

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 16 1987
date entered FEB 12 1987

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

1. Name

historic John Osborne House

and/or common John Osborne House

2. Location

street & number 909 King's Highway West NA not for publication

city, town Fairfield x vicinity of Southport

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA	<input checked="" 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 Lowell F. & Nancy W. Hess

street & number 909 King's Highway West

city, town Fairfield x vicinity of Southport state CT

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Fairfield Land Records, Town Hall

street & number 611 Old Post Road

city, town Fairfield state CT

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1975 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

59 Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state CT

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

The John Osborne House faces north on King's Highway West, one block southwest of its intersection with Route 1, the Boston Post Road. The site is on the corner of Osborne Road, 100 yards east of Casco Brook and about 300 yards northwest of the Connecticut Turnpike. The house probably was built in the late 17th or early 18th century.

The original 1-story 5-bay central-chimney section of the house is flanked at both ends by 20th-century wings. The house is pleasantly shaded by trees on a lot of .85 acre with a stone fence running along the two street lines. (Photograph 1) There are several other pre-Revolutionary War houses in the neighborhood, which adjoins Pequot Swamp, scene of the last fighting in the Pequot War.

The house has wood shingles for both siding and roofing, and apparently always has. The roof shingles were replaced by the present owner and it seems likely that the siding shingles have been renewed during the 300 years of the house's existence.¹ The 12-over-12 windows are old but originally the house probably had casement windows. The plain door surround is splayed at the transom of lights. The brick chimney, rebuilt above the roof line in the 20th century, is offset to the right. (Photograph 3)

A lean-to was added several decades after the house was built. There is some thought that its roof pitch may have been altered and rear wall pushed out but in view of the sturdiness of the framing, as will be seen on the interior, this seems unlikely. (Photograph 13)

The wing to the west grew in three stages. At an unknown date a small addition was added at the southwest corner, to serve as a kitchen. The framing of this section is old and its dimensions are those of the foundations of a former tollhouse located near the King's Highway bridge over the nearby Casco Brook. Consequently, it is considered likely that the tollhouse was moved to become the kitchen.² Behind the tollhouse/kitchen is an area once enclosed, but now a recessed porch. There is a well in the floor of the porch. Its round stone cover and a pulley to raise it are still in place. (Photograph 7) The kitchen was enlarged to the west in the 20th century and a second story added to provide a bathroom. These changes resulted in the present asymmetrical gable roof. (Photograph 4) The east wing was added by the present owner. (Photograph 2) In the case of each wing the single window on the side elevation of the original house was enlarged to a door.

The front door opens to a small stair hall. The stairway rises steeply from left to right, with winders. It is partially enclosed by wide boards. Formerly the stair was entirely closed in by boards and a door, but alteration was necessary in order to carry furniture to the second floor. (Photo 8) Since the door is in the center of the house but at the far left of the hall, the hall and the chimney behind it are off center to the right. In the west front room framing is straight corner posts and east-west joists at about two-foot intervals, without summer beam. The fireplace has brick cheeks and stone rear wall. Its heavy oak lintel has a chamfered

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

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

For NPS use only
OCT 24 1986
received
date entered

John Osborne House, Fairfield, CT

Continuation sheet	Description	Item number	7	Page	1
--------------------	-------------	-------------	---	------	---

molding below it with lamb's tongue stop. The molding is pieced at the right, indicating that it may not be original. There is a large bake oven with iron door in the rear wall, upper left. Hearth is a single piece of gneiss. Fireplace accoutrements are old. The crane and the cast-iron fire back depicting Rachael at the Well are thought to be original. (Photographs 9, 10) Wide vertical boards cover the wall above the fireplace and make up the door to its left that leads to the cellar. The door is hung with butterfly hinges. Window and door surrounds are plain. There are no cornice or chair rail moldings. The wide floor boards appear to be original and are the only original flooring in the house. The east-west dimension of this room is 11' 10", with 8' 4" high ceiling. The framing is rough finished.

The east room has the same high ceiling but is larger, being 15 feet long. Its framing is similar to that of the west room, except that the joists are lighter and the workmanship is of lower quality. The joists are not fitted into the girts as neatly, leaving gaps. (Photograph 12) The stone fireplace has been rebuilt but its slate hearth appears original. This room is also free of decorative trim. (Photograph 11) In the rear girt pegs for the studs are visible. There are no corresponding pegs visible in the west room.

