

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 1
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

Other Name/Site Number: The Cottage

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 449 Mill Plain Road

Not for publication: ___

City/Town: Fairfield

Vicinity: ___

State: CT

County: Fairfield

Code: 001

Zip Code: 06430

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: ___

Public-State: ___

Public-Federal: ___

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: ___

Site: ___

Structure: ___

Object: ___

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

3

2

5

Noncontributing

buildings

sites

1 structures

objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 5

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing:

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. 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): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Domestic

Sub: Single Dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION:

Gothic Revival

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Brick

Walls: Board and batten

Roof: Wood shingle

Other:

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Page 4**Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.**

The following description is taken from the National Register nomination for this property by Jack Gold.

The Jonathan Sturges House (The Cottage) faces south on Mill Plain Green, about one mile northwest of downtown Fairfield. Several large, early-to-mid-nineteenth and early twentieth-century residences also face Mill Plain Green from the north and west (including the Frederick Sturges House, c. 1860, on the west side). A convalescent home is situated on the east side of the Green and there is an entrance to the Connecticut Turnpike on the south side. As originally designed, the property consisted of eight acres of landscaped grounds to the north and west, including a large greenhouse, stable, and other outbuildings. During the 1930s, four acres were subdivided and sold, and in the 1970s, an additional 2.6 acres were sold.

The house consists of four sections: the main house (1840), and major additions constructed in 1846, 1883, and 1895. Designed by architect Joseph Collins Wells and built in 1840, the Gothic Revival-style cottage features a steeply pitched, flanking-gable roof with an intersecting gable centered on the facade and north (rear) elevation, and a lower, two-story ell and single-story lean-to attached on the west side. (See original 1840 elevations.) A first-floor veranda with segmental-arch bays, latticed trim, and wood cresting shelters the first floor on the front and rear elevations of the main block. Painted cast-iron urns flank the steps to each approach to the veranda on the front elevation. On the facade, the first-floor windows with two-by-four-lights rise from floor level to near-ceiling height. Window surrounds are finished with architrave trim. On the east elevation, two, three-sided bays (added in 1874), one two stories high and the other one story, provide the drawing room, library, and a bed chamber with additional light. The third-floor attic window in each gable end features arched hoodmolds around three-by-six-light sash. Interior chimneys are topped by *fleur de lis*-pattern circular pots. The main block incorporates a number of interesting construction features, including a braced frame with brick infill sheathed by board-and-batten exterior walls and a four-inch layer of sand between the first-floor joists and the subflooring.

In 1846, the original lean-to attached to the west side of the house was demolished and replaced by a two-and-a-half-story, one-bay addition (first addition), the roofline of which was built over the original ell and extended west. The walls of the original ell were simply extended to the existing roofline to create a third-floor garret. In 1883, a large three-and-a-half-story block (second addition) was attached on the north side of the ell. The three-bay structure is distinguished by a clapboard tower, called the book tower, which rises from a hipped roof base. The pyramidal-capped tower features five arched window openings surmounted by a bracketed cornice. A metal weathervane rises from the tip of the tower roof. A prominent, rectangular, brick chimney stack, embellished with a foliate design at the base and a corbeled cap, rises off-center on the block, to a point higher than the book tower. A lower rectangular stack with chimney pots rises on the west side. The single-bay, third-floor balcony on the north side was added c. 1900. The two-and-a-half-story west wing (third addition), constructed c. 1895, is attached on the west side of the 1846 addition and is distinguished from the earlier addition on the facade by a slightly higher roofline. A single-story, shed-roof porch is attached to the west wing on the north side.

The main block and additions are uniformly finished with board-and-batten siding, with the exception of the clapboarded, third-floor dormer wall on the second addition. High peaked gable roofs have overhanging eaves embellished with curvilinear bargeboard trim, pendants, and finials. Although the style of the bargeboards on the additions is similar to the main block, the trim is less intricately carved, and the gable ends are less steeply pitched. The roof is sheathed with newly installed cedar shingles. The most prominent feature of the first

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE**Page 5**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

(1846) addition is the projecting, boldly detailed entrance hood over paired doors, open porch stoop, and sawn balustrade. The gabled hood is supported by heavy brackets and features exposed framing members with sawn trim, creating a highly picturesque appearance. Plans and elevations of the additions have not been found; it is likely that these were also architect-designed, given the stylized book tower and sympathetic treatment of the main house achieved by setting the additions back from the original facade and keeping the rooflines lower than the main house. As an ensemble, the three additions appear Victorian Gothic, especially from the rear, where the multiple gable ends and dormers, pyramidal-capped book tower, oversized chimney, balcony, varied wall surface treatment, and asymmetrical massing create a romantic and exuberant visual image.

