

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

For NPS use only

received JUL 23 1985

date entered AUG 23 1985

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Ambrose Whittlesey House

and/or common Ambrose Whittlesey House

2. Location

street & number 14 Main Street

N.A. not for publication

city, town Old Saybrook

N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county Middlesex

code 007

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N.A.</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Clara K. Zirkenbach

street & number ___ Jones Hollow Road

city, town Marlborough

N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk's Office, Town Hall

street & number Main Street

city, town Old Saybrook

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford

state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date 1765, or 1800
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		(rear wing) See below, item #7, paragraph 3.

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Ambrose Whittlesey House is a Georgian/Federal-style building which is located on the east side of Main Street, near its intersection with the Boston Post Road (Route 1). Originally this area was open farmland with widely spaced houses. Division of these large farm-lots began in the eighteenth century and continued through the nineteenth century, as the area became more populated. Today eighteenth- and nineteenth-century houses remain scattered along both sides of Main Street and the Boston Post Road, but modern strip development for commercial purposes has substantially destroyed the historic appearance of the area. Many historic buildings were demolished in the process; the Whittlesey House is one of the few survivors.

The house consists of two sections: an earlier, one-story, rear wing (1765), originally a separate, three-bay, gambrel-roofed house (16' x 30'), and a later two-story main block (ca. 1800) of five bays (30' x 34'), which faces Main Street. (See exhibit A for a schematic diagram of the floor plan of the building.) Both sections are post-and-beam framed and sheathed with planking and clapboards. The gable roof of the main block is covered with slate and supported by an unusual framing system to carry the weight of the roof. Two continuous purlins (6" x 8" x 34') run the length of the building, halfway down the slope of the roof. They are supported at regular intervals of approximately 6 feet by purlin posts, and carry rafters of equal dimension. Collar beams are let into gains in the purlins, forming a simple truss with each pair of rafters. The 1800 house has a full basement, with a rubble granite foundation below grade. The exposed foundation is cut granite, set in a coursed ashlar bond. The rear ell foundation is similar in appearance, but has only a crawl space under the building. Across the facade of the main house, the exposed foundation is smooth brownstone, also coursed ashlar, which returns around the corners of the building to the first cellar windows on either side. (For general views, see Photographs #1,2,4,5,6.)

The massive central chimney stack of the main block provides flues for six hearths, three on each floor. It is supported by a granite foundation, a hollow square open on one side, which carries nine massive hewn timbers set side by side across the opening. The chimney stack of the rear ell may have been removed when the main house was added. However, there is no evidence of a foundation in the crawl space, which suggests that the gambrel may have been moved to this site, either in 1765, a date ascribed by tradition, or in 1800 when the main house was built. The exposed foundations of both buildings appear to be continuous, which supports the latter contention.

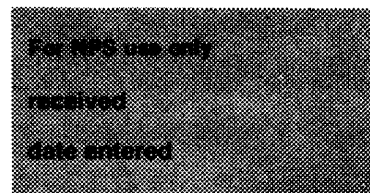
Additions to the building over time include a colonnaded porch on the south side (ca. 1900), which has a brick foundation (See Photograph #4). Now partially enclosed (at the rear), this open porch, or an earlier, narrower version, originally wrapped around to the rear of the main block and joined an open porch on the gambrel ell. This latter porch may have been original since the older house faced south onto a road, which is no longer extant. The porch of the gambrel was enclosed in 1984 to provide office space, but the original front door was retained in place and reversed on its hinges. A large modern, barn-like addition (30' x 50') was added at the northeast rear corner in 1978, with a connecting ell (Photograph #7). A modern exterior brick chimney has been added to the north elevation of the main block (Photograph #6). An outbuilding on the site, a gable-roofed shed with outwardly-angled walls, is located to the southeast of the barn addition (Photograph #8).

A Georgian-style portico accents the relatively plain facade of the main block. It has a finely detailed dentil course in the cornice and the cornice returns; a similar moulding can be found under the eaves of the facade. The columns are typically Georgian in proportion (approximately 10½ diameters in height), but the delicate fanlight over the door is more Federal in style and design. It has leaded comes, highlighted with rosettes. The

(See continuation sheet.)

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Old Saybrook, Connecticut

#6. (continued)

A Preservation Plan for Connecticut, Vol. II: The Inventory.

#9. (continued)

Old Saybrook land and probate records.

Walling, H.F. Map of Middlesex County: 1859.

