

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 The Palmer Home
other names/site number K-6396

2. Location

street & number 115 American Avenue not for publication
city, town Dover vicinity
state Delaware code DE county Kent code 001 zip code 1901

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>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</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 of certifying official Delaware Division of Historical and Cultural Affairs 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 John P. Kern Date 7/29/88
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register. Patrick Andrews 9/13/88
 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 of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic - institutional housing

Domestic - multiple dwelling

7. DescriptionArchitectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

Colonial Revival

foundation brick

walls brick

roof asphalt shingle

other wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Palmer Home sits on a slightly elevated, neatly landscaped, six lot plot in what was formerly known as "Bradford City" in Dover, Delaware. Both on the exterior and interior, the building has been little altered since it was originally constructed in 1907. The only major alteration is the two-story brick wing to the south which was added in 1930.

The Palmer Home is an eight bay, two and one half story, gable roofed, brick, Colonial Revival building having a moulded cornice with returns at each end of the main section. Paired partially exterior, brick chimneys are located at each gable end of the main section. There is an exterior brick chimney on the rear wing's gable end. The building is laid in seven course common bond. It has four pedimented dormers with six over six, double hung sash windows on the facade. The roof is covered with asbestos shingles. The remaining windows are primarily six over six double hung except for the palladian window over the main entrance which has a keyed arch. In the middle of the exterior gable end chimneys are double windows with rounded brick arches on the first and second story and a smaller round arched window with a keyed brick arch at the attic. The remaining windows all have flat brick arches. The front door which has fifteen lights at the top and a paneled bottom has side lights with a decorative lead design.

Across the front of the building is hip roofed porch with Doric columns and a square balustrade. A pedimented cross gable is located over the entrance. Originally there were five wood stairs leading to the porch; these have been replaced by brick stairs. The building also has a moulded brick water table, a four brick belt course, and brick quoins at the ends of the main building, the rear wing and the south addition.

The 1930, flat roofed, south addition repeats the exterior detail of the main section of the building and has a moulded cornice, brick quoins, water table and four brick belt course.

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)

Social History
Architecture

Period of Significance

1907-1938

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

William S. Vaux

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

The Palmer Home is being nominated under Criterion A because it is an outstanding example of buildings constructed to house indigent elderly during the Progressive Period when women's organizations such as The King's Daughters were building homes for the aged and settlement houses for urban immigrants to address the problems of the poor in this country. The Palmer Home is the only home for the aged dating to this period remaining in lower Delaware. For eighty years, from its construction in 1907 until its last resident left in 1987, the Palmer Home provided room and board for elderly Delawareans. It is also being nominated under Criterion C because architecturally it is a significant example of Colonial Revival institutional architecture so popular in the first decades of the twentieth century, both in the country as a whole as well as in Dover. It also remains much as it was when it was first built; indeed the only major alteration was the addition of a two bay, two story, brick wing in 1930. The wing matches the original building.

The Palmer Home was built by the Ever Ready Circle of the King's Daughters of Dover, Delaware, in 1907, as a home for elderly men and women who were no longer able to care for themselves. It represented the true spirit of The Kings Daughters, a philanthropic society founded in 1886 by four wealthy New York City matrons to aid the urban indigent population and to provide rich women with a service outlet.

Between 1880 and 1920 a "New Woman" appeared in America. She was "decidedly middle-class, if not upper-class...usually a town or city dweller, the wife or daughter of a business or professional man, and better educated than the average." (Woloch, 269) It was such women who raised money to buy the land and to build the Palmer Home. The sphere of the "New Woman" expanded visibly

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To the rear of the main portion is a two and one half story rear wing with an exterior iron fire escape and a screen enclosed side porch.

The interior of the building has been little altered since it was originally constructed in 1907. Upon entering the main section there is a small entrance hall which leads to larger center hall with a staircase rising in the southeast corner. The three rooms that enter the hall--the dining room, sitting room, and reception room--all have doors diagonally placed making the large entrance hall polygonal in shape. At the south end of the first floor there are three rooms for residents, the matron's room, and the two-room infirmary in the 1930 addition. At the north end of the first floor there is only one room for a resident and a large bathroom. Behind the dining room are a serving room, a store room, and a large kitchen with a screen enclosed porch to the side.

On the second floor there is a sitting room in the center of the main section just opposite the stair; five rooms and a n assembly room are to the south and in the 1930 wing, and three rooms and the entrance to the rear wing which has six rooms, including two double rooms for married couples. There are several linen closets on this floor and three bathrooms.

Most of the interior detail of the building is very plain. The staircase contains the only decorative detail.

