

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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

For HCRS use only
received JUL 12 1982
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic BRANCHVILLE RAILROAD TENEMENT

and/or common N.A.

2. Location

street & number OLD MAIN HIGHWAY N.A. not for publication

city, town RIDGEFIELD N.A. vicinity of congressional district FIFTH

state CONNECTICUT code 09 county FAIRFIELD code 001

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

4. Owner of Property

name Louis and Paula Reens

street & number 281 Cheese Spring Road

city, town Wilton N.A. vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Ridgefield Town Hall

street & number Main Street

city, town Ridgefield state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1982 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

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 Branchville Railroad Tenement, built in three principal stages between c. 1853 and c. 1905, is an elongated, three-story clapboarded structure located on the east side of the railroad tracks of Conrail's Danbury Line, opposite the Peaceable Street grade crossing in the Branchville section of Ridgefield, Connecticut. Distinguished by its full-length Victorian verandah, the gabled vernacular structure is set into the foot of a hill, with its western, front elevation facing the tracks and rising directly from Old Main Highway (West Branchville Road), about 500 feet south of the Branchville Railroad Station. Part of the 1852 subdivision of the Abijah Fillow farm, the property encompasses 1.308 acres of sloping, partially wooded land bounded on the north by a row of modest, mostly nineteenth-century houses; on the east by the wooded hillside, across which runs the municipal boundary line with the town of Redding; on the south by partially wooded land and several small dwellings, also dating back to the nineteenth century; on the southwest by Peaceable Street, and on the west by Old Main Highway, which runs parallel to the railroad tracks, Norwalk River, and U.S. Route 7 (Ethan Allen Highway). Peaceable Street crosses the tracks and the river, providing access to Route 7, the main thoroughfare of the area (Exhibit #1). The surrounding semi-rural neighborhood creates a distinct, nineteenth-century feeling which contrasts with the recent commercial development along busy Route 7.

Measuring 58' by 17', the building presents an unbroken, clapboarded facade which actually consists of three sections built over a fifty year period (Photograph #1). The central section, encompassing the three bays to the left of the chimney, is the oldest, built c. 1853 over a stone-walled storage depot of indeterminate age, presently incorporated in the foundation. The northern section, also consisting of three bays, was built c. 1880, at about the same time as the long, two-story verandah. The southern section is two bays wide and was built

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
	<input type="checkbox"/> invention			

Specific dates c.1853, c.1880, c.1905 **Builder/Architect** Unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

SIGNIFICANCE

The Branchville Railroad Tenement, erected in the 1850s as housing for the immigrants brought in to construct the Danbury-Norwalk Railroad, is significant primarily as the only known structure of its type in the town of Ridgefield (criterion A). One of Branchville's few remaining Victorian vernacular commercial structures (criterion C), it has served in several other capacities relevant to the development of the area. The basement level, built at an undetermined date before the coming of the railroad, was originally a storage depot, commonly thought to have been for dairy products. The tenement was enlarged, altered, and redecorated to attract railroad travelers in the 1880s, while some twenty years later it was transformed into a three-family house with stores on the basement level. Its current use as an art gallery reflects the present sophisticated suburban character of the surrounding community.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The oldest portion of the tenement is its basement level, originally used as an agricultural storage depot, thereby reflecting the predominant farming economy of the area prior to the construction of the railroad. Part of the extensive Abijah Fallow farm, the flat-roofed, stone-walled structure was probably used for the storage and collection of the dairy products. It was built into the foot of a hill, above an underground stream which provided natural refrigeration, and was located on the area's main turnpike, which followed the Norwalk River Valley.

9. Major Bibliographical References

1. Thompson, W. E., Georgetown Industries, Danbury: private printing, 1923.
2. Baldwin, Irene, Georgetown And Its People, History Dept., Danbury State College, April 15, 1965, property of Mark Twain, Library, W. Redding, CT.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.308
 Quadrangle name Bethel, Conn.

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>0</u> <u>7</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>9</u> <u>2</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
E			
G			

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
F			
H			

Verbal boundary description and justification The nominated property is described as the first parcel and second parcel in volume 243, page 532 of the Ridgefield Land Records.

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

state	N. A.	code	N. A.	county	N. A.	code	N. A.
state	N. A.	code	N. A.	county	N. A.	code	N. A.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Nils Kerschus

organization Preservation Development Group date September 17, 1981

street & number 200 Henry Street telephone 324-9317


city or town Stamford state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

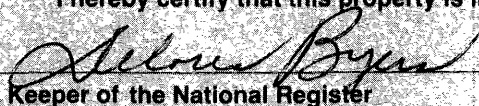
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date July 6, 1982

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


 Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the National Register date 8/12/82

Attest: _____ date _____
 Chief of Registration

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Title: Architectural Resources Inventory of Ridgefield, Connecticut

Date: June, 1979 X State

Depository for Survey Records: Connecticut Historical Commission

City, Town: Hartford State: Connecticut

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c. 1905. The small, one-story addition next to it was built c. 1930, as was the rear, two-story porch.