Whittlesey, Charles B. Genealogy of the Whittlesey-Whittlesey Family. Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Brainerd, 1898.

#10. (continued)

"Division of Land N/F Linsley Shepherd, Main Street, Old Saybrook, Conn. Scale 1"=20'
Date: June 23, 1976" bounded and described as follows:

Commencing at a point on the easterly boundary line of Main Street, which point is 0.24 feet westerly of an iron pipe recovered, and which point marks the northwesterly corner of the hereinafter described premises and the southwesterly corner of land now or formerly of Endrich; thence running N 68 degrees 08' 45" E through said iron pipe recovered a distance of 171.54 feet along land now or formerly of Endrich to an iron pipe to be set; thence turning and running S 03 degrees 27' 31" E a distance of 154.13 feet to an iron pipe; thence turning and running S 86 degrees 32' 29" W a distance of 162.77 feet to an iron pipe to be set in the easterly boundary line of Main Street; thence turning and running N 03 degrees 27' 31" W along the easterly boundary line of Main Street a distance of 100 feet to the point and place of beginning. (Vol. 177:790)

Boundary Justification:

Division of open farmland along this street had already begun in the early nineteenth century. The most recent division of the Whittlesey land was in 1976, when the property was divided by a descendant, and this piece was sold out of the family. The above described boundaries encompass the original house and outbuilding.

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entrance door, which has four panels, has unusually large H-L, wrought-iron hinges.¹ The door is flanked by half-round pilasters, currently hidden behind wooden, full-length shutters (Photograph #3).

A picket fence with a gate, supported by squat, wooden posts, extends across the Main Street facade. The pickets are square in section, typical of the early nineteenth century; the fence, at least along the length of the facade, if not original, is at least an accurate reproduction.

The fenestration of the main block consists of six-over-six, double-nung sash. The gambrel ell, however, has twelve-over-twelve sash on the north elevation, which appear to be original (Photograph #6). It is apparent that the western-most window of the original three was removed when the buildings were joined. The window surrounds of both sections are set flush with the clapboarding, an unusual occurrence in a house of this period. A drip cap has been added to the first floor windows of the north and west elevations of the main block, and also can be found on the second floor windows of the south elevation. These drip caps are a modern addition.

The interior detail of the 1800 section is generally Federal in style. Two fireplaces are exceptionally finely detailed. In the north front parlor, the brick firebox is flanked with attenuated pilasters, which extend up through the architrave to the mantel. They are panelled, and elaborated with cable moulding. An unusual fluted moulding extends across the frieze under the mantel (Photograph # 10). The kitchen hearth, also of brick, is similar in style, but it is less detailed (Photograph # 11). The surrounds of the the other four fireplaces are relatively plain, but still Federal in style and proportion. With the exception of the kitchen in the main house, all the rooms are fully plastered, with a chair rail and cased corner posts. The dado of the kitchen has fielded panelling, which may be a later addition. The doors throughout the house have four panels, flush and beaded on one side and slightly recessed on the other, rather than the more typical six panels of the Federal period. Some of the original square-edged, wide pine flooring remains in place. The front, triple-run staircase has a somewhat unusual treatment for a Connecticut house. It is boxed in beneath the treads and panelled. The simple balustrade has square-section newels and balusters, with a plain handrail that is round in section. The string is elaborated with applied scroll work, cut from half-inch stock. (Photograph #9).

A corner cupboard in the southeast corner of the kitchen does not appear to be original to this house. Although it is a fine example of the period, the panelling does not match the rest of the panelling in the room. It also does not extend the full height of the room, but ends at an awkward level. A similar cupboard, attributed by J. Frederick Kelly to the "Whittlesey House," is quite obviously not this one; it may, however, still be extant in another house belonging to the family.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
..... prehistoric	..... archeology-prehistoric	..... community planning	..... landscape architecture	..... religion
..... 1400-1499	..... archeology-historic	..... conservation	..... law	..... science
..... 1500-1599	..... agriculture	..... economics	..... literature	..... sculpture
..... 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	..... education	..... military	..... social/
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	..... art	..... engineering	..... music	..... humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	..... commerce	..... exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... theater
..... 1900-	..... communications	..... industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics government	..... transportation
		..... invention		..... other (Specify)

Criteria B and C.