The lean-to is framed with gunstock posts and with smoothly finished joists which are placed closer together than the joists of the front rooms. (Photograph 13) The fireplace, without bake oven, is made entirely of brick including the hearth of square bricks. The fireplace wall has raised paneling. (Photograph 13)

In the framing of the stairway the west end of the stair enclosure is a wide horizontal plank in the same plane as the west wall of the chimney. (Photograph 15) While this circumstance tends to support the conjecture that the house may originally have been a 1-room structure, no confirmation can be found in foundations, sills or other basement framing. The framing supporting the first floor is in good condition free of rot or infestation. Except for the addition of two lally columns, it all appears to be old. The stone chimney base has the usual cavity on the west face and above it the framing for the west hearth appears to be original. (Photograph 16) The chimney base in part is made of large oak timbers. One of these timbers has pegs in it, indicating that it came from an even earlier structure.

In the second story the plate is seen to be above floor level and the ceiling is at the height of tie beams.³ (Photograph 17) The tie beams are half-lapped into the rafters and fastened with two large rose-headed nails. A small fireplace was introduced in the east room at about the turn of the 19th century, but historically there were no fireplaces at the second floor.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

OCT 24 1975

date entered

John Osborne House, Fairfield, CT

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number

7

Page

2

Contributing and noncontributing resources by resource type:

Contributing: One building, the house

Noncontributing: One building, the garage, c. 1975

1. What the siding is under the shingles is not known. At the second floor rear, under the lean-to roof, vertical planks are visible, separated by spaces that are about the width of a plank. The presence of planks in this upper rear wall suggests the possibility that all siding under the shingles is vertical planking.

2. This account of the provenance of the small kitchen addition is traditional, without documentation.

3. The nature of the framing at the ridge line is unknown. There is no visual access through the second-floor ceiling.

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 Unknown **Builder/Architect** Attributed to John Osborne

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion C - Architecture

The John Osborne House is significant architecturally because it is an example of a late 17th- or early 18th-century house with framing substantially intact. The house exhibits several unusual features, including its off-center chimney and a difference in sturdiness of the framing of the two principal rooms, that give it exceptional interest.

Criterion C - Architecture

The date traditionally associated with the house is 1673. The Assessor's record shows a date of 1734, with no indication of its source. Regardless of the exact year of its construction, the house is probably at least 2½ centuries old with good structural integrity, a circumstance that contributes to its architectural significance. In addition, it exhibits several features not commonly found in contemporary houses that add to its significance.

The off-center chimney immediately gives rise to the conjecture that this originally was a 1-room house. The difference in sturdiness of the framing of the two front rooms encourages the speculation, as does the indication of a possible exterior east wall in the plane of the chimney wall.

The absence of summer beams tends to support the later date of construction. While J. Frederick Kelly, the leading authority on early Connecticut houses, does not discuss the question at length, he does indicate that summer beams often were used as late as 1750.¹ Summer beams became less common as the use of plaster ceilings increased and as the massiveness of framing generally declined. Under this theorem, 1734 becomes a more likely date than 1673. The house once had plaster ceilings.

The absence of a bake oven in the lean-to fireplace indicates that this added room never became the kitchen. Often, when a lean-to was added to a 2-room house it did become the kitchen. Failure to follow the usual procedure is another idiosyncrasy of the house.

The absence of decorative woodwork in the 2-room house is an additional unexpected feature. It might be expected that in a well-established land-rich family, such as the Osborne family, a more elaborate house would have been built. A similar observation arises with respect to what appears to be less than the best workmanship in the east room.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property .85 acres

Quadrangle name Westport

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 1 8 6 4 3 0 2 0 4 5 5 1 1 4 0
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C
Zone Easting Northing

D
Zone Easting Northing

E
Zone Easting Northing

F
Zone Easting Northing

G
Zone Easting Northing

H
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is lot 32 on tax map 283. It is described at Fairfield Land Records, volume 738, page 628. The boundary encompasses the land that now goes with the house.

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

state NA code NA county NA code NA

state NA code NA county NA code NA

11. Form Prepared By

edited by John Herzan

name/title David F. Ransom/Consultant, National Register Coordinator

organization Connecticut Historical Comm. date February 21, 1986

street & number 59 Prospect Street telephone 203 566-3005

city or town Hartford state CT

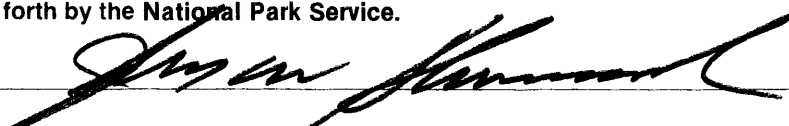
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___x 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.