The main block and additions contain over 30 rooms, 13 fireplaces, and 11 staircases. The plan and finish of the main block are completely intact. The gracefully proportioned entrance into the first-floor hall features a paneled door with applied trefoil arches, flanked by sidelights and symmetrical architrave trim joined to the ceiling cornice by a flat shield. Paired sliding doors of cherry (now painted) are similarly paneled and framed with trim; the doors provide access to the drawing room from the hall. Parquet floors (installed c. 1900) are intact in the hall and other first-floor rooms. Some interior doors have glass panels in the upper halves with colored and etched-glass inserts; symmetrical architrave trim have corner blocks with carved quatrefoils set on a diagonal. In addition, door jambs are paneled and incised with trefoil arches. Mantel pieces in the main block are of marble of varying color and design. Hearths are framed by hand-painted tiles; fireplace walls are lined with stamped-metal firebacks in a *fleur de lis* pattern. Additional interior decoration consists of wood ceiling cornices and a coved ceiling with plaster ornament in the library. There is a built-in sideboard in the dining room. A two-run open stair with curved bannister leads to a long center hall which provides access to the five chambers in the main block and a chamber and the extant "bathing room" in the original ell. The bathing room includes a water closet on the north side of the room, concealed from view by a sliding, opaque-glass paneled door; a large sink and tub are located on the west side. A separate closed stair runs to the third-floor garret, which consists of several smaller rooms with simple vertical-boarded wainscot and pine floors.

The addition of 1846 retained the plan of the original ell, including the kitchen, fireplace, and oven on the first floor, and bathing room on the second floor. The addition of 1883 consists of small sitting rooms on the first floor and chambers on the second and third. The fourth-floor library, in the book tower, is reached from a narrow, two-run stair. The library room features built-in shelves on four sides; a cylindrical-shaped hanging lantern with hand-painted porcelain sides is suspended from a square wooden grate in the center of the library ceiling. The west wing (1895) contains a scullery and several smaller service rooms on the first floor, and chambers on the upper two floors. A subterranean ice house with an arched brick ceiling and a well with a wooden pumping machine are located under an extension of the 1895 addition.

A carriage house (c. 1880) with a studio on the second floor is situated on the northeast corner of the lot. Called "the Overlook" because of its former proximity to the landscaped grounds to the west and north of the house, the frame structure retains all original sawn trim, including the balustraded second-floor porch with colored and etched-glass door panels. Following the 1970s subdivision of the property, the original gazebo was moved to its present location approximately 20 feet west of the carriage house. A small shed with Gothic Revival trim is located west of the gazebo. A section of the original fence, with carved wooden posts connected by painted-iron pipes, survives on the east side of the property. All of the above are contributing resources. (The wooden fence at the front of the house dates from c. 1970 and is a non-contributing feature.)

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
Nationally: X Statewide: ___ Locally: ___

Applicable National Register Criteria: A ___ B ___ C X D ___

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A ___ B ___ C ___ D ___ E ___ F ___ G ___

NHL Criteria: 4

NHL Theme(s): XVI. Architecture
 E. Gothic Revival
 1. Early Gothic Revival

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: 1840, 1846, 1883, 1895

Significant Dates: 1840, 1895

Significant Person(s):

Cultural Affiliation:

Architect/Builder: Joseph Collins Wells, FAIA (1814-1860)

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Page 7**State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.**

The Jonathan Sturges House, also known as "The Cottage," is one of the earliest and best preserved architect-designed Gothic Revival cottages in the United States. The house is one of the very few completely documented 19th-century structures; this documentation even includes a color rendering of the architect's design. Designed by Joseph Collins Wells, an important New York City-based architect, the Sturges House is an outstanding example of the style. The house is also associated with the Jonathan Sturges family. A prosperous businessman, Sturges played an important role in establishing the validity of an American School of Art, leading broad-based efforts to display, publicize, and garner commissions for the work of American artists, as well as acting as a patron for several notable American painters.

ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

The Sturges House typifies the Gothic Revival cottage style; its asymmetrical massing, elaborate and varied details, materials, extensive use of verandas, steeply pitched roof, and use of cross gables are hallmarks of the style. The architect's design for the house combines these elements in such a way as to produce a striking, as well as an early, example of a Gothic Revival cottage. Important elements of the Gothic Revival house during this period included the placement of the building on its site in such a way so as to take advantage of its picturesque qualities, and the integration of the structure with the natural world outside its walls through the placement of windows, doors, and verandas. The design of the surrounding landscape and the placement of the outbuildings were considered to be of equal importance to the design of the house. The design of the Sturges House expresses the aesthetic ideals of the earliest and best known American practitioners and promoters of the style, Andrew Jackson Downing, Alexander Jackson Davis, and Richard Upjohn.

It was during the second quarter of the nineteenth century that the Gothic Revival board-and-batten cottage was developed as a distinctively American example of residential architecture. Thousands of similar cottages were constructed over a 50-year period in the continental United States, most by builders extrapolating from pattern book models. A surprisingly small number of architect-designed cottages have been documented, possibly because the popularity of the style was relatively short-lived among those who employed architects to design their houses. Few of these cottages have managed to survive without major alterations. Although the architect of the Sturges house, Joseph Collins Wells, is not as closely identified with the style as Downing, Davis, and Upjohn, the following evidence indicates that he was one of the first architects in America to design buildings in the Gothic Revival idiom in the second quarter of the nineteenth century: the Sturges house, built in 1840-41, is Wells' first documented commission. During Wells' career in the United States, he designed some notable Gothic Revival buildings, several of which still stand, but only his two Gothic Revival cottages in Connecticut, the Sturges House and the Henry Bowen House (Roseland) 1846 (designated a National Historic Landmark in 1992), survive in such remarkably pristine condition, with few alterations to the original structures, and retaining their landscaped settings. Wells was associated with the design of other important buildings,

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Page 8

and throughout his career demonstrated an interest in architectural and technological innovation. He was a vocal proponent of the establishment of architectural and professional standards, and was a founder and officer of the American Institute of Architects.

