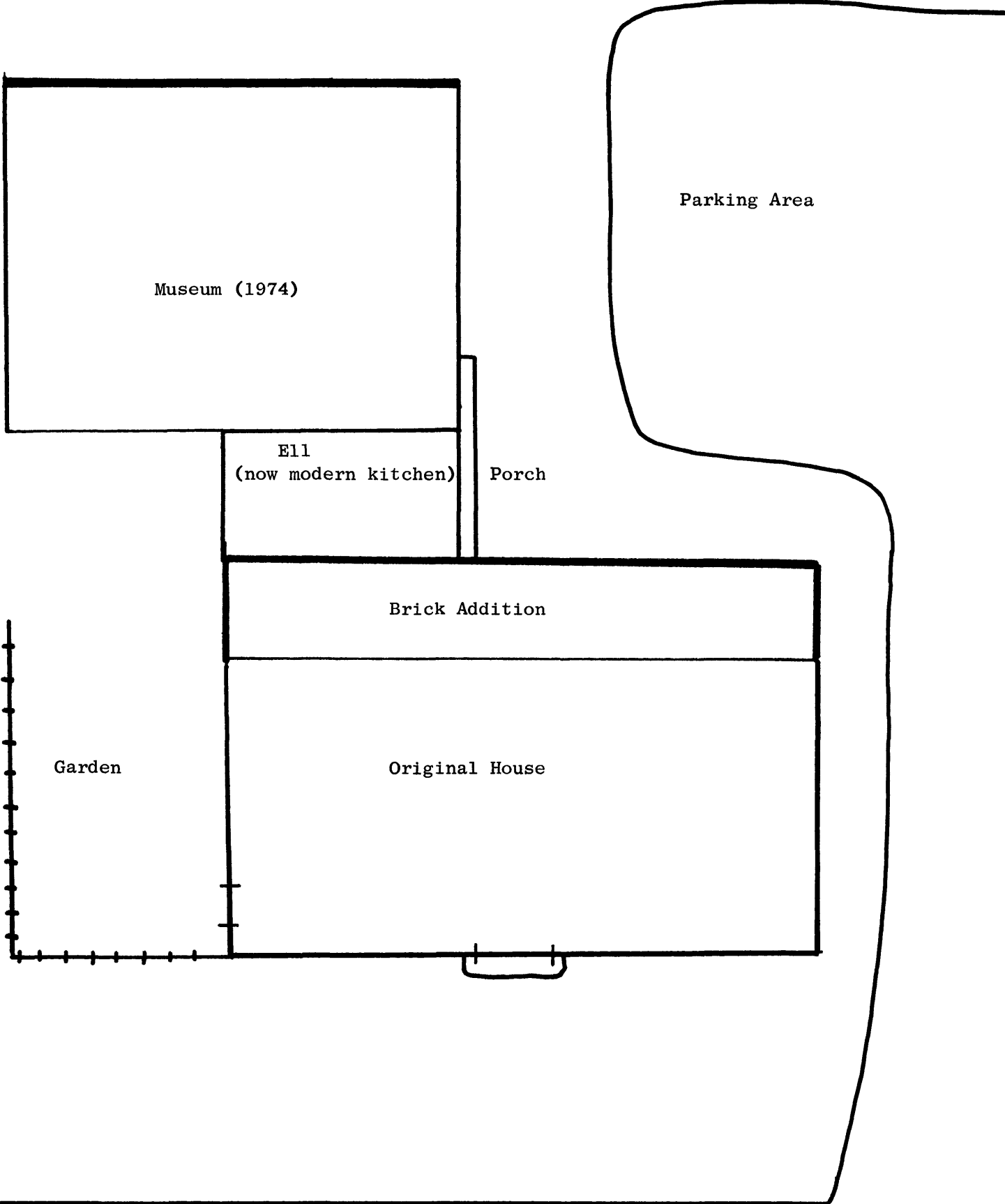
Beginning at the northeast corner of the property on South Main Street, the boundary follows the west curb of South Main Street for 116 feet, then runs along the property line in a southeasterly direction for 119 feet, then westerly for 115 feet, then northwesterly for 120 feet to the beginning point on South Main Street.

The twentieth century ell (now a modern kitchen), the porch, and the museum addition to the rear of the Webster house do not contribute to the national significance of the structure.

Noah Webster Birthplace
West Hartford, Connecticut

B.H. Schroer 1974
**map not to scale

— indicates end of historic
portion of the house



South Main Street