There is a basement with a concrete floor and brick piers under the main portion of the building; most of this area was used for open storage and heating. Under the kitchen is a laundry room and under the addition is a crawl space.

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through her participation in single-sex associations through which she began to participate in public affairs. The Palmer Home is an excellent example of this change in women's involvement in society.

The late nineteenth century witnessed a proliferation of women's associations like The King's Daughters which enabled "thousands of conventional middle-class women to learn from others, share female values, and work toward common goals." (Woloch, 187) Normally based on the concept of self-help and social mission, these women's associations sought to alleviate the pain and suffering in a changing world and exemplified and benevolent gospel of the Progressive Period.

The Dover circle was organized in 1892 by twenty Dover women "to develop spiritual life and to stimulate Christian activities" especially among the poor. They were particularly concerned about the growing number of older people who were no longer able to maintain themselves. Indeed without assistance many would become homeless. The indigent elderly poor in downstate Delaware were typical of a growing nationwide trend. Businesses were beginning to discharge employees after they attained a certain age without retirement plans and pensions. The number of Americans living beyond the age of sixty increased steadily between 1870 and 1920. (Achenbaum 60-61) And too, as American became more industrialized and people moved from the country to the towns and cities, the elderly no long necessarily lived in close proximity to their children. Thus when the elderly were unable to maintain themselves they had to turn to society for help. Only during the 1930s under the New Deal did government address the problem of the elderly in America with the introduction of Social Security and other programs. Until government became involved in the concerns of the elderly, it was groups such as The Kings Daughters that gave the needed assistance.

Originally the Dover Circle helped to pay the rent and to provide fuel and food for the elderly. In 1898 they organized the Birthday Box to provide Christmas Dinners for the worthy poor. During the first year they provided fourteen baskets. The following year they began to accumulate funds for a home for aged. Each member of the circle pledged to raise \$5.00 for the home.

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Representatives of the circle contacted a former Kent Countian, General William H. Palmer, who had made a fortune in the Colorado silver mines. He pledge to match them dollar for dollar in their efforts to build the home. He was typical of the "newly self-conscious businessmen" of the early twentieth century who provided money and prestige to implement social change. After receiving assurance of Palmer's support, the group involved the entire community in their fund raising efforts by holding sociables, auction sales, rummage sales, newspaper collections, and different entertainments; they even had a coin tape along Loockerman Street and collection boxes in local stores. In December of 1901 the circle purchased six lots numbered 38, 39, 40, 52, 53, and 54 in the "Bradford City" section of Dover for \$2000 from Edward S. Beswick and his wife Hattie E. Beswick of Milford, Delaware. The property consisted of 46,800 square feet.

Once the contributions began to accumulate, representatives of the circle went to Philadelphia to get William S. Vaux, an architect whose offices were at 1218 Chestnut Street, to design the home. Vaux was a young engineer and architect who had received his degree in engineering from Haverford College and had studied architectural drawing at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. From 1895 to 1898 he worked for the architect Walter Smedley, but in 1898 began his own engineering firm which lasted until 1900 when he entered a partnership with George Spencer Morris. Their firm was called Morris and Vaux. From 1905 until his early death from tuberculosis in 1908 just two years after he designed the Palmer Home, he practiced independently. Because he died so young there are few buildings other than the Palmer Home which he designed. Most of his work included alterations and additions to buildings. Because of his work on the Palmer HOME, he was commissioned by the New Century Club of Dover to do the alterations and additions to their building on the Dover Green rendering it more in line with the more up to date Colonial Revival style of the period.

Vaux's final plans for the building were submitted on August 22, 1906 and include fifteen single rooms, three double rooms for married couples, two sitting rooms, a small entrance hall, a large reception hall, a small reception room, a large dining room and kitchen, and smaller linen closets and bathrooms. The home, as drawn, could house approximately twenty residents.

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The home was constructed by Frank P. Collins and John Cohee according to Vaux's specifications. The heating and plumbing systems were installed by T. K. Jones and Bro. Co. of Dover. The heating system was required by Vaux to be "of ample capacity to warm all the rooms specified to seventy degrees in zero weather/" to accomplish this, a low pressure, direct, one pipe steam heating system was used.

When the house was dedicated on October 1, 1907, its purpose was given by the Ever Ready Circle as a place "where food, warmth, gentle care, and friendly hands make life's evening peaceful, restful and secure." The interior was described as "homelike, with wide halls and bright airy, sunny rooms furnished as memorials." Some of the rooms were furnished by Delaware families such as the Pennewills, Magees, and Richardsons. Other rooms were furnished by King's Daughters circles from Camden, Laurel, and Smyrna, Delaware. There was a live-in staff of four, including a matron, nurse, cook, and janitor to provide for nineteen residents. Most of the residents were from Kent and Sussex, but some were from Wilmington.