The design of the Sturges House displays technological innovations both typical and atypical of American residential construction of the period. The incorporation of a brick-vaulted icehouse and basement-level well within the foundation of the main block in such a rural setting was unusual. The construction of the house, utilizing a braced frame with brick infill, was so rare in the Fairfield area that its construction ran over schedule.¹ This type of framing was recommended in Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850). The use of a layer of sand on the first floor between the floor and the basement is unusual; this is thought to have been an early fireproofing technique. The inclusion of a water closet on the second floor, and the combination of the water closet within a bathing room, makes the Sturges House a model of modern plumbing. Judging by pattern books published as late as the latter half of the 1850s, the use of water closets in residential construction during this period was extremely rare, and usually confined to large villas. (Kingscote in Newport, Rhode Island, designed in 1839, had a water closet.) Bathing rooms were also rare, since they required complicated engineering. The combination of a bathing room and water closet in the same room was evidently not even contemplated by most architects until the late 1850s.² It seems likely that from the standpoint of plumbing, Sturges' Fairfield summer cottage anticipated improvements in his primary residence in New York City, since it was not until 1842, with the completion of the Croton Aqueduct, that New York gained a public water system.

Joseph Collins Wells (1814-60), although well known in his own time, has been largely ignored by twentieth-century architectural historians. The reasons for this neglect range from his short career in the United States to the lack of information on his complete *oeuvre*, but there is no doubt about his talent as a designer. Wells was born and trained in Britain. By 1835, he had emigrated to the United States and had opened an architectural practice in Newport, Rhode Island. He eventually moved to New York City, establishing himself there by 1839. That city, growing at an extraordinary rate, provided fertile ground for the young architect, and he maintained an office in the city until his death. The bulk of his commissions were executed in the greater New York area, although he did move farther afield for clients in Connecticut, the Berkshires, and Pennsylvania.³

Wells, although identified in one source as a "church architect," also executed designs for residences, commercial buildings, and, in at least one case, an institutional structure. Records indicate that for much of his career he was the principal of his own firm, but he also

¹ Mrs. Jonathan Sturges, *Reminiscences of a Long Life* (New York: F.E. Parrish and Company, 1894), p. 179; Robert Jensen, "Board and Batten Siding and the Balloon Frame: Their Incompatibility in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* xxx, no. 1 (March 1971): 40-50.

² Arthur Channing Downs, Jr., "Andrew Jackson Downing & the American Bathroom," *Historic Preservation*, Oct.-Dec. 1971: 31-4; letter from Arthur Channing Downs to Henry S. Bullard, Dec. 31, 1988; William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects* (4 vols., Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1970-76), ii, 368.

³ Joseph Collins Wells's obituary was published in *The Crayon*, vii, no. 9 (Sept. 1860). See also the *Newport Mercury* (Rhode Island), Dec. 19, 1835 (AIA Library), and Dennis Steadman Francis, ed., *Architects in Practice New York City 1840-1900* (n.p.: for the Committee for Preservation of Architectural Records, n.d.), p. 81.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form
Page 9

briefly entered into partnerships with other architects. In 1840, he was associated with William H. Ranlett, an architect best known as the author of the house pattern book, *The Architect: A Series of Original Designs for Domestic and Ornamental Cottages Connected with Landscape Gardening Adapted to the United States* (1848). In 1846-47, Wells went into partnership with David H. Arnot, an architect and artist who was also the author of *Gothic Architecture Applied to Modern Residences: Containing Designs of all the Important Parts of a Private Dwelling Exhibited in Elaborate Perspective Drawings Together with Large and Copious Details* (1850).⁴

Wells was part of a group of expatriate Britons and British-trained artists who had a strong impact on the direction of American art and architecture in the mid-nineteenth century. Wells was an active member of the National Academy of Design from 1841 to 1847, submitting for exhibition his rendering of the Sturges House for the 1841 show of the Academy. In 1847, he and his partner, David Arnot, put forth their competition design for the Smithsonian Institution at the Academy's annual exhibition. Wells was also an art collector. He is listed as the owner of a landscape painting exhibited by the Academy in its 1848 show.

Wells, unlike his partners, did not write books about architecture, but there is reason to believe that he had strong feelings about design and professional standards. In 1847, when his design for the Smithsonian, along with several others, was rejected by the Regents of the Institution, Wells' partner Arnot wrote a pamphlet which claimed that the competition had been a sham from the beginning. The pamphlet criticized the design which was chosen on several points: first, that it did not answer the needs set out in the competition guidelines, and second, that the decorative elements had been lifted from several different historical styles and recombined in a way that was aesthetically unacceptable to those who championed the purity of historical styles. Wells, his partner, and architects John Haviland and John Notman were the signatories of a letter of protest published as part of the text of the pamphlet. Wells' role as a proponent of historical accuracy in architecture is also suggested by his participation in the founding of what would shortly be rechristened as the American Institute of Architects. Wells was present at the organizational meeting of that body on February 23, 1857, in Richard Upjohn's office, along with a vocal contingent from the ecclesiological party, Leopold Eidlitz, Richard Morris Hunt, Jacob Wrey Mould, Henry Cleaveland, John Welch, Charles Babcock, F.A. Peterson, and Edward Gardiner. The AIA *Proceedings* leave no doubt as to Wells' feelings on the character of the new organization. When Peterson suggested extending an invitation to all New York architects in order to avoid jealousy, Wells stated in no uncertain terms that the group should not extend invitations to "all who styled themselves architects."⁵ Evidently the group felt the power of this argument, although they did extend invitations to A.J. Davis, Calvert Vaux, Thomas U. Walter, and John Notman, and by 1859, the group also included James Renwick and others. The group's major contribution while Wells was a member was the attempt to establish standards and regulate training and professional behavior. The organization also provided a forum for the education of its members by presenting papers by members and illustrious

⁴ Francis, p. 81. See also Noyes L. Thompson, *The History of Plymouth Church* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co., 1873, London: S. Low, Son & Co., 1873), p. 66. For Arnot, see George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, eds., *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564-1860* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957).

