

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Curtiss, Reuben, House
other names/site number Buck Hill Seminary for Boys

2. Location

street & number 1770 Bucks Hill Road N/A not for publication
city, town Southbury (Southford) N/A vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county New Haven code 009 zip code 96488

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>1</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] June 10, 1993
Signature of certifying official Director, Connecticut Historical Commission Date

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

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. See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

[Signature] 7/29/93
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure
EDUCATION/school

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)
MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival
20TH CENTURY REVIVAL/Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)
foundation stone
walls weatherboard
roof asphalt shingle
other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Reuben Curtiss House is a large Greek Revival-style house with an extended rear ell which was extensively remodeled in the Colonial Revival mode. It is located in the village of Southford, north of the center on the west side of Bucks Hill Road. Walnut Hill rises at the rear of the property and Walnut Hill Brook runs behind the land to the west. A contributing barn/garage is located to the northwest of the house and a non-contributing poolhouse, built in 1991, and swimming pool are found to the south.

The house has been enlarged several times since it was originally constructed (Photograph #s 1, 2, 3, 4). The main block facing the road was a center chimney house, which appears, from its original first floor plan and other physical evidence, to have been a one-and-one-half-story Cape dating from the late eighteenth century.¹ This section was raised to a full two stories and styled in the Greek Revival manner about 1840. Near or at the same time the large rear ell was added. It has a later projecting gabled wing at the rear of its south elevation, part of an extensive reworking of the exterior and the interior in the twentieth century.

Greek Revival-style elements predominate on the exterior. The five-bay facade of the main block is framed by large corner pilasters which support a full entablature. There are three small attic windows in the frieze. The central doorway is Greek Revival with pilasters and recessed sidelights and matches another entranceway on the north side of the ell.

Later features included the Palladian windows in the gable peaks, which date from about 1930, a detail also found in the south projecting gable of the ell. Also at that time, a full-facade Victorian-period veranda was removed and the main entrance established in the north side of the ell, but its Greek Revival surround remains. Later exterior alterations include the bay windows in the dining room and French doors with a terrace, added on the south side of the ell after 1953.

Only some of the interior of the first floor of the main block recalls the earliest stage of the house. The two front rooms with the connecting front "porch" remain from the Cape layout. In the south front room, the former hall of the Cape, there is horizontal board wainscot; the fireplace there, which has been restored, has an oven on the left and a panelled chimney breast. The former rear staircase on this side of the house and the fireplace at the rear of the stack were removed. The fireplace surround in the parlor is fully Greek Revival and resembles others in Southbury from this period (Photograph #5).

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Reuben Curtiss House, Southbury, Connecticut

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Although the first floor of the ell has been altered, the second floor remains intact. Used as a dormitory when the house was a boys' school in the mid-nineteenth century, it contains a series of small rooms opening off a long narrow hall which runs the length of the addition. This section is simply detailed with plain board trim. The back staircase to this space has newels and a railing at the second floor that appear to be from the Greek Revival period.

The major change to the interior in the twentieth century was at the first floor. It included the removal of a partition and the relocation of the staircase. The section of the ell immediately behind the former main block is now an entrance hall that runs the full width of the house. There is a Colonial Revival fireplace, framed by bolection molding, on the west wall of this room and a new staircase of this style rises along the east wall from just inside the entrance door there (Photograph #6).

The horse barn and attached garage have vertical siding and a rubblestone foundation and probably dates from the 1930s, when the property was again used as a farm.

1. The corner posts are relatively slim which suggests a late 1700s date. The missing kitchen fireplace at the rear of the stack might have provided more conclusive evidence, such as the location of its bake oven.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

c. 1840

Significant Dates

c. 1840

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Reuben Curtiss House is architecturally significant as one of the finest examples of the Greek Revival style in Southbury.¹ Exceptionally well-preserved and enhanced by its later Colonial Revival-style remodeling, it has local importance from its use as the Buck Hill Seminary for Boys in the nineteenth century and its association with the Curtiss family.

Architectural Significance

The Reuben Curtiss House remains as a classic example of a Greek Revival farmhouse, enhanced by its commanding hillside position. Its historic setting has changed very little since the nineteenth century. Although the property is smaller, what modern construction that has taken place in the area is not generally visible and does not impact on the historic ambiance, maintaining the illusion that the Curtiss House is still the centerpiece of a large nineteenth-century farm.