The Palmer Home was controlled by a Board of Managers elected yearly from the Ever Ready Circle of The King's Daughters of Dover "to provide a home for the aged people of Delaware, when needy circumstances" required. They supplied a comfortable home, clothing, employment and religious privileges.

To be admitted to the Palmer Home a person had to be sixty years of age and a resident of Delaware for five years unless he or she was a native Delawarean. The original admission fee was \$400. Each person admitted was required to bring clothing sufficient for a year. All of the individual's furniture and other possessions except for small heirlooms became the property of the Palmer Home. In addition, all real property was turned over to the Palmer Home; the interest helped to provide maintenance of the resident. If a resident decided to leave the home on his own accord, he or she could get his or her property back, minus room and board already expended. No insane or idiotic person could be admitted, and if a resident became insane he or she had to be removed to a state institution or to the care of a family member.

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There were strict rules for the residents. All had to, when able, attend meals and go to family prayers and all other religious services in the home to show what was "only a slight recognition of the Heavenly Father, from whom cometh all blessings.": The residents were required to make their own beds and keep their rooms neat. No one was allowed to leave the home to work or to solicit funds. Breakfast was at 7 in the summer and 8 in the winter. There was a large dinner at noon and a light supper at 5 in the winter and 6 in the summer. The residents were not allowed to have "spirituous liquors or stimulants" unless prescribed by their physician and dispensed by the nurse.

The matron was in charge of the home, and her authority could not be challenged; if there was a complaint, a resident could go to the Board of Managers. The matron was supposed to be "kind and respectful to all and attentive as their circumstances may require, never let partiality be shown in any instance, but maintain the respect due her station." At 9 at night she was to make rounds to make sure fires were in order and the lights extinguished except for one in each hall. She also read a portion of Scripture daily before the residents retired. The residents were not allowed in the kitchen except with special permission and "tattling, ridicule, unkind and uncharitable remarks" were forbidden and could be reported to the House hold Committee of the Board of Managers. Persistent misbehavior could be cause for dismissal from the home.

Local donations filled the pantry shelves. There were two donation days a year--one in April and one in October--when circles in the towns of Delaware collected food and money for the Palmer Home. A garden to supply food as well as flowers was on the grounds. Chickens were raised in the yard.

In 1924 a Palmer Home Auxiliary was formed by forty-five young Dover women to raise money for the home and to serve as volunteers. In addition, doctors in Dover provided their services free of charge to the home, and the ministers of the town visited the home frequently.

In 1930, Mary E. Saulsbury, the first President of the Ever Ready Circle, donated funds for an addition to the home to house an assembly room on the second floor and two infirmaries on the first floor--one for men and one for women. This addition was built in a style similar to the main building.

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The home continued to be operated in much the same way as it was originally organized until 1987 when the last resident moved out. Shortly thereafter, it was sold by The King's Daughters to two Dover men who plan to renovate it and turn it into apartments or condominiums for older residents of Dover.

Architecturally, the building is significant because it is an outstanding example of Colonial Revival institutional architecture designed by the Philadelphia architect William S. Vaux who also designed the Colonial Revival alterations and additions to the New Century Club on the Green in Dover. The Palmer Home was constructed in the Colonial Revival Style in imitation of the other buildings in Dover either being remodelled in the stylish Colonial Revival Style such as the Old State House, the New Century Club, CHrist Church, and the Ridgely House or constructed in the new style such as the growing complex of state office buildings including Legislative Hall. Colonial Revival Architecture remains to this day a popular style in Dover. The Victorian town hall was torn down in the early 1970s and replaced by the Colonial Revival building. The Kent County Romanesque style brick courthouse was converted into a Colonial Revival building in 1920, just over thirty years after it was constructed, by the removal of an entire floor and the alteration of the door and window openings. In like manner Old Main Hall at Wesley College was torn down, and a New Colonial Revival complex of buildings was constructed during the same period.

The original blueprints for the Palmer Home survive and reveal that the building has been little altered since it was originally constructed. Outstanding exterior details include the pedimented dormer, the double partially exterior chimneys, the brick quoins, the brick belt course and water table, the front porch, and the brick arched windows. The interior includes institutional plain detail except for the main staircase.

