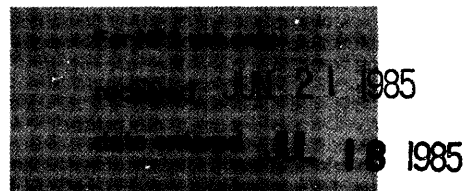


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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



1. Name

historic REYNIER SPEER HOUSE

and/or common AS ABOVE

2. Location

street & number 612 Upper Mountain Avenue NA not for publication

city, town Little Falls vicinity of ~~congressional district~~

state New Jersey code 034 county Passaic code 031

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Mr. & Mrs. John Russo

street & number 612 Upper Mountain Avenue

city, town Little Falls vicinity of state New Jersey

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Essex County Court House

street & number

city, town Newark state N.J.

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title NA has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Office of N.J. Heritage

city, town Trenton state N.J.

---

## 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**Description

The Reynier Speer House is an 18th century vernacular farm dwelling built in 1785 on the west side of Upper Mountain Avenue (the former Little Falls Road). Though close to the roadway, the house follows the slope of the wooded hillside, which rises sharply at the back where the property extends west to Highland Avenue.

Six bays wide the one and a half story clapboard building has a high foundation of roughly squared brownstone. There are two entrances to the structure, one in the third bay and another on a lower level in the fifth bay to the north. Both entrances have heavy Dutch doors. Wood posts define the structure at four corners and strap-like timbers form vertical bands alongside the windows in the outer bays. The first floor windows, have board and batten shutters, and 6/6 double-hung sash with broad frames give light to the basement.

A gable roof, articulated north and south by two brick chimneys covers the main section of the structure. This roof extends west forming a cat slide above the rear extension. The lower section of the front roof, also gable is articulated to the north by an exterior brick chimney.

The stairs of weathered brownstone leads from a fieldstone pathway to a narrow stoop outside the main entry. The high stone foundation continues west where it runs into the slope of the hill. On the southeast corner of the house a board and batten door leads to the basement. The second door behind leads to a root cellar below the present kitchen. The intermediate wall space is broken by double-hung sash windows.

Two skylights break the rear slope of the main roof and a gabled dormer punctuates the center of the lower roof to the west. The one story addition on the northwest corner of the structure shows continuous windows to the west and a separate entrance on the north elevation.

Interiors

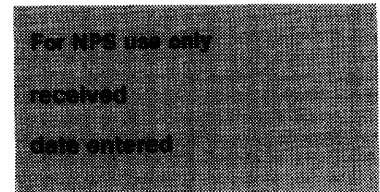
In spite of alterations, much of the 18th century building fabric has survived the passage of time.

A heavy stone fireplace with a finely carved pine mantle defines the north wall of the middle room or hall. The floor boards in this room are oak, held in place by wood pegs and almost 12" wide. Exposed beams break up the low 7' high ceiling and the interior battened doors are latched and hung from heavy iron strap-hinges.<sup>1</sup> On the south wall of the middle room a partly boxed winding stair with a short battened door at the half-landing leads to the attic space above. Below this main stair a narrow door, also latched, provides access to the basement by way of a steep ladder-like stairway.

Two closets with battened doors of light oak define the corners of the north wall. The door of the larger closet to the west shows a raised bead between the vertical boards, while the battens of the smaller closet in the east corner are plain and unadorned. Both doors have small iron latches. To the right of the fireplace a narrow passage (because of the width of the chimney breast) shows 4 worn steps leading down to what was formerly the kitchen. This room has been remodelled but still retains its heavy stone fireplace and exposed ceiling beams. A severely plain oak mantle surmounts the fireplace and the exterior door, (sometimes used as a secondary entrance) retains its original hardware. The design of the low door between the hall and south parlor is unique within the structure. On the parlor side the door is panelled in keeping with the importance of the room, while the hall side shows three wide battens separated by narrow raised beads. Within the parlor itself the floor boards are pine and noticeable because of their irregular size. The largest boards run to 16" while others are narrower though never less than 12".

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

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



Continuation sheet REYNIER SPEER HOUSE, Little Falls, Item number 7

Page 2

Passaic County, NJ  
Description (cont'd)

In the basement the exterior walls are unfinished. An interior partition of pine planking separates the basement from a root cellar behind. The root cellar has a dirt floor, an exterior entrance and a small window on the south wall. A crude fireplace defines the north wall of the basement area. The double hung sash windows in this area are the only original windows in the house.