The principal, western elevation is three stories high and is dominated by its two-story, Victorian verandah which extends across the entire facade. The first story shows bay-fronted storefronts occupying the central and northern sections of the porch. The central storefront consists of double doors flanked by plate-glass bays that project to the outer edge of the porch, a reconstruction of the original, deteriorated storefront, utilizing the original wainscoting. The northern storefront repeats this treatment, only with a single door. Until the recent renovation, this end of the porch was open, supported by turned posts which have been moved inside the gallery area, behind the storefront windows. The southern end of the porch remains open, supported by a single turned post, and reveals the ground floor's clapboarded wall which features two windows with two-over-two panes. To the left is the one-story addition, surmounted by a low-pitched, hipped roof. Its clapboarded wall angles slightly towards the rear, and shows a door and a double window.

The second story is distinguished by the handsome upper floor of the verandah. It consists of eight turned posts supporting the sloping, asphalt-shingled roof, and an attractive balustrade composed of two horizontal rails, two tiers of vertical sticks, and small diagonal slats occupying the corners between the rails and the sticks. Open, curvilinear brackets ornament the angles between the posts and the roof. Behind the porch, the second story's exterior wall shows two doors, located directly above the storefront's doors, and six windows with two-over-two panes. The third-story fenestration consists of seven windows, six-over-six-paned, positioned symmetrically over the door and window openings below.

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The southern elevation (Photograph #3) is composed of the one-story addition abutting the stone retaining wall, and the gabled side of the southern section which is two bays wide. Its second and third stories feature two-over-two-paned windows while the gable is lit by an horizontal, six-paned window.

Because of the slope of the hill, the rear, eastern elevation is only two stories high (Photograph #2). Its roof extends beyond the eave-line to form a two-story porch in front of the central and northern sections. The portion of the roof overhanging the southern section is supported by a long, diagonal brace.

The porch is supported primarily by simple, square posts, except at the lower part of the southeastern corner where there is a turned post, probably salvaged from a previous remodelling of the front porch. The second story features a simple rail constructed by widely spaced boards. The northern end of the porch is enclosed by clapboarded walls which conceal the stairway to the second floor of the porch -- the only access to the second-story apartment. It shows two doors: the left one is surmounted by a vertical, four-pane transom and provides access to the stairs, while the door to the right is the entrance to the apartment on the first story. To the left of this entrance was a deteriorated laundry room that was recently removed. The wainscoting visible on this room's remaining north wall indicates that the room might have been another rear entrance to the building.

The north elevation (Photograph #4) consists of the northern section's gabled side, almost identical to the southern section's gabled elevation. It is two stories high, however, and its upper left window has been clapboarded over. The siding treatment of the gable is also different, with several rows of ornamental, pointed shingles

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alternating with the clapboards.

The interior spaces of the building consist of an art gallery on the ground floor, and three apartments on the two floors above. The art gallery is the result of a recent renovation in which most of the deteriorating ground floor, previously occupied by a plumbing supply business, was gutted and reconstructed, in part with materials duplicating the originals and, in some cases, utilizing original elements that were still intact.

The flooring consists of random-width boards that are replications of the originals. During this reconstruction, the original storage depot floor was revealed. It was made of stones and dirt that were later covered with railroad ties to support the floor that was added during the construction of the boarding house.

The west wall, facing the street, features a reconstructed central section and a remodelled northern section (Photograph #5). The central section is composed of double doors utilizing the original hardware, and flanking, plate-glass bays that project onto the porch. The wainscoting was salvaged from the undamaged portions of the panelled ceiling and is identical to the original wainscoting. The adjacent northern section, which replaced the open end of the porch, is essentially a continuation of the central section, except that its bays flank a single door. Located in the middle of each projecting bay is a turned post positioned under the beam supporting the structure's west wall. Originally these posts supported the lower story of the verandah. The northern two were moved when these bays were recently constructed, while the southern two were in the original storefront, but probably predate it, having originally supported the porch at this location, and then moved inside when the storefronts were built.

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Located behind the east wall of the gallery is a small room which reveals the fieldstone construction of the original wall of the storage depot. This room retains its wood-panelled ceiling and features a meat locker dug further into the hill c. 1905. An underground stream runs down the hill, directly behind the east wall and underneath the floor. This condition provides natural air conditioning during the summer, indicating that the depot might have been used specifically for the storage of dairy products.

The upper floors of the structure currently consist of three apartments with a total of eleven rooms. There is a duplex apartment occupying the second and third floors of the southern half of the house, while two smaller apartments occupy the northern half's second and third story, respectively. The arrangement and number of rooms has been changed frequently throughout the years, so that little original detail remains. Several windows and doors, however, do retain molded trim with bull's eye corner blocks. The most significant feature of the rooms is the change in ceiling heights from section to section. The oldest, central section is 6'2" high while the northern and southern sections are 6'11" and 7' high, respectively. In the attic, thick oak beams mark the divisions between the three sections. The greater age of the central section is confirmed by its original wallplate, which is hand hewn, pegged, and braced at the corners.