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Comprehensive Planning

The Palmer Home represents an early philanthropic endeavor by a woman's group in Delaware. The late nineteenth century saw a rise in Delawarean's concern for the social welfare of disadvantaged groups. Most of these efforts were concentrated in northern Delaware with the establishment of boarding schools for delinquent boys or for delinquent girls as well as mission efforts among newly arriving immigrants. The Palmer House is a rare central Delaware example of a tradition that would later become more highly developed in this part of the state.

The Palmer Home is located in Upper Peninsula zone. It represents two themes. The first is that of community organizations for the type of activity which it houses. The second is that of architecture as a good example of Colonial Revival architecture. Its date of construction places it within the urbanization/suburbanization period of Delaware's history.

As a property type, it represents retirement homes. Its architectural characteristics of a brick, group home built in the Colonial Revival style make it an example of that style.

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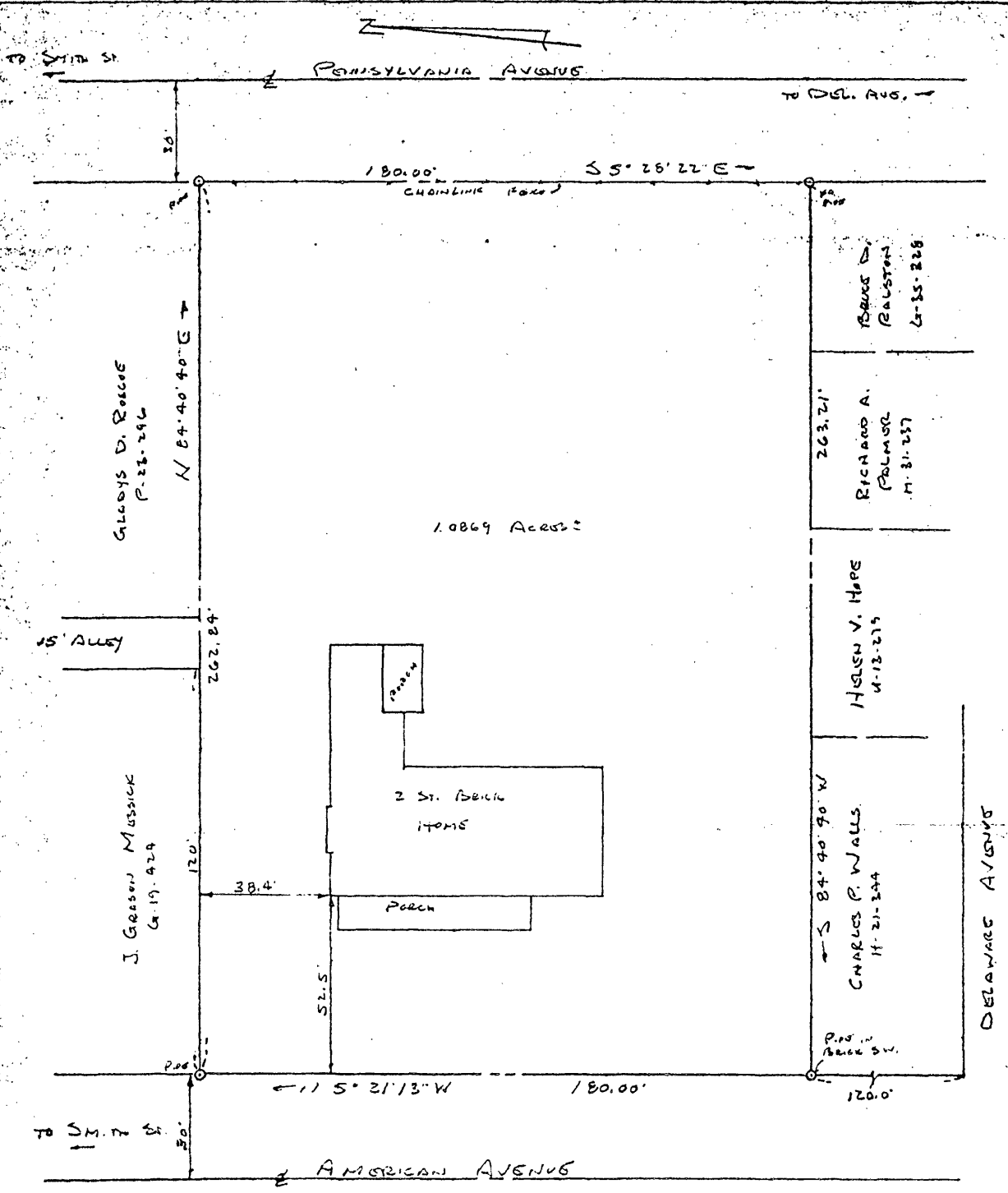
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We certify that this survey was prepared for identification purposes only for the individual (s) noted below. No responsibility is extended and/or assumed by the surveyor to any future land owner or occupant.