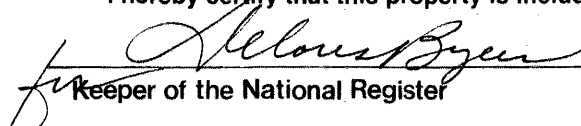
State Historic Preservation Officer signature



title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date October 17, 1986

For NPS use only

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

for 
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 2-12-87

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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

John Osborne House, Fairfield, CT

Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number

8

Page

1

For NPS use only

received

date entered

The rough finish of the posts, girts, and joists of the two front rooms is equally unexpected, unless possibly this was a rustic secondary structure, or unless they were intended to be cased in. There is no indication of casing.

The heavier framing and smoother finish of the lean-to, usually associated with earlier construction, places the addition at an earlier date than the main block. This anomaly has been resolved by John O. Curtis with the suggestion that the lean-to was moved from an earlier house.²

On the other hand, Abbott Lowell Cummings has pointed out that ceiling beams at 2-foot intervals are a New York trait derived from Dutch framing practices as found on Long Island and up the Hudson River Valley in the 17th century.³ Since Fairfield is located so close to New York, a Dutch influence is not improbable, and the possibility of a 17th-century date cannot be entirely discounted.

The John Osborne House does not fit the usual analysis of early houses and therein lies its interest and significance. Its great age from late 17th/early 18th century, the integrity of its framing, and the unusual features that are difficult to analyse combine to give it a special place in the history of traditional architecture.

The consensual view of pre-Revolutionary War houses tends to place them in a standard sequence of development from 1-room type through 2-room, lean-to, and full 2-story house. The non-standard structure often is overlooked, but it did exist. The John Osborne House is useful to the study of the architecture of the pre-Revolutionary War era because it is a non-stereotype and is an example of one of the variations that did occur. It is a good example of non-uniformity.

Historical Note

The view that this is the John Osborne House is taken from tradition. It was so identified in a 1935 list.⁴ A map of Fairfield in 1810, published in 1927, shows the house with the owner identified as Daniel Osborne.⁵

John Osborne (d. 1709) was the son of Richard Osborne, who sailed from London February 17, 1634. The father was a soldier in the Pequot War of 1637. The final battle in that campaign was fought in Fairfield at

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

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

John Osborne House, Fairfield, CT

Continuation sheet

Significance

Item number 8

Page 2

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Pequot Swamp, an area adjacent to the John Osborne House. By c. 1650, Richard Osborne was living in Fairfield. In 1671 the Connecticut General Court granted him 80 acres in Fairfield in recognition of his services during the Pequot War. The location of the 80 acres is not known, but the circumstances suggest that the John Osborne House may be built on the 1671 grant.⁶

John Osborne married in 1673.⁷ The year 1673 is taken as a possible date of construction for the house because building a house often occurred at the time of a marriage. It is also soon after the grant of land to Richard Osborne in 1671.

Tracing the history of the house back from its present owner is inconclusive. It is common knowledge that a major restoration was undertaken c. 1950 by an owner who acquired property long held by the Hall family. Mary D. Hall inherited from her father, Seth M. Bulkeley.⁸ According to the State Register of Historic Places form, a Bulkeley was the next owner after Daniel Osborne. The record is imprecise. It should be noted that imprecise record is not an unusual condition to be associated with a late 17th-/early 18th-century house.

1. J. Frederick Kelly, The Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut (New York: Dover Publications, 1963, reprint of 1924) pp. 67, 68.
2. John O. Curtis, letter to author, March 19, 1986.
3. Abbott Lowell Cummings, interview, October 24, 1984.
4. "A List of 87 Old Houses in Fairfield, Conn.," Fairfield Tercentenary Committee, comp., 1935.
5. Charlotte Alvord Lacey, comp., An Historical Story of Southport, Connecticut (Fairfield Historical Society, 1927), between pp. 10, 11.
6. For an account of the career of Richard Osborne, see Elisabeth Hubbell Schenck, History of Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut (New York: 1889) pp. 68, 401, and Donald Lines Jacobus, History and Genealogy of the Families of Old Fairfield (Fairfield: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1930-32) pp. 455, 456.
7. Jacobus, p. 456.
8. Fairfield Land Records, volume 71, page 90, April 22, 1901.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

John Osborne House, Fairfield, CT

Continuation sheet Bibliography

Item number 9

Page 1

Cummings, Abbott Lowell. Interview, October 24, 1984.

Curtis, John O. Letter to author, March 19, 1986.

Fairfield Land Records, volume 71, page 90, April 22, 1901.