There are three rooms in the attic; a center space (now used as a study), and two adjoining bedrooms. The center space, (formerly the Spinning Room of the farmhouse) has a brick chimney on the north wall. A narrow doorway on the west wall provides access to a storage space behind. (See section "Alterations"). In the study and north bedroom heavy oak wainscoting with vertical members at approximately 3' 0" intervals articulate the wall at ceiling height. There are no original windows in the attic space. The battened doors between the bedrooms are part of the 19th century alterations.

Alterations

The original farmhouse had three rooms, a hall or living space, a parlor to the south and a kitchen on a lower level to the north. A high over-ground basement extended below the hall and south parlor. Circa 1870 extensive alterations were carried out when three small rooms (presumably bed-chambers), were added on the west side of the house. Other changes took place at this time in the upstairs attic. A narrow door was installed below the heavy summer beam on the west wall providing access to a storage space behind. Windows were added on the north and south walls for ventilation. The two windows in the south gable that appear in early engravings of the farmhouse could have been installed during this construction phase as was the small square window in the north attic gable.<sup>2</sup> In the late 19th century, the glass in all the farmhouse windows, except those in the basement, was changed.

The character and construction of the top stairs to the front entrance indicate they were rebuilt in the late 1900's. Most of the foundation stones show a bush hammered finish<sup>3</sup> and there is no evidence of mortar between the joints. The steps themselves are square-cut brownstone, less worn and quite different from the weathered stones of the lower steps. The wrought-iron handrails were added in this century.

In 1935 when further renovations took place, the fireplace in the south parlor was bricked up and a furnace installed in the basement below. A small powder-room was constructed in the south-west corner of the same room. The original kitchen became a living room when an addition of fifteen feet was added to the west. A modern kitchen was created on the southwest corner of the house, with a new bathroom close by on the south wall. Another bathroom was cut out of the new kitchen addition on the north wall of the master bedroom. Older clapboards from the back section of the house were removed and used to repair the front wall of the original kitchen which was damaged by termites.

On the second floor, skylights were installed in the roof of the old Spinning Room and the chimney remodeled in brick. A double window was installed in the south bedroom and a new bathroom constructed in the southwest corner. To provide more light in the north bedroom a large dormer was cut in the west roof.<sup>4</sup>

# 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** c. 1785

**Builder/Architect**

Reynier Speer

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

### Significance

The Reynier Speer House is architecturally significant as one of the earliest documented Dutch/Colonial farmhouses in Montclair/Little Falls, New Jersey. Also historically important, is the association of the house with the Speers, a prominent Dutch family who lived there for over 100 years and gave their name to that part of Montclair Township known as Upper Montclair.

### History

The farmhouse was built c. 1785 by Reynier Speer, a descendent of Hendrick Jansen Spiers, who came from Holland to New Amsterdam on the ship "Faith" in 1659.<sup>5</sup> Nelson's "History of New Jersey", mentions Hendrick's son Jan (Johannes Spier), as one of the patentees of the Acquackanonk, (sometimes spelled Acquackanonck) purchase of land from the Indians in 1685. Acquackanonk included much of what is now Passaic County and all of Essex County. The name of Jan Speer appears again in 1714 when the Acquackanonk lands were extended and further divisions made. The fourth or Wasel Division included much of what is now Clifton and Little Falls.<sup>6</sup>

Members of the Spier family came up from Passaic and Paterson through the Great Notch to the valley below Little Falls in 1775. Though Frans Spier (the son of Jan) had settled in Horses Neck (Verona) much earlier. At this time only farm roads led from present day Paterson to Little Falls. The present road was laid out in 1797.<sup>7</sup>

Born in September 21, 1767, Reynier Spier married Maria Jacobusso in 1788 and had a house built for himself on the west side of Little Falls Road (now 612 Upper Mountain Avenue), where he resided until his death in 1826.<sup>8</sup> The surrounding area became known as Speertown after the Speer family who owned large tracts of land in the vicinity. Speertown at this time extended as far south as the present Edgemont Park; east down Watchung Avenue to "Telegraph Road" (now Grove Street) just above the Old Dutch Reformed Church at Stone House Plains to "Coeymantown Road" (now Alexander Avenue); west following a country lane established in 1837 leading to the Little Falls Road. The present Valley Road which led from "Cranetown" (now Montclair) was known for many years as the "Speertown Road" and was frequently used by the American Army during the Revolution.<sup>9</sup>