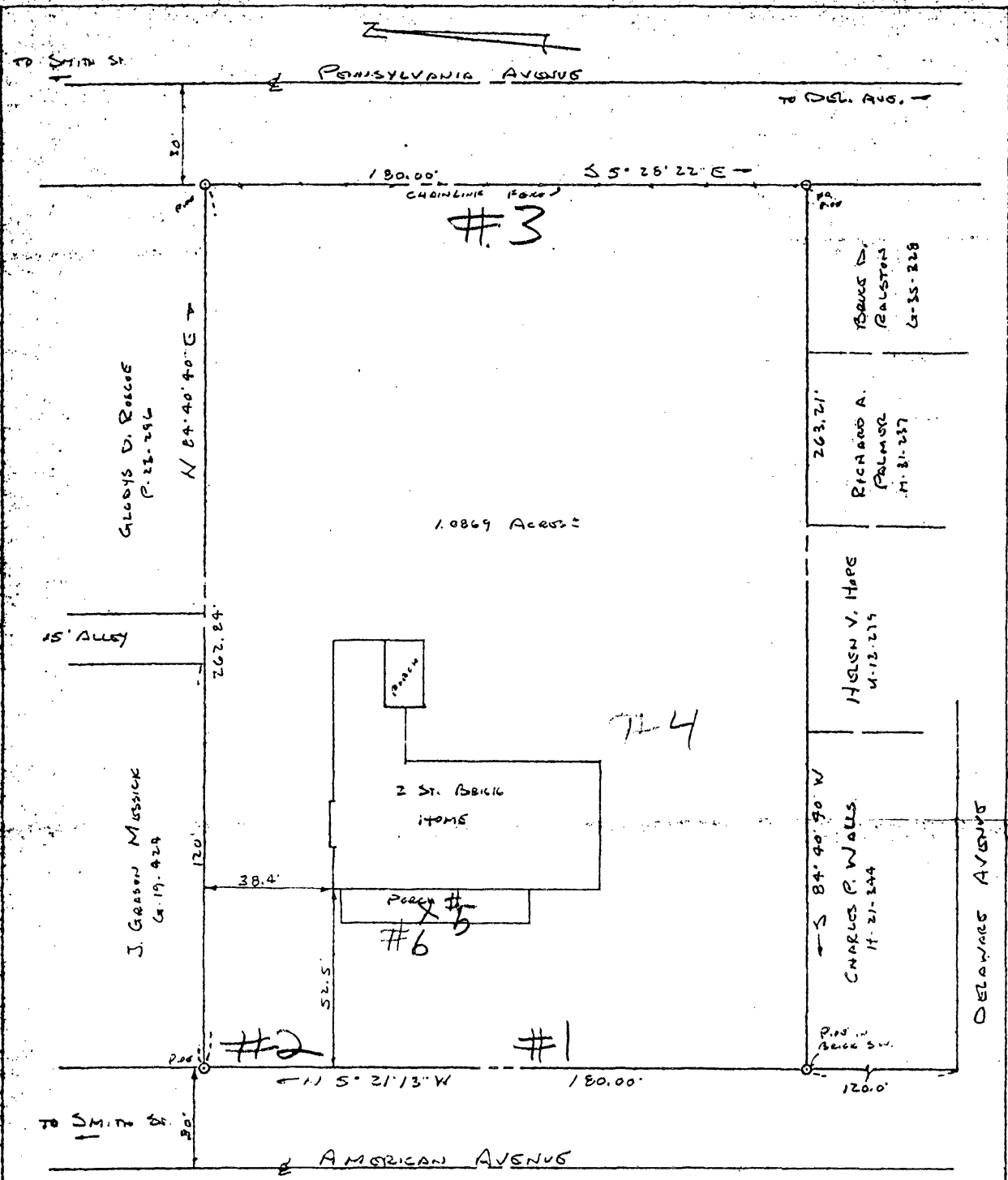
77.05 05 2 11

115 AMERICAN AVENUE

Buyer: PALMER HOME ASSOC.

I certify that the improvements indicated hereon are located as shown and do not violate the applicable zoning code or building restriction line as established by the plan of record.

LANDS OF	
PALMER HOME, INC.	
IN THE CITY OF DOVER	
KENT COUNTY - DELAWARE	
EARL D. SMITH	SCALE 1" = 30'
LAND SURVEYOR	8-6-67
DOVER, DEL.	