The property slopes upward rather steeply from the building's frontage on Old Main Highway, towards the east. The driveway is entered from Peaceable Street, to the south, and terminates at the rear porch. During the nineteenth century, the driveway continued north to enter the highway, thus providing easy access to the structure's rear entrance. Stone walls still mark this road, now covered by trees and underbrush.

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The eastern side of the driveway features a stone hitching post near its entrance (Photograph #6), and a fieldstone retaining wall that leads to the garage, located opposite the tenement. Built into the hillside and constructed of coursed cutstone, the garage displays a stepped gable showing a '1930' date panel above which is a round arched opening. Near the southern boundary of the property is a two-story, gabled barn which predates the tenement (Photograph #6). It is sided with vertical boards and has a cement floor. Below the driveway is another fieldstone retaining wall which runs south from the one-story addition. Leaning against it are several mailboxes supported by a turned post, salvaged from a remodelling of the verandah (Photograph #3).

Other landscape elements include an overgrown vineyard, located on the hillside above the garage, several large Norway Spruce off to the northeast, and numerous middle-sized Sugar Maples growing mostly to the south.

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The first of the three main sections of the building dates back to the 1850s, when the arrival of the railroad brought extensive changes to the rural economy of the area. The two-story, three-bay wooden structure was built on top of the storage depot as a boarding house for railroad workers. The railroad had leased the property in 1850 and construction on the railroad began in 1852. The railroad station was built just north of the boarding house and was known as Ridgefield Station until the Ridgefield spur was constructed between this station and Ridgefield center in 1870.

The completion of railroad construction opened up the area to travelers and tourists who sought to escape the discomforts of city living and admire the rural scenery of quaint old towns such as Ridgefield. Fillow sought a new source of income from these travelers by attempting to convert his tenement into a hotel at around 1880. He extended the structure to the north, built a two-story Victorian verandah across the facade, redecorated the interior with wainscoting, and made other improvements to the property, such as building stone walls, all designed to serve a clientele more sophisticated than the railroad workers. However, this venture apparently failed since there is no mention of this structure in any directory of hotels in that era. The improved appearance of the tenement house is perhaps why it was sometimes called 'the hotel'.

During the later years of the nineteenth century, Branchville began to gain attention in the local newspapers as a rowdy area. Always considered the poor end of town, it also became more ethnically mixed as several Italian families moved into the area. In 1905 the tenement was bought by an Italian immigrant, Pasquale DeBinigno, who added the south wing and converted the entire structure to a three-family house with a saloon and a grocery store at the ground level. In 1930 the rear porch and the basement level addition were added, and the garage was

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constructed. The cutstone garage and the vineyards climbing the hillside in back reflect the immigrant Italian influence of the first half of the twentieth century.

Changes in the methods of transportation had a profound effect on the fortunes of the building during the twentieth century. As motor vehicle traffic increased, railroad service decreased, so much that the Ridgefield spur ended all passenger service in 1925. The need for wider highways led to the construction of U. S. Route 7, which was built on the other side of the railroad tracks, leaving the former main highway as a sidestreet. This isolation allowed the tenement and its neighbors to remain relatively unchanged over the years, while U.S. Route 7 became lined with the typical 'strip' commercial development of the automobile age. The improved access to the area was responsible for an influx of a more sophisticated, upper middle-class population, reflected in the conversion of the building's commercial space to its present use as an art gallery. This conversion, designed to recreate a nineteenth-century atmosphere for the gallery's patrons, recalls Fillow's attempt to attract a similar clientele by trying to convert his tenement house into a hotel one hundred years ago.

ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

The Branchville Railroad Tenement is one of the few Victorian vernacular commercial structure remaining in the Branchville area. The only building which bears any physical resemblance to it is a residence at the north end of Old Main Highway known as the Forcelli house. It consists of two attached, nineteenth-century houses with a second-story verandah featuring turned posts and ornamental brackets.

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The building has managed to retain most of its modest architectural character throughout the years. Its conspicuous location, near the railroad station, makes it a familiar landmark and a reminder of the various historical transformations that have gone on over the past one hundred fifty years.

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3. Northeastern Microfilm Service, Inc. of Milford, Ridgefield Press, January, 1875 - April, 1880; April, 1880 - January, 1886; January, 1886 - April, 1892.
4. Van Hoosear, David H., Fallow Genealogy, Albany, New York: Joel Munsell, 1888.
5. Weller, John L., The New Haven Railroad, Its Rise and Fall, N. Y.: Hastings, 1969.

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EXHIBIT #1 Branchville Railroad Tenement
Ridgefield, Connecticut
Scale: 1" = 100'