John R. Speer, son of Reynier lived in the old stone house and kept slaves there.<sup>10</sup> John R., a prominent man in his day, was appointed Justice of the Peace by Governor Pennington. He was also a surveyor. His son, Reynier Speer, born in 1817 at the old farmhouse attended Briar Hill Academy in Caldwell and had a good education for that day. Reynier was also a Justice of the Peace like his father, and an important man in the Speertown area. Preference for a rural life on the part of the Dutch farmers and the absence of transportation kept Speertown largely underdeveloped until the arrival of the Greenwood Lake Railroad in 1873. A map of the area drawn up in 1873 shows the Dutch still in control of the farmland. The Speers continued to live in the house until after 1930. The farmhouse changed hands many times since then and some unnecessary alterations were carried out (see section under heading "Alterations"). Despite these changes the structure has retained its integrity.

One of the only surviving examples of vernacular Dutch architecture in the area, historically linked to the most prominent family of the time, this small stone farmhouse is unique in the area and merits designation to the National Register of Historic Places.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE ATTACHED SHEET

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property ± 2 acres

Quadrangle name Orange

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

|      |   |   |   |         |   |   |   |          |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|------|---|---|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1    | 8 | 5 | 6 | 7       | 1 | 0 | 0 | 4        | 5 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 4 | 0 |
| Zone |   |   |   | Easting |   |   |   | Northing |   |   |   |   |   |   |

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| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

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| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

F 

|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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G 

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| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

H 

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|      |  |  |  |         |  |  |  |          |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Zone |  |  |  | Easting |  |  |  | Northing |  |  |  |  |  |  |

### Verbal boundary description and justification

Block 240, Lot 3

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

NA

state code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Eleanor McArevey Price/Preservation Consultant

organization

date October 12, 1984

street & number 217 Inwood Avenue

telephone (201) 783-6030

city or town Upper Montclair

state New Jersey

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

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

Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer signature

date 5/13/85

title Acting Director, Division of Parks & Forestry

For NPS use only

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

Keeper of the National Register

date 7-15-85

Affect: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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

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

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

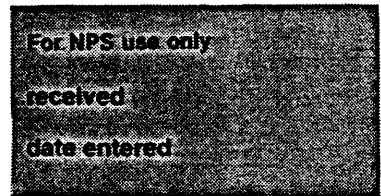
Continuation sheet REYNIER SPEER HOUSE, Little Falls, Item number 8 Page 2  
Passaic County, New Jersey

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Nash, G.W., "Some Early American Hardware", Architectural Record, Vol. 34 (1913), pp. 329-332. An early article on Dutch-Colonial hardware.
- <sup>2</sup> The date of the 19th century alterations is based entirely on analysis of the building fabric.
- <sup>3</sup> McKee, Harley J., "Introduction to Early American Masonry", National Trust for Historic Preservation, (1973). The bush hammer was used widely in the United States at the beginning of the 19th century.
- <sup>4</sup> The 1935 alterations were carried out by Mrs. Edna Foote Champaigne.
- <sup>5</sup> Records show that Hendrick Jansen Spiers, whose name also appears as John Hendrick Speare, his wife Madeline and their two children arrived in New Amsterdam in 1659. New York Colonial Documents, No. 111, p. 35.
- <sup>6</sup> Scott, William W., History of Passaic and Its Environs, (1922) Vol. I, Lewis Publishing Co., Inc., New York and Chicago. Wasel Division, after a village in Westphalia, near the border of Holland. The name had been corrupted into "Weasel".
- <sup>7</sup> Nelson, William & Shriner, Charles A., History of Paterson and Its Environs, (1920), Vol. I, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., New York and Chicago.
- <sup>8</sup> Smith, Jane Norman, The Speers of Speertown New Jersey, (1946) Montclair State College. By the beginning of the 19th century the spelling of the name appears to have changed from Spier to Speer.
- <sup>9</sup> The Story of Montclair, Montclair Chapter, New Jersey Society, Sons of the American Revolution, Montclair, New Jersey, pp. 16-17.
- <sup>10</sup> Oral history indicates that slaves were kept in the Speer House, but there is no documented evidence to prove it.