⁵ Phoebe Stanton, *The Gothic Revival and American Church Architecture: An Episode in Taste 1840-56* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1968) pp. 321-2. David H. Arnot, *Animadversions on the Proceedings of the Regents of the Smithsonian Institution in their Choice of an Architect for their Edifice in Washington...* (New York: n.p., 1847).

visitors. Wells' contribution to this effort was a presentation on his design for Bowen & McNamee's Silk Warehouse, an Italian Palazzo-style marble commercial building constructed at 112-14 Broadway in 1848-49. By March 10, 1857, the AIA had settled on the group's current name, implying an interest in the formation of a cadre whose membership was national rather than regional and whose goals had a national scope. On March 26, 1857, Wells was elected to the Board of Trustees. He remained an active member until his death.⁶

Wells' 1844 advertisement read: "Designs furnished for mansions, villas and cottages in the Italian, English Gothic and Elizabethan styles, adapted to the intended location and the contemplated expenditures,"⁷ but he also designed other types of buildings.

Wells' designs for two commercial structures were executed for Henry C. Bowen, a leading New York City merchant who achieved national recognition through his abolitionist activities and his publication of *The Independent*, an organ of the Congregational Church which was widely read in the 1860s and 1870s. The first of these commissions was for Bowen's store at the corner of Pine and Cedar streets (1843); the more ambitious Bowen and McNamee Silk Warehouse on Broadway (1848-49; demolished) was on the cutting edge of commercial design, emulating dry goods tycoon A.T. Stewart's Marble Palace at 280 Broadway (1846) (designated a National Historic Landmark in 1978). In this store, Stewart initiated major changes in the design of commercial buildings, using plate glass display windows for the first time in America, and opening up the interior plan, as well as using marble on the facade in lieu of brick. Wells' Italianate design for Bowen's store was "for beauty and delicacy unsurpassed in this country."⁸ Compared to Stewart's store, it was termed "much freer and elaborately decorated,"⁹ but it was considered, along with Stewart's store, A.J. Davis'

⁶ Stanton, *The Gothic Revival*, pp. 322-4.

⁷ *Directory: Architecture and the Building Trades of Greater New York* (2 vols., New York: Union History Company, 1899), i, 127.

⁸ Winston Weisman, "Commercial Palaces of New York: 1845-1875," *Art Bulletin* (Dec. 1954), p. 290; Wells obituary; National Landmark Designation report for Henry C. Bowen House "Roseland Cottage" by Anne Andrus Grady; Harry E. Resseque, "A.T. Stewart's Marble Palace—The Cradle of the Department Store," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 48 (1964): 131-3, 138-42.

⁹ *Directory: Architecture... of Greater New York*, i, 147.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 11

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

design for Arthur Tappan's Pearl Street store, and Trinity Church (Richard Upjohn, 1841-46), to have "marked in its way a distinct epoch in the history of building art in New York and Brooklyn."¹⁰

Wells' association with Bowen also resulted in the construction of his best-known residential design, Roseland (Woodstock, Connecticut; 1846). Of all of Wells' documented commissions in Connecticut, this Gothic Revival cottage is the most similar to the Sturges House. However, the two cottages differ in several ways. Although both houses are built of the same materials, in the same style, and exhibit a similar degree of integrity of design, the Sturges House is set apart by its early construction date and asymmetrical massing. Roseland, with its center hall plan and balanced facades, seems to have been influenced by Davis' cottage designs. Other rural/suburban villa commissions executed by Wells include "The Castle" (Fairfield, Connecticut; 1847-51, in ruins), a Gothic Revival villa in stone, and the Charles Kneeland House (Bayside, New York; c. 1850), a Gothic Revival cottage similar to Roseland. Wells also designed townhouses in New York City for John David Wolfe, one of the founders of the Museum of Natural History (Murray Hill; 1859), and Edward Walker (Stuyvesant Square; 1859). Wolfe's collection of paintings was housed in a custom-designed gallery attached to his townhouse, and Walker's mansion was deemed by the critics of the time "a model worthy of study."¹¹

Wells earned kudos for other designs too. His Gothic Revival First Presbyterian Church (Fifth Avenue, New York; 1844-46), along with Trinity Church, New York (Upjohn; 1841-46; designated a National Historic Landmark in 1976), and the Church of the Holy Trinity, Brooklyn (Minard Lafever; 1844-47), are all products of the ecclesiological movement in religious architecture. Wells' design, although smaller in scale than the other two churches, is notable for its bold form. It is said that the sanctuary was modeled after the Church of St. Saviour, Bath, and that the tower is similar in design to the Magdalen College Tower, Oxford. Contemporary architectural criticism fails to comment on the form and design of the church, but praises the building's landscaped setting; the 200-foot frontage was lauded for "that freshness and simplicity of nature which should be symbolized in the surroundings of every church, particularly in cities."¹²