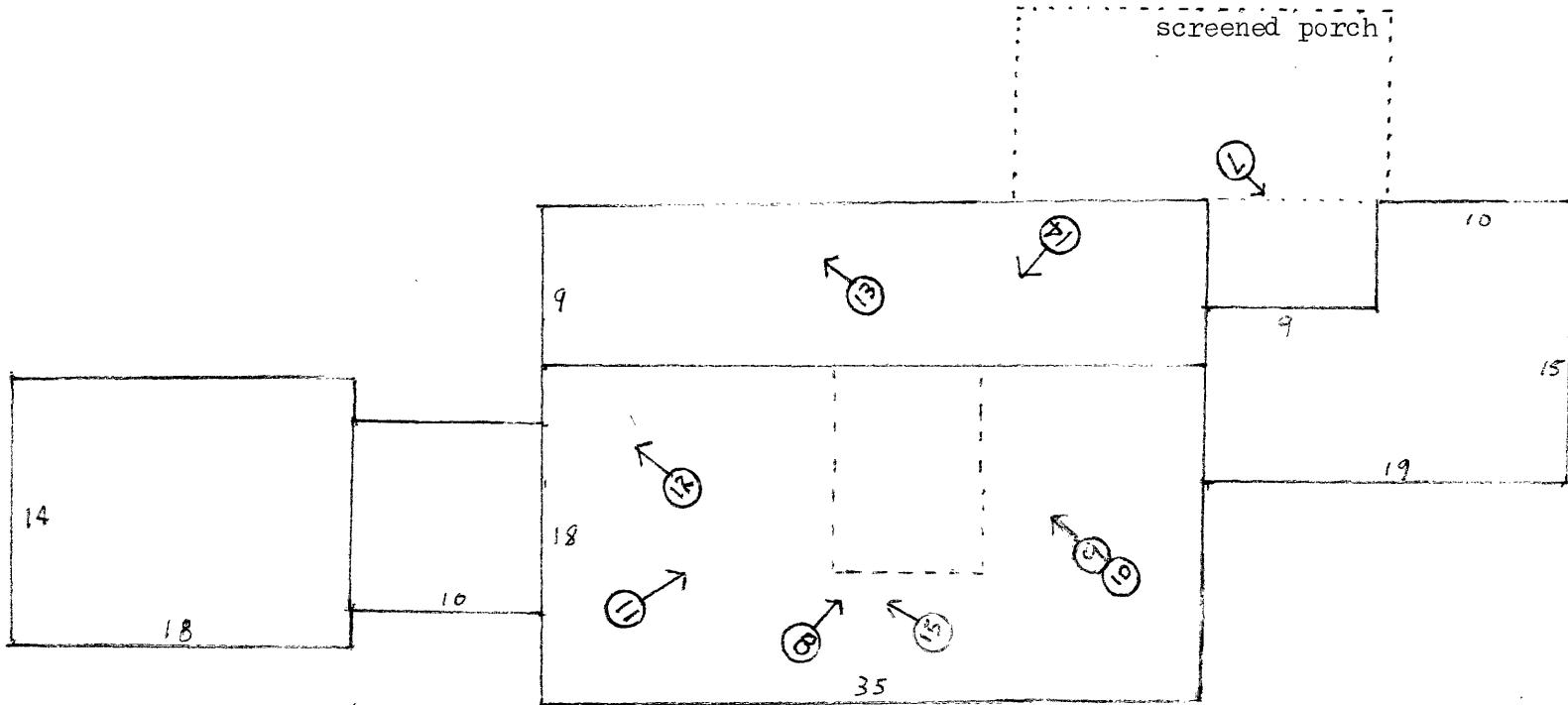
Jacobus, Donald Lines. History and Genealogy of the Families of Old Fairfield. Fairfield: Daughters of the American Revolution, 1930-32.

Kelly, J. Frederick. The Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut. New York: Dover Publications, 1963, reprint of 1924.

Lacey, Charlotte Alvord, comp. An Historical Story of Southport, Connecticut. Fairfield: Fairfield Historical Society, 1927.


"A List of 87 Houses in Fairfield, Conn." Fairfield: Fairfield Tercentenary Committee, comp., 1935.

Schenck, Elizabeth Hubbell, History of Fairfield, Fairfield County, Connecticut. New York: 1889.



John Osborne House
Fairfield, CT

Scale: 1" = 10'

Photo key - 



9

10

9

15

14

18

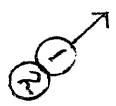
18

10

19



35



OCT 24 1968