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

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



Continuation sheet REYNIER SPEER HOUSE, Little Falls Form number 9  
Passaic County, New Jersey

Page 1

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Nelson, William & Shriner, Charles, History of Paterson & Its Environs, Vol. I, Lewis Historical Publishing Co., New York and Chicago, 1920.

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Smith, Jane Norman, The Speers of Speertown, Montclair State College, 1946.





REYNIER SPEER HOUSE

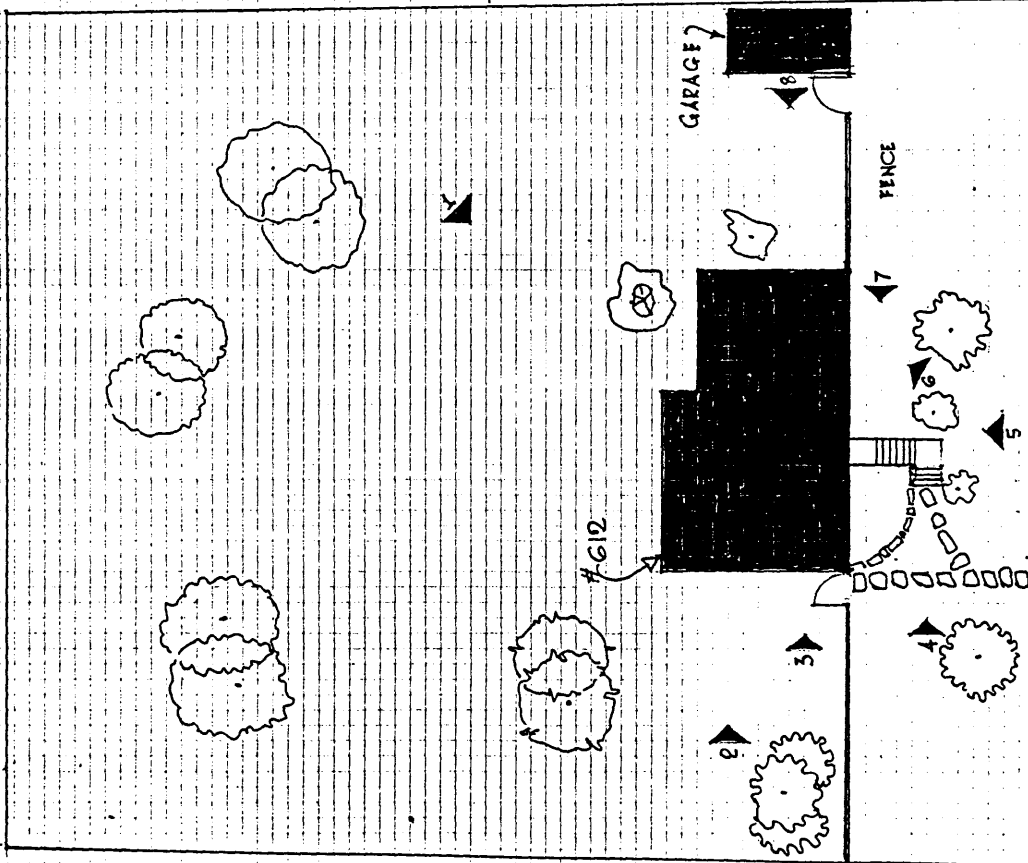
612 UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE, LITTLE FALLS N. JERSEY