Wells' other documented church commission was better known for its association with a great man than for its architecture. The job may well have come to him through the recommendation of Henry C. Bowen, one of the founders of the church. It was Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church (Brooklyn, 1849-50; designated a National Historic Landmark in 1961). When the original church was destroyed by fire in 1849, Sherman Day, the chairman of the building committee, drew plans for a simple auditorium designed to seat over 2,000 people. The accommodation of the huge crowds drawn to hear Beecher's oratory was evidently more important than building a stylish church. For this warehouse-like brick building, Wells provided working drawings. Soon even this church was too small for Beecher's congregation, but there is no evidence that Wells entered into the competition to

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Grady, Roseland Landmark Designation report; Jack Gold, "Jonathan Sturges House, 'The Cottage'," National Register of Historic Places, 1984; *The Crayon* (Sept. 1859).

¹² *The Crayon* (Sept. 1858); Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York and London: MacMillen Publishing Company, Inc., n.d.), p. 78; Whitney North Seymour, *The Heritage of New York* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1970), p. 88.

design a larger structure, which was never built.¹³

Wells' last major non-residential commission was the Luzerne County Courthouse (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, 1856; demolished c. 1900). The large, brick, Gothic Revival Courthouse, possibly a reworking of the Wells and Arnot design for the Smithsonian Institution (1847), was praised for the convenience of its plan and the advances in fireproofing used in its construction.¹⁴

Jonathan Sturges' house stands as a memorial to the Sturges family, who commissioned its design, had it built, added onto it, supervised the design of the surrounding landscape, and still occupy and maintain it. Jonathan Sturges, the original owner of The Cottage, was an extraordinary man; this self-effacing art patron was self-made, a leading New York entrepreneur during a period of many prominent entrepreneurs, recognized not only for his probity in business but for his reputation for integrity, piety, and philanthropy. Sturges, his wife, and their descendants have been distinguished by their love of the fine arts, including music and literature, as well as their sensitivity in expanding The Cottage and their recognition of their role as caretakers of an outstanding house.

The Cottage was built as the summer residence of prominent New York City merchant Jonathan Sturges (1802-74) and his wife, Mary Pemberton Cady Sturges (1806-94). Sturges was a man of industry and enthusiasm. Although he was the grandson of a man who had served in the Continental Congress and who was later named a judge of the Connecticut Supreme Court, Sturges was raised in modest circumstances. Born in Southport, Connecticut, his family later moved to a farm outside Syracuse, New York, where they raised sheep. Through the auspices of his elder brother, Lothrop L. Sturges, a merchant in Fredericksburg, Virginia, he accepted a position at the age of 17 as a clerk in a grocery store in Fredericksburg owned by his future father-in-law. Sturges' pursuit of a career in business led in 1822 to New York City and a clerkship with the firm headed by Luman Reed, a leading wholesale grocer. Sturges was just one of many New Englanders attracted to the city and fated to make his fortune in what was fast becoming the new world's greatest port and one of the country's largest distribution centers. Sturges showed himself diligent in Reed's employ, and in 1827, his industry was rewarded by an offer of an interest in Reed's business. Sturges improved his ownership position in the business over the next decade, and

¹³ White and Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, p. 390; Thompson, *History of Plymouth Church*, pp. 19-20, 27, 65-9; *History of Architecture...of Greater New York*, i, 140.

¹⁴ "Architectural Gossip," *The Crayon* (Sept. 1858); Eva Ingersoll Gatling, *Luzerne County Courthouse* (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1986), pp. 5-7, 15; Vito J. Sgromo and Michael Lewis, *Wilkes-Barre Architecture 1860 to 1960* (Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, 1983), pp. 8, 61; figure 28.

when Reed died Sturges became the principal of the firm. In the years after Reed's death, the company came to specialize in coffee, tea, and spices, both on a wholesale and retail level.¹⁵

Sturges' association with Reed brought not only success in business, but also great personal enrichment. Reed infected him with his enthusiasm for the fine arts. Along with his mentor, Sturges became one of the great patrons of the American School, and a number of paintings from his personal collection, or paintings commissioned by him, have come to represent to modern scholars some of the best work of this school's early years. At Reed's house, Sturges became acquainted with some of the leading artists, authors, and politicians of the day: Samuel F.B. Morse, Thomas Cole, Robert W. Weir, Henry Inman, Asher B. Durand, James Fenimore Cooper, Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, Philip Hone, and David Wainwright. The friends and acquaintances from these days inspired Sturges with awe. He stated, "I can truly say that I have met with no class of men of purer lines or more refined tastes than the artists of New York with whom it has been my good fortune to associate from that time to this."¹⁶

As an early member of the Sketch Club, a precursor of the National Academy of Design, Sturges was part of a group which promoted, supported, and collected works of the nascent American School. Sturges was an honorary member of the National Academy of Design by 1838, but as early as 1836 he commissioned Cole to paint "View on the Catskill, Early Autumn." In this painting, Cole reconstructed a treasured but vanished landscape: his adopted hometown of Catskill before the coming of the railroad. This painting was a labor of love for Cole, one that expressed the artist's passion for the pre-industrial landscape. It is ironic that it was painted for a man destined to become one of the state's leading railroad promoters.¹⁷