We certify that this survey was prepared for identification purposes only for the individual (s) noted below. No responsibility is extended and/or assumed by the surveyor to any future land owner or occupant.

77.05 05 2 11

115 AMERICAN AVS.

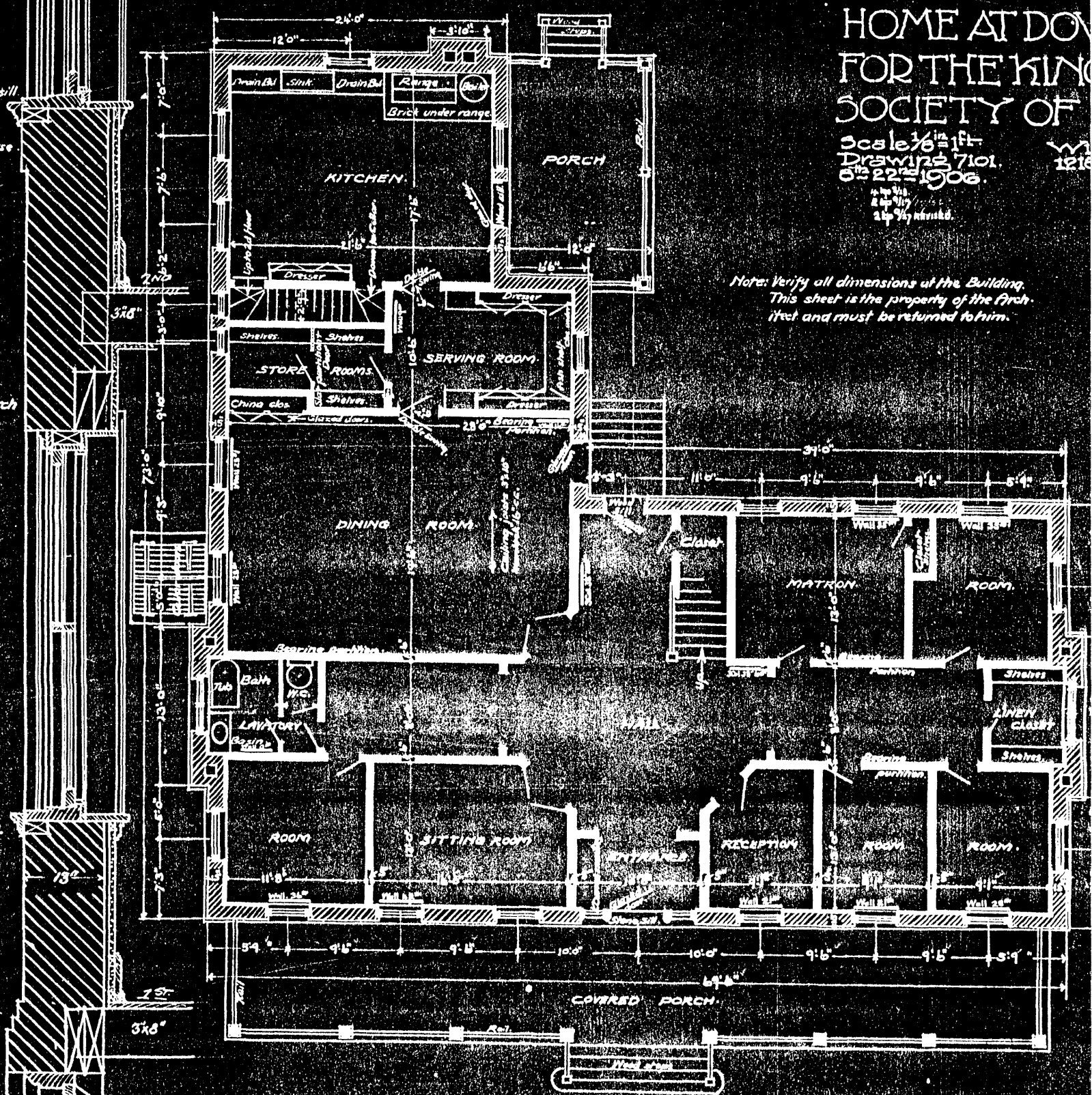
Buyer: PALMER HOME Assoc.

I certify that the improvements indicated herein are located as shown and do not violate the applicable zoning code or building restriction line as established by the plan of record.

LANDS OF	
PALMER HOME, INC.	
IN THE CITY OF DOVER	
KENT COUNTY - DELAWARE	
EARL A SMITH	SCALE 1" = 30'
LAND SURVEYOR	8-6-67
DOVER, DEL.	

