

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

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

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

For HCRS use only

received FEB 21 1984

date entered

1. Name

historic David Perry House

and/or common Seery-Bolster House

2. Location

street & number 531 Lafayette Street n.a. not for publication

city, town Bridgeport n.a. vicinity of congressional district Fourth

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield code 001

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name William A. Finch

street & number 531 Lafayette Street

city, town Bridgeport n.a. vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bridgeport Town Clerk

street & number 45 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1983 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

| | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Condition | | Check one | Check one |
| <input type="checkbox"/> excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> original site |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good | <input type="checkbox"/> ruins | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> moved date 1871 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The David Perry House is a Federal period half-house of urban form, two-and-one-half stories in height with a side hallway and a side-gable roof. It contains a rear appendage, the first story of which is of integral construction (a flat-roof second-story addition of the mid 19th century replaced what was probably a shed roof). The structure is situated one block south of the Connecticut Turnpike and Bridgeport's Central Business District, and is some three blocks west of its former harborfront location. In the context of the city's surviving early architecture, it is a highly-developed example of its style and preserves a wealth of original fabric.

The house is a typical example of coastal Fairfield County domestic architecture in the waning years of the Federal era. The symmetrical proportioning of its fenestration and the detailed work of its cornice, doorway and gable pediment set with lunette window (finished with flushboard siding in contrast to the clapboarded remainder) are the distinguishing aspects of the exterior. It is three bays wide with a side entry and a slightly off-center main chimney (a second chimney at the rear of the main portion is not visible from the street). The early 19th-century appearance of the house had been altered over the years by the substitution of 2-over-2-pane sash for the probably original 6-over-6 (a few of which remained at the rear), the addition of a veranda across the front and the installation of asphalt shingle siding over the clapboarded portions of the exterior (Photos 1 and 5). The house was raised over a high stone basement, probably for purposes of increased storage space, at the time of its relocation.

The exterior restoration of 1980-81 has seen the removal of the early-20th-century veranda, asphalt siding, and Victorian window sash and a return to much of the supposed earlier appearance of the house (Photos 2,3,4,6 and 7). The 6-over-6-pane replacement sash was salvaged from a demolished early 19th-century house, and the drip hoods were a conjectural recreation based on an interpretation of scars and a comparison with extant similar structures in the nearby villages of Easton, Huntington and Black Rock. The removal of the artificial siding revealed a substantially intact exterior covering (Photos 2 and 6), which has been repaired and repainted in period colors ("lively cream" and ivory). Surrounding the front entry, leaded-glass top and side lights were uncovered of circle-and-oblong pattern, with a moulded-lead American eagle centered over the door (Photo 14).

The demolition of the veranda revealed the outline of the original portico entablature as well as the roof pitch. This was analyzed and compared with a very similar house with an intact entry porch (the museum of the Huntington Historical Society, Huntington, Connecticut) in the design of the replacement structure. The modillion cornice was copied from one still in place on the main body of the house (Photo 5). Also, the survival of simple, unfluted pilasters to either side of the door frame was the basis for the selection of Tuscan-order columns. A new side porch (Photo 6) is utilitarian in nature and is not based on historical precedent.

The interior of the house, in unrestored condition at the time of inspection, is of considerable interest. It contains 5 rooms on each floor, 3 in the main portion (in addition to the stairhall at the northeast corner) with 2 more in the rear ell.

The front entry opens into the stairhall, a large space which measures 10 by 15 feet. At the far end is a wooden archway (Photo 9) with a delicate reeded moulding, which fits beneath the staircase and connects the hall with the dining room. The

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David Perry House
Bridgeport, Connecticut

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stair itself is of the double-turn type. It has a balustrade of finger-roll pattern mahogany with elongated square balusters and a turned newell post surmounted by a ball-and-claw cap (Photo 8). The top of the stair at second-story level forms an ellipse (see floor plan, Item 7 page 3).

The parlor adjoins the stairhall to the south. It contains some of the most ambitious woodwork in the house, including finely fluted pilasters casing the windows with oblong wood panels beneath the sash and square plinth blocks at the upper corners. There is a mantel supported by free-standing Tuscan-order columns (these were copied in detail and proportioning in the recreation of the front portico) which contains incised decoration in the frieze and a bowed shelf (Photos 10 and 11).