NOTE:  
ARROWS ARE KEYED TO  
PHOTOGRAPHS AND INDICATE  
DIRECTION OF VIEW



1381 ±

175 ±



140' ±

UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE

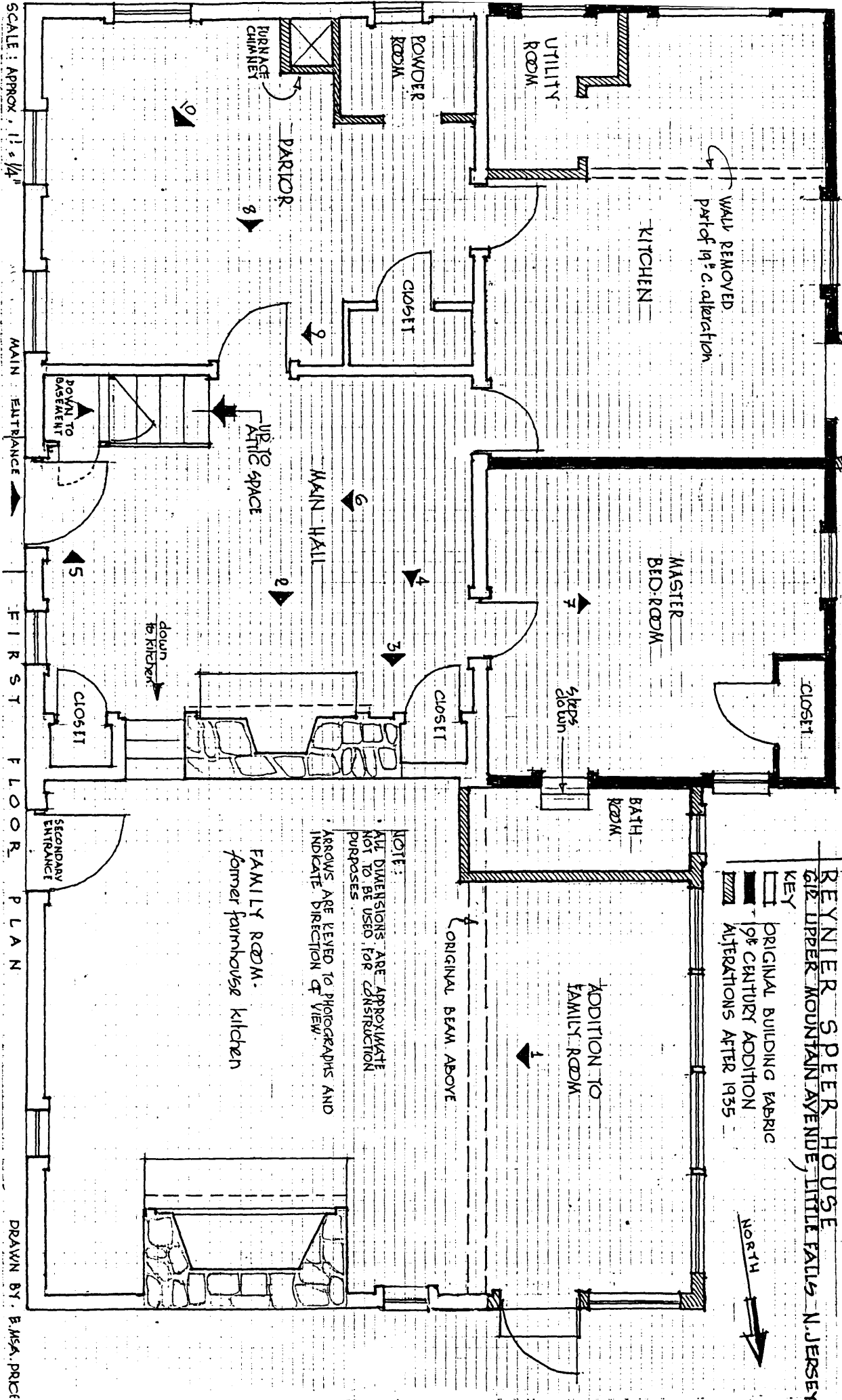
175 ±

SITE PLAN · SCALE APPROX 4" = 100'

DRAWN BY: ELEANOR RIC

**REYNIER S PEER HOUSE**  
 612 UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE, LITTLE FALLS, N. JERSEY

KEY  
 [Solid line] ORIGINAL BUILDING FABRIC  
 [Dashed line] 19<sup>th</sup> CENTURY ADDITION  
 [Hatched area] ALTERATIONS AFTER 1935



NOTE:  
 ALL DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE  
 NOT TO BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION  
 PURPOSES.  
 ARROWS ARE KEYS TO PHOTOGRAPHS AND  
 INDICATE DIRECTION OF VIEW.