In 1836, Sturges' mentor in business and fellow art lover Luman Reed died. Reed's collection may have been at that time the greatest testimony to the power of the early efforts of the American School. Sturges formed an association with about 50 others and purchased the Reed collection. With Sturges as its president, the association proposed the establishment of a gallery in New York on the model of the National Gallery in London. Reed's collection was at first mounted in the Rotunda at City Hall Park, and in 1845, the New York Gallery of Fine Arts was incorporated as the city's first public art museum. The collection was later moved to the National Academy of Design, and still later to its present location, the New York Historical Society. As president, Sturges contributed the majority of the funds for the gallery's operation. In December 1841, Sturges, poet and journalist William Cullen Bryant, and entrepreneur and art patron Charles Leupp (1807?-1859), all members of the Sketch Club, were elected to the executive committee of the Apollo Association for the Promotion of Fine Arts. With this infusion of new blood, the young subscription organization focused its energies on sponsoring a free art gallery open to the general public. In 1843 the organization was rechristened the American Art Union; its declared purpose was

¹⁵ Gold, "Jonathan Sturges House"; Sturges, *Reminiscences*, pp.37, 99-100, 120, 125-6, 167-8; Sketch of Jonathan Sturges published in the *New York Evening Mail*, n.d., in the collection of Mrs. Henry Rousseau and Mr. Henry S. Bullard.

¹⁶ Sturges, *Reminiscences*, pp. 158-60; "Dear Crayon" Letter from Jonathan Sturges, n.d., Pierpont Morgan Library.

¹⁷ Nevins, "The Century," pp. 3-6; *National Academy of Design Exhibition Record*, ii, p. 144; John K. Howat, *American Paradise The World of the Hudson River School* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1987), p. 128.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 14

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

to encourage the development of a distinctively American school of painting.¹⁸

In 1847, the Sketch Club was once again the incubator for a new project: the formation of a club dedicated to the cultivation of a taste for letters and fine arts. In the building which housed the New York Gallery of Fine Arts, the Century Club was born. Sturges was one of the 42 original members. The first rooms rented by the club were adjacent to the showroom of the American Art Union. The Century Club quickly became an intellectual and social center and the site of regular art exhibitions. For more than a 100 years the club has been notable for its activities and distinguished membership. Sturges, although never an officer, was a member until his death.¹⁹

While Sturges was involved in broad-based efforts to recognize American art, he also supported individual artists of note. Sturges' personal collection of art came to be a who's who of American mid-nineteenth-century artists' work, including works by John Gadsby Chapman, Frederic E. Church, Thomas Cole, Asher B. Durand, Francis W. Edmonds, H.P. Gray, Daniel Huntington, C.C. Ingham, Henry Inman, William Sidney Mount, and Robert W. Weir. He extended his personal patronage to allow American artists to study abroad, most notably Asher B. Durand, the engraver-turned-landscape painter, whose work after Cole's death was the standard against which other landscape paintings were judged.²⁰

In 1828, Sturges had married the sweetheart of his youth, Mary Pemberton Cady. Mrs. Sturges was, like her husband, a native of Connecticut. Born in New London to a newspaper publishing family, she later moved to Virginia, where her father became a merchant. The Jonathan Sturges family by 1840 included four young children, and although the family enjoyed frequent visits to Sturges relatives in Fairfield, they felt the necessity of the convenience of their own house, especially after the cholera epidemic of 1832. Jonathan Sturges had purchased his grandfather's mid-eighteenth-century farmhouse on Mill Plain

¹⁸ Sturges, *Reminiscences*, pp. 171-3; Gold, "Jonathan Sturges House"; William C. Bryant II and Thomas G. Voss, eds., *The Letters of William Cullen Bryant* (4 vols. to date, New York: Fordham University Press, 1975-) ii, 169n.

¹⁹ *The Century 1847-1946*.

²⁰ Howat, *American Paradise*, p. 33. See also Henry T. Tuckerman, *Book of Artists American Artist Life* (reprint of 1867 edition, New York: James F. Carr, 1967), p. 627. Tuckerman, Sturges' contemporary and fellow Centurion, gives ownership information for paintings he considered of importance. Sturges' name is mentioned often in Tuckerman's sketches of notable artists, but it is in the listing of Sturges' collection in an extensive, if not exhaustive, catalogue of major collections of American art, that provides the evidence that even among the great collectors of the day, Sturges was considered a connoisseur.

Green in 1835, but agreed not to demolish it until after the death of his mother. She died in mid-1840, and he quickly hired Joseph Collins Wells to design a new house on the site of the old.²¹

Both Sturges and his wife were keenly interested in both art and the design of houses. Mrs. Sturges reflected, "I hear people speak sometimes of the trouble of building houses, but for my part, I have often said, if I took as much comfort in living in my houses as I did in building them, I should be satisfied."²² That the couple chose to build a cottage in the Gothic Revival style is notable since it was the first house built in that style in Fairfield, and quite probably the first board-and-batten Gothic Revival cottage in the state, as well as one of the first in the nation. The choice of style reveals something of the couple's character as well as their financial status; in 1840, the Gothic Revival style was associated in religious architecture with Christian piety as well as with a sense of the romantic old world past. The style, in residential construction, became emblematic of the ideals of society's aesthetes. Many artists, authors, and actors chose to build or remodel their houses during this period using elements of the Gothic Revival style. The Sketch Club often met at the Sturges House, and this structure may have inspired or confirmed a taste for the Gothic Revival in domestic architecture among Sturges' wide circle of friends and acquaintances. If the Sturges House mirrored the Sturges family's aesthetic tastes, it also came to house much of the couple's growing collection of American art. Before the house was completed in the spring of 1841, Asher B. Durand had already volunteered "to contribute to the furnishing of your Connecticut cottage."²³