The first floor also includes the dining room with its classically proportioned mantel (Photo 12) and a back parlor or office. The rear addition, the integral construction of which is evidenced by an examination of the basement sill and joist structure, contains a kitchen, rear stairway, and small auxiliary bedroom. The kitchen is distinguished by a built-in cupboard immediately to the west of the entry that is apparently contemporary with the original construction. As is the case with the dining room, the portion of the wall below the chair rail is finished with late 19th-century wainscot.

The second floor is laid out in similar manner to the first. A master bedroom corresponds in size and location to the parlor below, and smaller bedrooms to the dining room and back parlor/office. On the chimney wall the back parlor/office chamber contains a small, finely proportioned mantel with reeded pilasters with a small wall cabinet above (Photo 13).

The rear ell portion of the second floor is similar in design and construction to examples of local building from the period around 1850. It is of primitive balloon-frame construction with milled studs and lath and relatively heavy (4" x 6") plates. Interior doors contain 6 vertical panels, mortise locks and black pottery knobs. The north chamber includes a utilitarian mantel with unornamented frieze and pilasters.

The attic is unfinished except for an 11' x 12' servant's chamber at the north end. The basement, of coarse rubble-stone construction, is totally unfinished.

--See Item 7 page 3 for floor plan; Item 7 page 4 for site plan

¹The term "half house" denotes a dwelling three bays wide with a side entry (relative to the standard five-bay width with a center entrance)

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David Perry House
Bridgeport CT

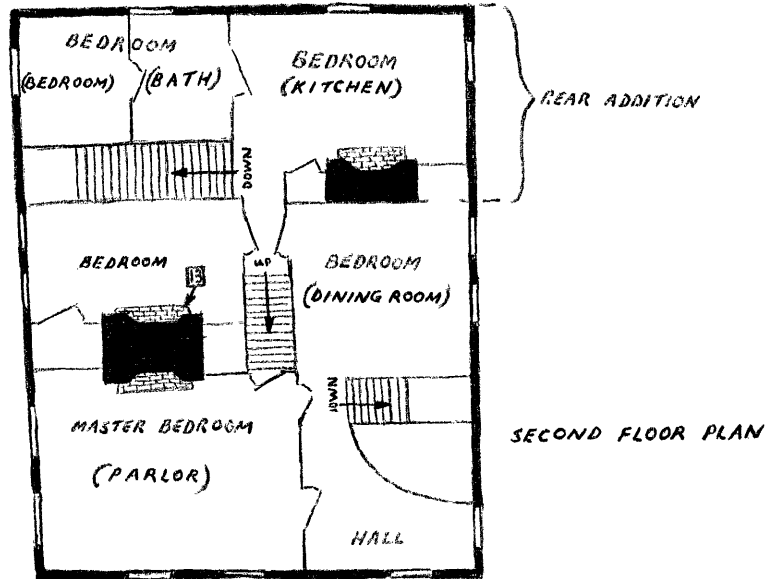
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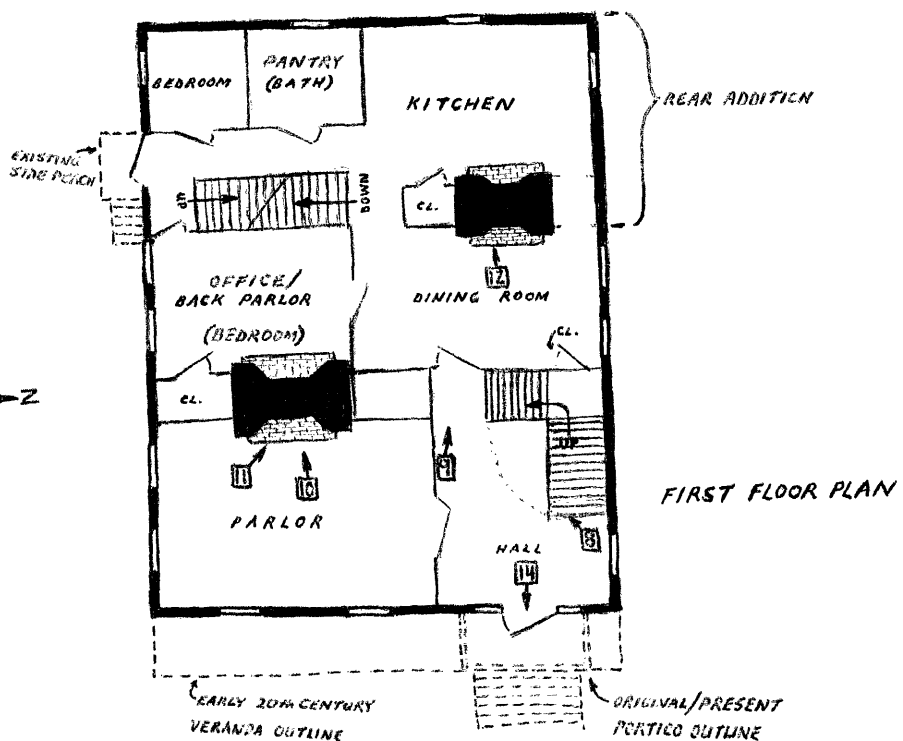
PAGE 3