FAMILY ROOM.  
 former farmhouse kitchen

SCALE: APPROX. 1" = 1/4"

MAIN ENTRANCE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

DRAWN BY: E.M.S.A. PRICE

REYNIER SPEER HOUSE  
 612 UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE, LITTLE FALLS, N. JERSEY

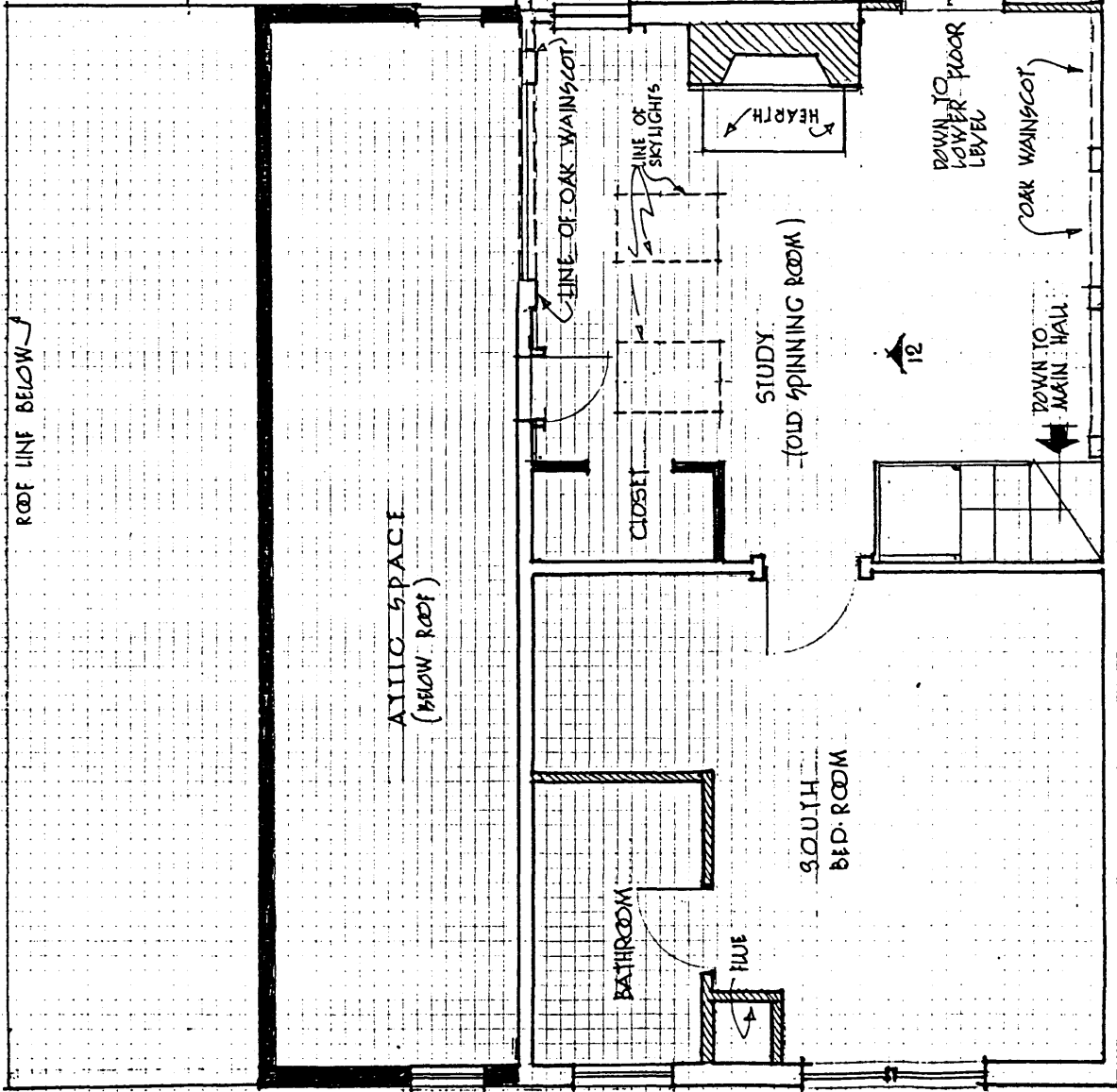
KEY  
 ORIGINAL BUILDING FABRIC  
 19th CENTURY ADDITION  
 ALTERATIONS AFTER 1935



ROOF LINE BELOW

ROOF LINE BELOW

- NOTE
- ALL DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE NOT TO BE USED FOR CONSTRUCTION PURPOSES
  - ARROWS ARE KEYED TO PHOTOGRAPHS AND INDICATE DIRECTION OF VIEW.