Considering the long building history of this house, particularly the changes that took place in this century, it is remarkable that its nineteenth-century architectural integrity has not been compromised. None of the essential exterior design elements that typify the Greek Revival have been altered. The few Colonial Revival elements added to the main block, such as the Palladian windows in the gables, add an elegant note, but these applied details do not interfere with the proportions of the building or compete with the much bolder Greek Revival features. In fact, because the earlier detailing is so strongly executed, these later changes are not at first readily apparent.

The interior is a pleasant blend of periods, with all stages of the building's history displayed. Modernized for comfort and convenience, it still retains important features from earlier periods. The integrity of the school dormitory on the second floor of the ell is particularly notable, since this section has such important local historical associations.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Barbour Collection of Connecticut Vital Records.
Beers, F. W. Atlas of New Haven County: The Town of Southbury. New York: Beers & Co., 1868.
Cothren, William F. History of Ancient Woodbury from the First Indian Deed in 1659 to 1871. 3 vols. Waterbury: Bronson Brothers, 1854, 1872; Woodbury: Cothren, 1879.
Curtis, Harlow Dunham. A Genealogy of the Curtis-Curtiss Family of Stratford, Conn. Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1953.
Curtiss, Frederic Haines. A Genealogy of the Curtiss Family. Boston: Rockwell and Churchill Press, 1903.
Smith, H & C.T. Map of New Haven County, Connecticut, 1856.
Southbury: Townwide Architectural Survey (intensive level). Connecticut Historical Commission, 1990-1991 (compiled by Mary McCahon).

See continuation sheet

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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 6.7

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of the nominated property are described in the Southbury Land Records in Book 232, Page 806.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundaries of the nominated property encompass all the land and buildings still associated with the Reuben Curtiss House.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By _____ Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator
name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant
organization Cunningham Associates Ltd. date 11/30/92
street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (203) 347 4072
city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Reuben Curtiss House, Southbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 2

Historical Background

Although this house has been attributed to Israel Curtiss (1716-1795) and it is known that he had a house on Bucks Hill, it is no longer possible to determine if it is part of the present building. Israel, the son of Stephen Curtiss and the grandson of Israel Curtiss, a founder of Old Woodbury, married Martha Towner in 1738, which could suggest a date of about 1740 for his house.² Such an early date cannot be confirmed. The remaining physical evidence indicates that the earliest part of the house appears to have been built after the Revolution.

Deed records do confirm that Reuben Curtiss (1755-1804), Israel's son, lived here and it was later owned by Reuben's grand-nephew, Reuben Bradley Curtiss. In 1798 Israel's large estate was distributed among his three sons, Joseph, Benjamin, and Reuben. The distribution was complicated by the fact that both Joseph and Benjamin died that year and some of their heirs had not reached their majority. Apparently this property was part of the estate and may in fact have been the homestead farm left to Reuben subject to the dower rights of his mother. However, the first definitive deed was recorded in 1819. It indicates that it was then owned by Simeon Curtiss, Joseph's son, but identifies the property as "late of Reuben Curtiss." At that time a house and barn and 40 acres on both sides of the highway were passed by deed of gift from Simeon Curtiss (1768-1852) to his son, Reuben Bradley Curtiss (1796-1882).

From about 1840 and possibly until he sold the property in 1866, Reuben B. Curtiss ran an academy here, identified on the map of 1856 as "Buck Hill Seminary for Boys." It was a large operation, as suggested by the size of the addition and confirmed by the 1850 federal census. At that time there were 23 students in residence, ranging in age from 8 to 12, along with four adult supervisors. Apparently this was a sideline since the census taker recorded Reuben's principal occupation as farmer.

Several twentieth-century owners made changes to the house. Chief among these was Lillian Whitar Lima, who enlarged the rear ell and did most of the Colonial Revival-style remodeling. The later work was done by the Stephen DuPonts, who also subdivided the property into building lots. The present owners acquired the property in 1989.

1. This evaluation was made by Mary McCahon in the architectural survey she carried out in Southbury in 1990-91.
2. Old Woodbury is the name commonly used to differentiate the larger colonial town (173 square miles) from the smaller present-day Town of Woodbury. Until the late eighteenth century, Old Woodbury also encompassed the parishes which became the towns of Washington (incorporated 1779), Southbury and Bethlehem (both incorporated 1787), and Roxbury (incorporated 1796).