FLOOR PLAN

Conjectural original
use indicated with present
use (where different) in
parenthesis



SECOND FLOOR PLAN



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

David Perry House
Bridgeport CT

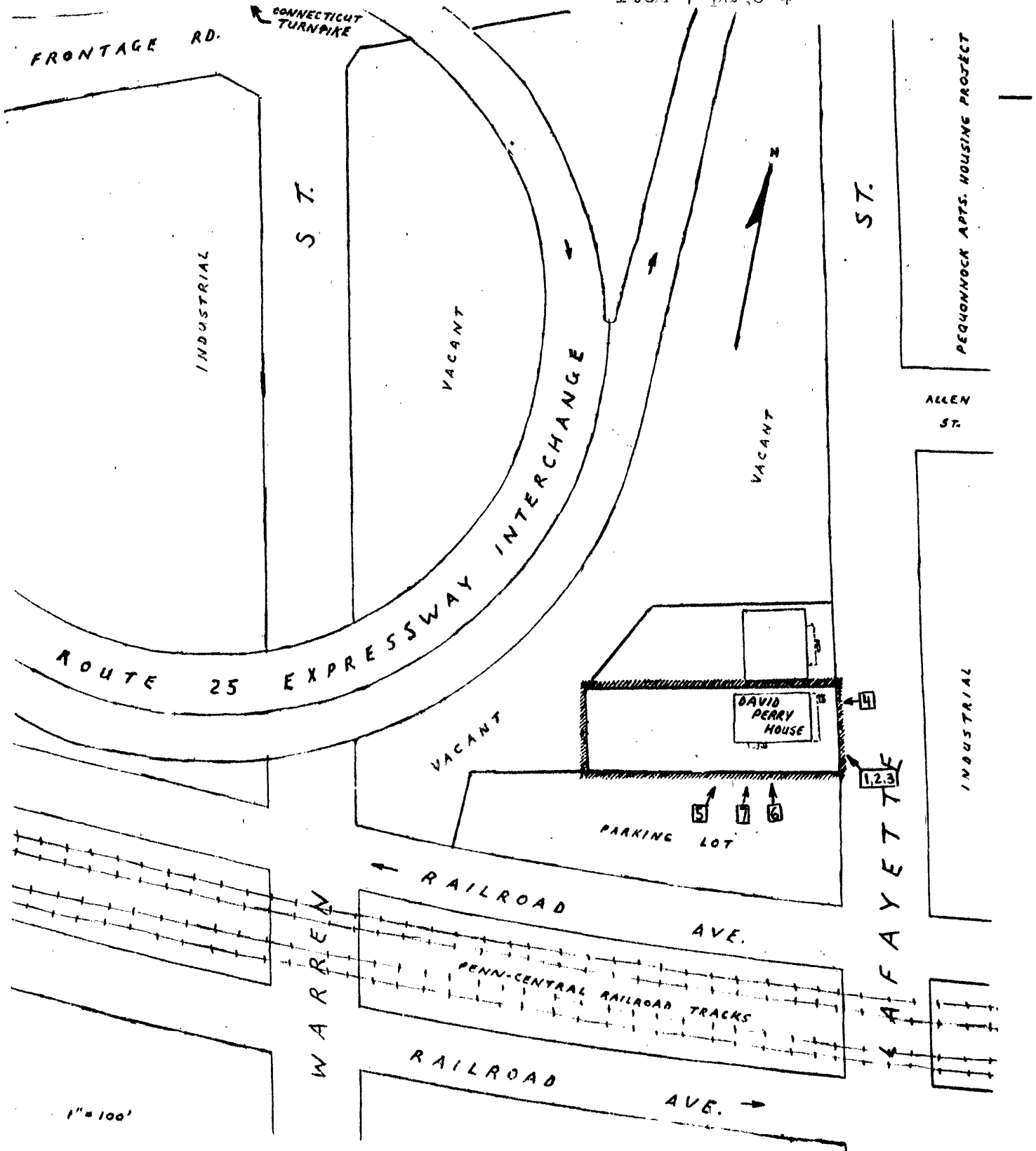
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