Specific dates 1765, ca. 1800 **Builder/Architect** Not known

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Ambrose Whittlesey House is both architecturally and historically significant. The main house, built about 1800, is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a Georgian/Federal-style, wood-frame building. It is particularly notable for its Georgian-style portico and finely-detailed Federal-style interior (Criterion C). The house was built by Ambrose Whittlesey, a locally prominent sea captain and civic leader, who was a sixth-generation descendant of John Whittlesey, an early settler of the Saybrook Colony (Criterion B). The house remained in the Whittlesey family for over 160 years, which adds to its local significance.

History:

Ambrose Whittlesey was born in the family homestead at Tully's Point, where his great-great-grandfather had established a ferry in the early seventeenth century, the first ferry to operate on the Connecticut River. The Whittleseys were wealthy landowners and farmers, but they were also involved in the merchant trade and shipbuilding. Ambrose went to sea at age 21, becoming a captain in the West Indies trade. After the War of 1812, he sailed on longer voyages to Spain and Portugal. Following the family tradition of public service, Ambrose also served six terms as a state representative between 1806 and 1818. He is credited with building this house in 1799, but the family history indicates that he was still living in the family homestead several years after this date, although he had married Ann Waterhouse in 1783. Upon his death in 1827, the house passed to the youngest of his eight children, also named Ambrose. The house was encumbered by the widow's dower (his mother did not die until 1838), but it was quit-claimed to Ambrose 2nd (1803-1889) by his surviving siblings in 1839. So diminished had the family estate become by this time, that Ambrose had to purchase two acres next to his Main street property to enlarge his holdings. His three-acre estate, with this house, passed to his daughter Elizabeth upon his death, and remained undivided and in the family until 1967.

Architectural Significance:

The Ambrose Whittlesey House is clearly a transitional Georgian/Federal-style building, one of the few remaining from this period in this section of Old Saybrook. Because it retains, however, many of its colonial-period features, such as the massive center chimney, and displays much more sophisticated features, such as the portico and the Federal-style detailing of the interior, it is somewhat of an architectural puzzle. Colonial survivals of this date are not unusual, even in a fairly cosmopolitan area such as Old Saybrook, but a portico on a center-chimney house is a rare occurrence.² Also, one might expect to find more Georgian-style detailing on the exterior, particularly on the window surrounds. Plain, flush boards are usually indicative of much earlier work. In a Georgian-style house of this caliber, the surrounds would normally stand out from the plane of the wall, and exhibit window caps with additional moulding. Dentil moulding would be quite likely, especially when it was used elsewhere on the facade. Combined with the fact that the pitch of the roof of the portico is somewhat flattened, the evidence suggests that the portico is a later addition.

(See continuation sheet.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Beers, J. H. Commemorative Biographical Record of Middlesex County. Chicago: J.H. Beers, 1903.
Beers, J. B. History of Middlesex County, Connecticut. New York: J. B. Beers and Co., 1884.
Kelly, J. Frederick. Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut. New York: Dover, 1963.
(See continuation sheet.)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 0.66

Quadrangle name Essex

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	7	1	9	6	3	0	4	5	7	4	9	1	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

A certain piece or parcel of land with all improvements thereon, known as Main Street and situated in the Town of Old Saybrook, County of Middlesex and State of Connecticut, and bounded and described as follows: Shown on the map entitled (See continuation sheet.)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries N.A.

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Cunningham

Edited by John Herzan,
National Register Coordinator

organization Cunningham Associates

date February 27, 1985

street & number 98 Washington Street

telephone (203) 347-4072

city or town Middletown

state Connecticut 06457

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director; Connecticut Historical Commission

date July 2, 1985

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

8/23/85

Jaime M. Sammons
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Ambrose Whittlesey House

Continuation sheet Old Saybrook, Connecticut Item number 8

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Despite these anomalies, the house has retained its architectural integrity. The additions, particularly the more recent ones, have not substantially affected the appearance of the original buildings, which themselves have an interesting history. It is clear from the layout of the buildings where they join at the northeast corner, that the gambrel section was integrated into the main block. A partition is located directly above the front plate of the 1765 house. It extends into the second-floor room just about the right length and ends where the west end wall of the gambrel was located. The more recent changes to the buildings have been confined to enclosing and extending a porch in a secondary location which is not visible from the street. More importantly, these modern changes have not affected the interior floor plan or have any impact on the significant, well-preserved Federal-style interior, the most noteworthy feature of this house.

Notes:

1. J.Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut (New York:Dover,1963), p. 199.
2. Kelly, p. 114

EXHIBIT A: SCHEMATIC DIAGRAM OF AMBROSE WHITTLESEY HOUSE.
Old Saybrook, Connecticut