HOME AT DOWN FOR THE KING SOCIETY OF

Scale $\frac{1}{8}$ " = 1'-0"
 Drawing 7101.
 8th 22nd 1906.
 14 1/2" x 11 1/2"
 14 3/4" x 11 1/2"



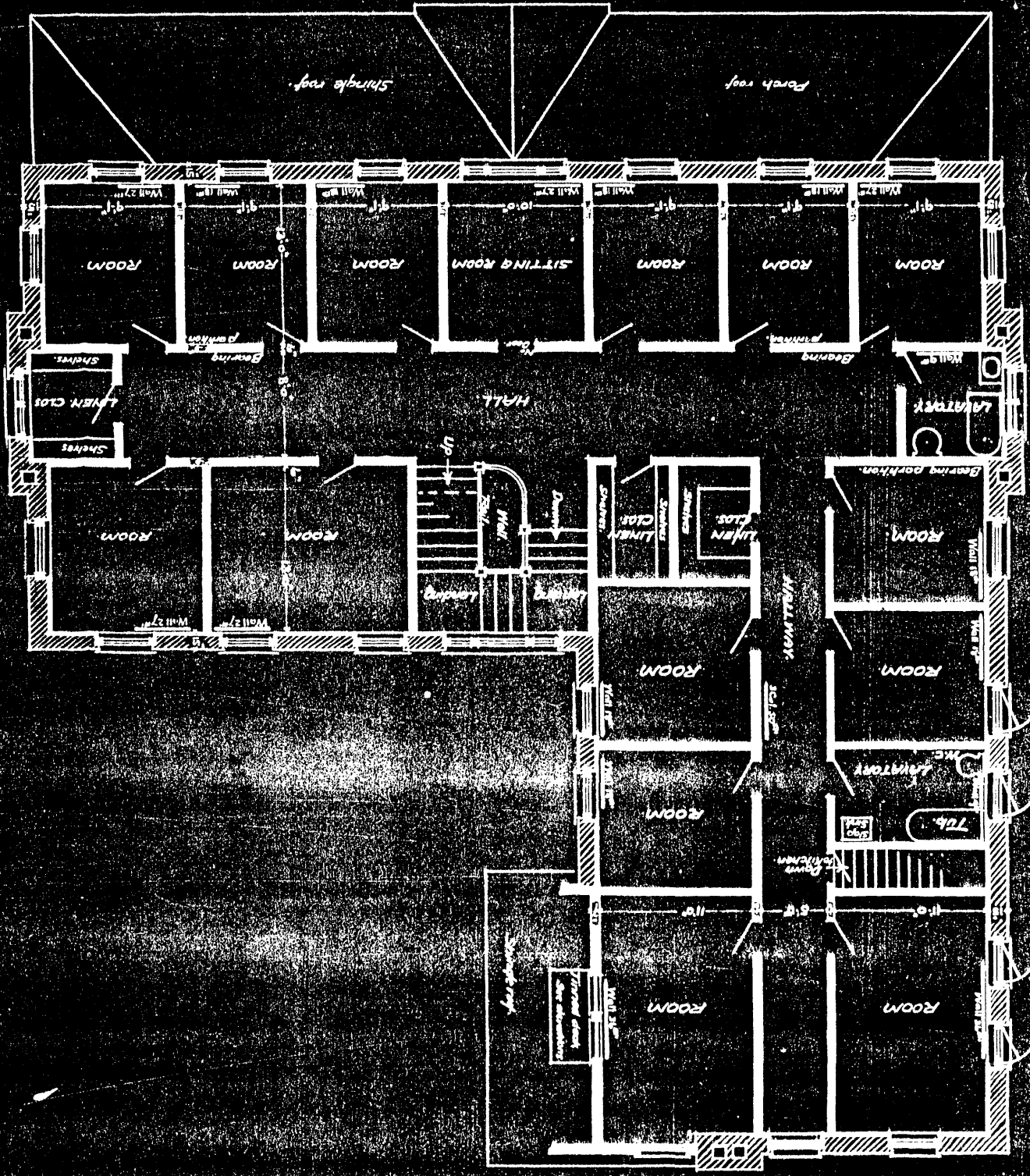
FIRST FLOOR

Palmer Home, Dover DE



HOME AT DOWNEY

SECOND FLOOR



Palmer Home, Dover, DE

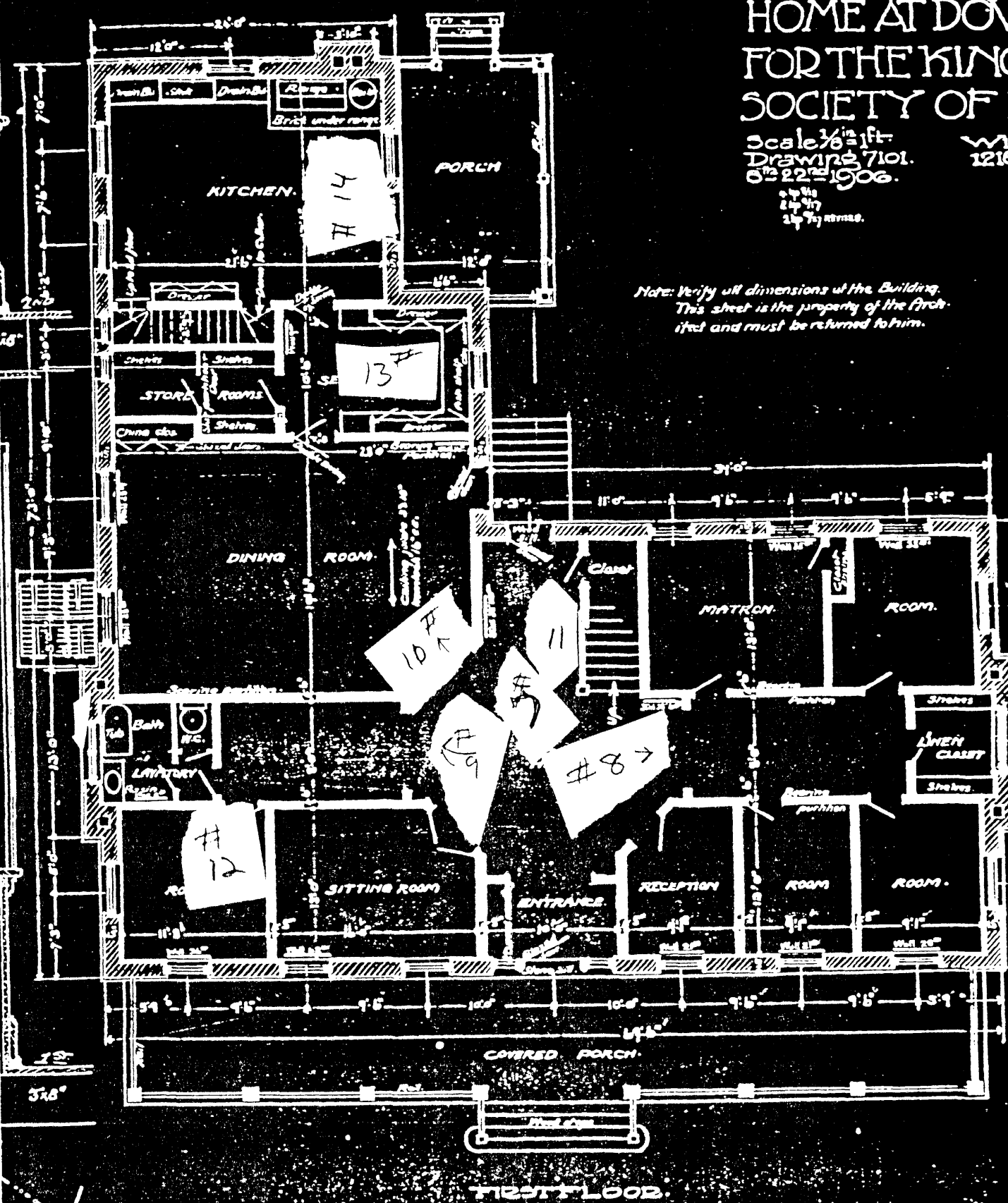
Carry porch footings
-80" below ground line.

NORTH SIDE

HOME AT DOWN FOR THE KING SOCIETY OF I

Scale $\frac{3}{8}'' = 1'$
 Drawing 7101. W.I. 1218
 5" x 22" 1906.
 6 1/2" x 11"
 8 1/2" x 11"
 2 1/2" x 7 1/2" mm. 10.

*Note: Verify all dimensions of the Building.
 This sheet is the property of the Arch-
 itect and must be returned to him.*



FIRST FLOOR.

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SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 88001443

Date Listed: 9/13/88

Palmer House
Property Name

Kent
County

DE
State

Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

Patrick Andrus
Signature of the Keeper

9/13/88
Date of Action

=====
Amended Items in Nomination:

There is an inconsistency in the nomination documentation regarding building materials - the text refers to asbestos shingles, while asphalt is listed at top of section 7. Steve DelSordo with the DE SHPO clarified that asphalt is the correct building material.