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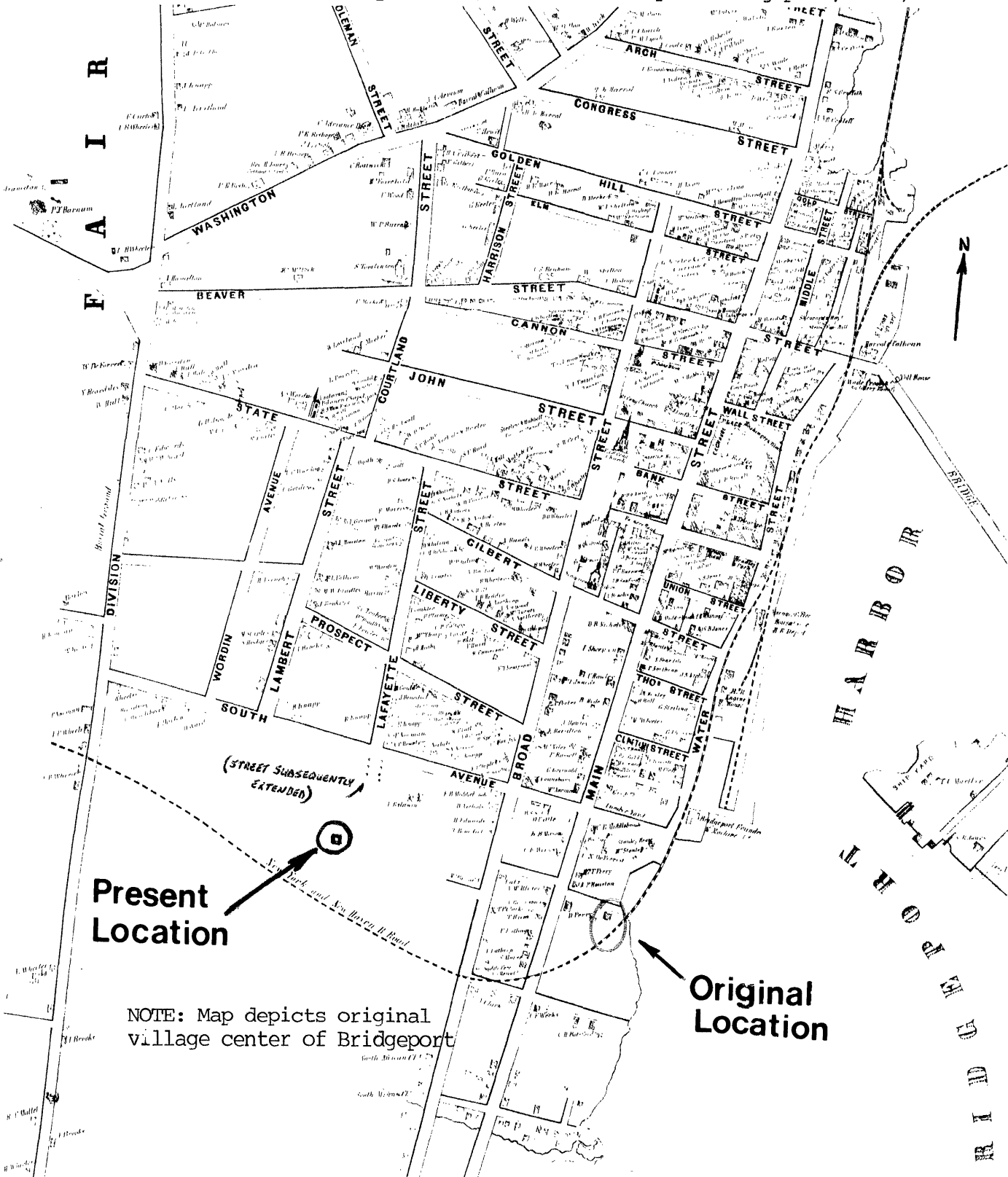
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Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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Bridgeport CT
Continuation sheet