Sturges was the owner of one of Durand's most celebrated compositions, "In the Woods," but it was his role in commissioning Durand to paint "Kindred Spirits" that confirmed his importance as an art patron. In 1848, the death of Thomas Cole, the leading interpreter of the American landscape, united in grief three of his friends: Sturges, William Cullen Bryant, and Asher B. Durand. Bryant's touching eulogy so moved Sturges that he asked Durand to portray Cole and Bryant on one of their rambles in their beloved Catskills, and he presented the painting to Bryant "as a token of gratitude for the labor of love performed on that occasion [of the eulogy]."²⁴ In the 1940s, as interest deepened in the roots of American art, this painting became "the universally recognized symbol of the sentiment of nature in American landscape art."²⁵ It is in the collection of the New York Public Library today.

Sturges' love of the natural world, as well as good design, was exemplified not only by the

²¹ Sturges, *Reminiscences*, pp. 170, 176, 244; Gold, "Jonathan Sturges House."

²² Sturges, *Reminiscences*, p. 178.

²³ Asher B. Durand to Jonathan Sturges, Dec. 24, 1840. Pierpont Morgan Library. Family tradition maintains that the Sketch Club met at The Cottage, and Mrs. Sturges says in *Reminiscences*, "every winter the club met at their houses.", p. 173. In terms of the Gothic Revival style in residential construction being the choice of the intellectual and artistic circle of which Sturges was a part, the following have been considered: Washington Irving's renovation of Sunnyside, James Fenimore Cooper's renovation of Otsego Hall, Jasper Cropsey's Aladin, and Jervis McEntee's studio/home in Rondout, near Kingston, N.Y. Calder Loth and Julius Trousdale Sadler, Jr., *The Only Proper Style* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1975), p. 43.

²⁴ Bryant and Voss, *Bryant Papers*, ii, 515.

²⁵ Howat, *American Paradise*, pp. 115, 108; Bryant and Voss, *Bryant Papers*, ii, 541-2.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 16

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

choice of a site for the Sturges House, among the rural splendors of the home of his youth, but also by the care he took in landscaping the property. He hired an English gardener named Atkinson, recommended by architect Wells, to lay out the gardens surrounding the house. The landscaping project continued for three years, and Atkinson went on to work for other prominent clients such as Hamilton Fish.²⁶

In 1849, Sturges and Charles Leupp, his friend from the Sketch Club and the American Art Union, were appointed trustees of the National Academy of Design. Sturges served on the building committee and the construction of the Academy's premises was largely supported by Sturges and Leupp. The gallery, displaying Reed's collection and other acquisitions, was opened in 1850. At the Academy in 1851, painter William Sidney Mount spoke of Sturges' contributions:

It is our duty to speak...of the men who adorn their walls with pictures rather than looking glasses. I would particularize at this time of one gentleman known to you all. Since the death of Luman Reed no man in the city holds a more prominent place in the affections of artists and the public than our esteemed President of the New York Gallery, Jonathan Sturges.²⁷

In the 1860s, Sturges was named to a joint committee of the New York Historical Society and the Union League Club, whose work led to the formation of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1869-71.²⁸

Throughout his adult life, Sturges was a friend to artists and a patron of art, but his activities were not limited to his patronage of art. Some of his other interests related to his business; he was a founder and director of the Bank of Commerce of New York and an officer of the city's Chamber of Commerce. As a railroad promoter he was a director of the New York and New Haven Railroad. Probably one of Sturges' most challenging business problems arose from his role as a director of the Illinois Central Railroad. Sturges was one of 13 original investors who provided funding for the railroad. The completion of this railroad was perceived to be of such national importance that it became the first important land grant railroad. When it was incorporated in 1851, the railroad's path was through the most thinly settled central part of the state, but by 1870, this area had become the granary of the North Atlantic states. The president of the railroad was Robert Schuyler, the country's leading railroad magnate, who was also president of the New York and New Haven Railroad. It became public knowledge in mid-1854 that Schuyler had fraudulently issued stock for the latter company, and this triggered a panic on Wall Street that adversely affected all railroad stock. Schuyler retired in disgrace. The Illinois Central was less than half complete, stock prices at rock bottom, land sales from the land grant slowed by the crop failure of 1854, the cost of raw materials so high that the owners were forced to renegotiate the construction contracts, and a construction mortgage was falling due in short order. In the midst of its disarray, the company sought an acting president of impeccable integrity and a high degree of business acumen, and found him in Jonathan Sturges. Sturges' tenure as acting president was brief, but critical, and he was soon replaced by his new son-in-law, William H. Osborn (1824-1894), who had married Sturges' eldest child, Virginia, in 1853. Under Osborn's presidency (1855-1865) and directorship (1854-1877), the Illinois Central not only recovered from its financial problems, but by 1870, achieved a position of prosperity,

²⁶ Sturges, *Reminiscences*, pp. 179-80. Hamilton Fish was elected governor of New York in 1848 and was secretary of state during the Grant administration. *DAB*.