ATTIC SPACE  
 (BELOW ROOF)

DRAWN BY: E. H. SA. PRICE

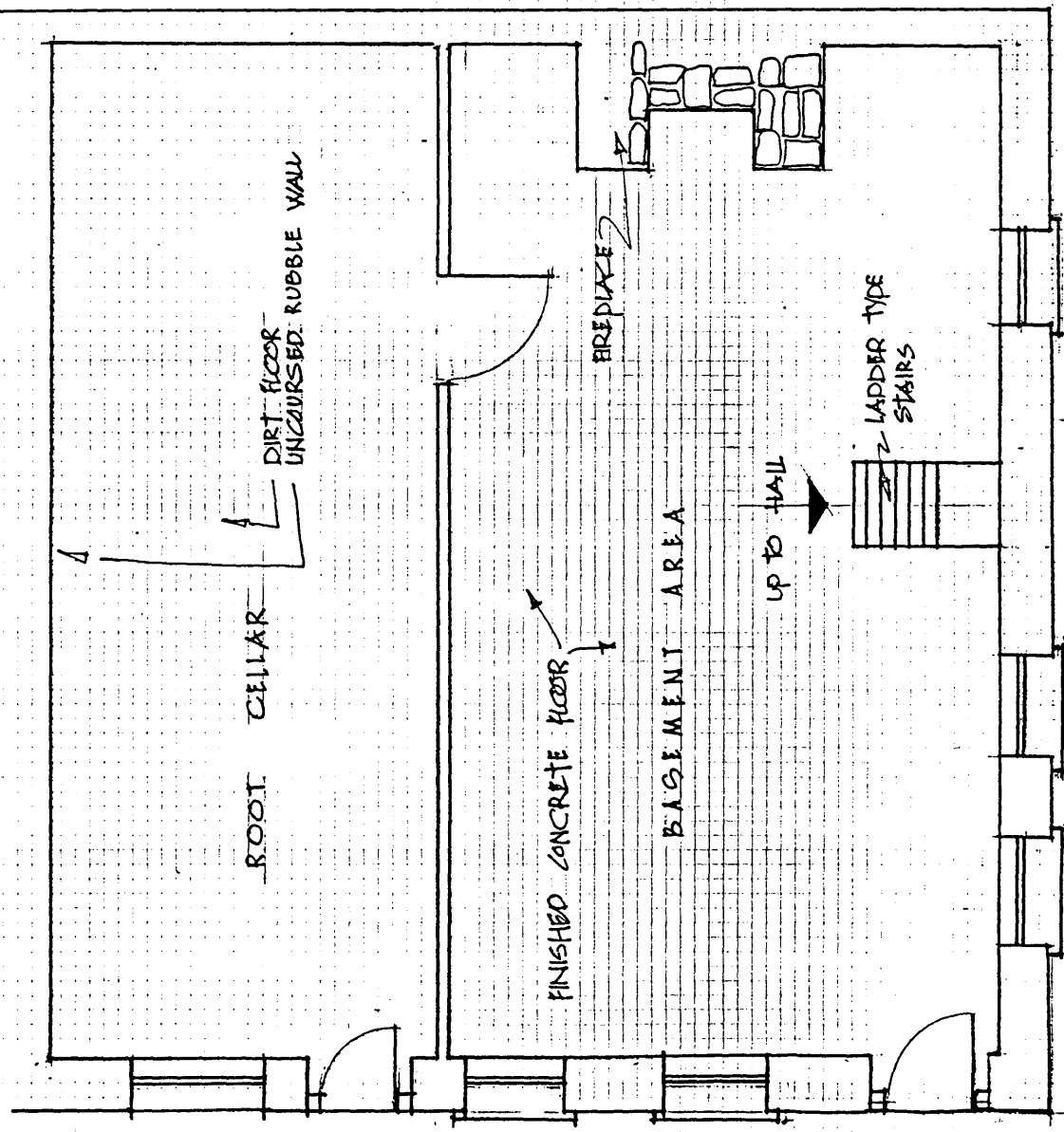
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

SCALE: APPROX - 1" = 1/4"

REYNIER SPEER HOUSE  
612 UPPER MOUNTAIN AVENUE, LITTLE FALLS, N. JERSEY

KEY:  ORIGINAL BUILDING FABRIC

NOTE:  
ALL DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE



SCALE: 1 1/4" APPROX. BASEMENT PLAN

DRAWN BY: E. MSA. PRICE