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Original location of the Perry House (from Clark's Map of Bridgeport, 1850)



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 type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799 | <input type="checkbox"/> art | <input type="checkbox"/> engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> music | <input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian |
| <input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) Local History |

Criterion C

Specific dates 1826 Builder/Architect unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The David Perry House is the only known dwelling to survive from the Federal period in Bridgeport's original village center, the first portion of the city to become urbanized (although it has been moved from its original harborfront location, it is still situated within the confines of the early-19th-century village--see Item 7 page 5). Its relatively unmodified architectural character (see pre-restoration Photos 1 and 5) makes it virtually the only remnant from an important era in the city's development, when Bridgeport grew from an unimportant agricultural backwater to a thriving center of manufacturing and marine commerce (Criterion C). It is also associated with the city's once-important whaling industry, as it was built as the home of David Perry, one of the principals of the Bridgeport Whaling Company.

Significance in Architectural History

Based on the evidence of other similar buildings which survived until recently in Bridgeport as well as comparisons with those still in existence in nearby seaport villages (e.g., Black Rock, Southport and Westport), the Perry House was a typical merchant-class residence of its day. The side-gable half-house was the most common type of dwelling built in the rising coastal towns of Fairfield County between 1810 and 1835. It was suitable to the narrow urban lot, and was adaptable to scales ranging from small laborer's cottage to opulent mansion. Unencumbered by a great central chimney, center entry and massive framing timbers typical of houses constructed during the previous century, it provided a suitable, well-lighted setting for the delicate mantelpieces and mahogany stair rails that characterized early-19th-century taste.

The Perry House has a number of features of outstanding local importance. The gable fanlights (Photos 5,6 and 7) are the only known examples to survive in central Bridgeport of this once common decorative treatment (the preponderance of early gable fanlights extant at Black Rock, Southport and Westport suggests its former commonness in Bridgeport). Fanlight building was listed in the 1819 Gazeteer of Rhode Island and Connecticut as one of Bridgeport's more important industries. The interior stairway balustrade with its ball-and-claw newell cap (Photo 8) is a highly unusual and perhaps unique survival. The mantelpieces, of correct classical proportioning; the fluted interior door and window casings; and the intricate leaded-glass lights surrounding the front entry (Photo 14) represent the probable high point achieved by Bridgeport craftsmen during this period.

Significance in Local History

Bridgeport in the 1820s was a rapidly expanding mercantile town, an important coastal and West India trading port which also produced a wide array of manufactured goods. It was a center of saddle, harness and carriage making, products which were traded extensively with Southern ports. Apparently, the physical aspect of the town was noted for its attractiveness. In his book Travels in New England and New York (published 1821), Timothy Dwight wrote "There is not in the state a prettier village than the Borough of Bridgeport . . . The style of building adopted here is also unusually happy. None of the houses are

9. Major Bibliographical References

Orcutt, Rev. Samuel: History of the City of Bridgeport. List of incorporators of the Bridgeport Whaling Company, p. 609.
Obituary of Mrs. Mary Perry, Bridgeport Standard, March 1, 1880; p. 3.
Bridgeport City Records, Common Council Minutes, meeting of May 22, 1837.
City of Bridgeport Land Records.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name Bridgeport

Quadrangle scale 7.5 minute

UMT References

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Item 10 page 1

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

state n.a. code n.a. county n.a. code n.a.

state n.a. code n.a. county n.a. code n.a.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Charles W. Brilvitch, Consultant - edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Bridgeport Architecture Conservancy date September 1981

street & number 328 Park Avenue telephone 203/367-7052

city or town Bridgeport state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date February 14, 1984

For HCERS use only

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

Entered in the
National Register

date

3/22/84

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

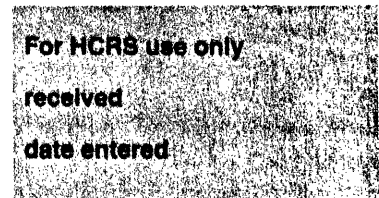
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large or splendid; but almost all of them, together with their appendages, leave upon the mind an impression of neatness and cheerfulness not often found elsewhere." The population of the Borough (same approximate boundaries as today's Downtown area) in the 1820s was about 1,000, and dwellings numbered slightly more than 100. It is believed that the Perry House is the only one from this number to remain in recognizable form.