²⁷ Bryant and Voss, *Bryant Papers*, iii, 124; Gold, "Jonathan Sturges House".

²⁸ *Ibid*.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 17

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

financial stability, and traffic control which it would not match again in that century.²⁹

Sturges retired from business in 1867, but he and his wife continued in their later years to be associated with the artistic, political, commercial, and philanthropic life of the city. Sturges was a founder of the Union League Club. Established in 1863, it was formed originally to support the Union, at a time when Confederate victories and increasing war-weariness made the club's purpose repugnant to some New Yorkers. Sturges was active in efforts to expose the corruption of the Tweed Ring. The couple also worked to support the Presbyterian Hospital, the Wilson Industrial School for Girls, the Hahnemann Hospital, and the Women's Board of Foreign Missions of the Dutch Reformed Church. Sturges was also a commissioner on the building committee of the new New York City Post Office. When Sturges died in 1874, his family erected a surgical pavilion at Bellevue Hospital in his memory.³⁰

The family owned one side of a block on Park Avenue between 35th and 36th streets with the exception of the corner lot on 35th Street, and at one time Sturges and his wife, as well as three of the four surviving Sturges children, lived on that block. In 1869 the family built two townhouses there. Occupied in 1871, they were designed by Richard Morris Hunt, one of the foremost architects of the day, and they housed Sturges, his wife, his bachelor son, and the Osborn family.³¹ They have both been demolished.

The Sturges children continued the pattern established by their parents, spending summers and weekends in Fairfield at the Sturges House, but living primarily in New York City. They also traveled extensively in Europe. Virginia Sturges Osborn (1830-1902) and her husband William H. Osborn were part of New York's intellectual and artistic circle: friends of William Cullen Bryant and particularly close to landscape painter Frederick E. Church, who spent his last days in their home in New York. Frederick Sturges (1833-?) was a veteran of the Civil War who took over the reins of his father's business, and married Luman Reed's granddaughter, Mary Fuller. Edward (1837-1901), like his elder brother, also

²⁹ *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (New York: James T. White & Company, 1983) **iii**, 350. William K. Ackerman, *Historical Sketch of the Illinois-Central Railroad* (Chicago: Fergus Printing Company, 1890), pp. 21-4, 62-9; Howard Gray Brownson, *History of the Illinois Central* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1915), pp. 37-9, 116-125, 157-63.

³⁰ *NCAB*; Francis Gerry Fairfield, *The Clubs of New York* (reprinted New York: Arno Press, 1975), pp. 106, 133; Sturges, *Reminiscences*, 230-40; Ackerman, *Sketch of the Illinois-Central*, p. 24.

³¹ Mary Cady Sturges Frier, *Memoires*; unpublished manuscript in the possession of Mrs. Henry Rousseau and Mr. Henry S. Bullard; Paul R. Baker, *Richard Morris Hunt* (Cambridge and London: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1980), p. 230.

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 18

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

served in the Union Army. Two of the Sturges children died as young adults: Amelia (1835-62), who married J. Pierpont Morgan, and Arthur (1841-66). Henry (1846-1922), the youngest child, inherited The Cottage.³²

Henry Cady Sturges trained as a lawyer at Columbia, but apparently never practiced law. He was particularly interested in literature, art, and music, and was the author of much musical and artistic criticism. He made at least one major addition to the family's collection of fine art: Church's "Rainy Season in the Tropics." His great passion was the collection of first editions, and it was for this collection that the book tower at the Sturges House was constructed. He is said to have had the largest collection in the country of the writings of his father's friend William Cullen Bryant. He was also an active member of the New York Yacht Club. He loved local history and expanded the family's landholdings in Fairfield through the purchase of some adjacent property. He seems to have been, like his father and mother, interested in interior decoration and garden design. He pursued these interests at The Cottage, which he continued to use as a summer residence. In 1883, Henry Sturges married Sarah Adams McWhorter, a young friend of the family whom he met while she was living with his sister Virginia.³³

Henry and Sarah Sturges had six children, but it was their eldest daughter, Ann Adams Bullard (1886-1979), who came to be the most closely associated with The Cottage. Ann, like many of her family, was interested in art and literature, and she practiced them as a talented amateur. She was an artist, a friend to many artists of the day, and an author of short stories and poetry. She married Roger H. Bullard (1884-1935), an architect trained at Columbia who maintained a practice which covered New York and Connecticut. After Bullard's death, Ann Bullard moved to The Cottage, and her children are the current occupants.

³² Bryant and Voss, *Bryant Papers*, iv, 121; *Fairfield County Magazine* May, 1967, p. 21. The genealogical information is from family records in the possession of Mrs. Henry Rousseau and Mr. Henry S. Bullard.

³³ Frier, *Memoires*; *Fairfield County Magazine*, p. 22.

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JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE

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Page 20

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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Page 21

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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 (Specify Repository):

JONATHAN STURGES HOUSE
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service**Page 22**
National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreage of Property: 1.43 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing
A 18 645320 4556510

Verbal Boundary Description:

As described in Fairfield Land Records, v. 54, p. 383.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries are those associated historically with the Jonathan Sturges House,
"The Cottage."**11. FORM PREPARED BY**Name/Title: Ms. Kate Mearns Ohno
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