David Perry, original owner of the house, appears to have been an important businessman in the early life of the city. One of the few factual sources of information concerning him that has yet come to light is the obituary of his wife, Mary, who survived him by 20 years. Appearing in the Bridgeport Standard of March 1, 1880, it states, "Her husband was one of the leading citizens of Bridgeport in its early days, and was at one time largely interested in the whaling business, in which, however, he lost heavily." He is mentioned twice in Rev. Samuel Orcutt's History of the City of Bridgeport (1884), once on a list of the original trustees of the Bridgeport Savings Bank (1842), and again as one of the incorporators of the Bridgeport Whaling Company (1833). The City of Bridgeport Common Council Minutes for the meeting of May 22, 1837, record the "application of Alderman Curtis on behalf of the Bridgeport Whaling Company praying for the privilege of boiling oil on David Perry's dock".

The Bridgeport Whaling Company was organized in 1833 with a capital of \$100,000 for the purpose of harvesting "whale and other fisheries in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans". The company operated four vessels. The reasons for its financial downfall, however, are uncertain: by 1845, when Perry's three wharf buildings were destroyed in what has become known as the "Great Fire", it was recorded that they were "mostly used for storage."

By 1871 the small community that had been Bridgeport had grown to be a heavily urbanized industrial city. The harborfront plot of land on which the stylistically outmoded Perry House stood had increased in value to a point which far exceeded its worth as a place of residence, and it was sold in that year to the Eaton, Cole & Burnham Company for the construction of their new factory. The house was removed by the Gould Brothers, a local building firm, to a new site three blocks away on Lafayette Street to serve as less-than-fashionable housing. It was surrounded then, as today, by industrial buildings and tenements (inhabited by lower-income workers) adjoining the railroad tracks. Thus the fine period detail of the house was probably preserved for the most part by poverty, never having been superceded by work of more modern fashion.

The common name of the house (Seery-Bolster) is taken from two interrelated families who occupied it for three-quarters of a century following the move. John Seery, listed in Bridgeport City Directories as a railroad track repairer, purchased the property from the Gould Brothers in 1876 after being their tenant for five years. In the last years of his ownership he operated it as a boarding house. He died in 1915, and the following year it passed to his son-in-law Cornelius J. Bolster, who resided in the house until 1945.

It was Bolster's daughter who identified the location from which the house had been moved as "where the Jenkins Valve factory stands today". A check of the 1867 Bridgeport map in Beers' Atlas of New York and Vicinity showed that there was indeed a house of identical configuration on a now-defunct segment of Allen Street which is missing from the 1876 Scofield Atlas of the City of Bridgeport. The house disappeared from Allen Street after the 1871 City Directory, while the Lafayette Street location is first listed in 1872. Although absolute confirmation cannot be made through documentary sources that have yet come to light, it is virtually certain that the house standing today at 531 Lafayette Street is indeed David Perry's homestead.

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The David Perry House includes that portion of the City of Bridgeport, Connecticut bounded as follows:

Starting at a point of intersection with the north property line of land now or formerly of William A. Finch and the west street line of Lafayette Street;

Thence southerly for a distance of 50.45 feet, more or less, to a point of intersection with the north property line of land now or formerly of S. Piell etals;

Thence westerly for a distance of 150.13 feet, more or less, to a point of intersection with the east property line of land now or formerly of the State of Connecticut Department of Highways;

Thence northerly for a distance of 49.74 feet, more or less, to a point of intersection with the south property line of land now or formerly of S. Piell;

Thence easterly for a distance of 149.67 feet, more or less, to a point of intersection with the west street line of Lafayette Street.

This property a/k/a Lot 22, Block 505 as shown on Map 2 on file at the City of Bridgeport Tax Assessor office.

Justification:

The Perry House stands in a particularly isolated location (see Map, Item 7 page 4). It is one block south of downtown Bridgeport in an intensively-developed industrial neighborhood. Immediately to the north is a single small-scaled residential building, a 4-unit frame tenement of a type commonly constructed throughout the South End in the early- to mid-1880s. To the north of this, as well as to the west of the Perry House, is the right of way for the Connecticut Turnpike--Route 25-8 interchange, the roadway raised at this point to a height of approximately 30 feet. To the south of the house is an industrial parking lot which borders on Railroad Avenue and the Conrail raised-trestle trackline. On the opposite side of Lafayette Street is a collection of early-20th-century industrial buildings and, above Allen Street, the high-rise Pequonnock Apartments state housing project.