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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name WILSON HOUSE

other names/site number Barrows House, Mt. Aeolus Inn

2. Location

street & number Village Street N/A not for publication

city or town Dorset (East Dorset Village) N/A vicinity

state Vermont code VT county Bennington code 003 zip code 05253

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Eliza Gilbertson, National Register Specialist November 1, 1995  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Vermont State Historic Preservation Office  
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

Edson M. Beall  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

12.13.95

Entered in the  
National Register

Wilson House  
Name of Property

Bennington County, Vermont  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	
	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
<u>1</u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/hotel

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls weatherboard

roof asphalt

other slate

marble

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Continuation Sheet

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RECEIVED  
NOV 6 1995  
Wilson House RESOURCES DIVISION  
Bennington County, Vermont  
COUNTY SERVICE

DESCRIPTION

Situated at the central street intersection of the mostly residential East Dorset village, the Wilson House (hotel) incorporates a main block, rear (east) ell, and connected former barn surrounded by informally landscaped grounds. The three blocks share two-and-one-half-story height, post-and-beam framing and clapboard sheathing, and gable-roofed form. The main block and east ell display basic Greek Revival stylistic features such as smooth corner pilasters and molded eaves entablature. The eaves-front, eight-by-three-bay main block carries continuous shed dormers on both slopes of its roof. A multi-bay porch with chamfered posts on pedestals wraps around the main (west), north, and south facades. The eight-bay main facade includes two entrances, the primary having multi-pane sidelights and transom; its window openings contain the six-over-six sash common to the building. The east ell also contains two entrances on both its multi-bay north and south eaves facades along with a greater variety of window sash. The former barn has been altered somewhat (especially in its fenestration) by conversion to meeting space and lounge; a massive stone fireplace chimney has been added to its north eaves facade. Appended to the barn's east gable facade, a one-and-one-half-story, gable-roofed former chicken coop has been converted to domestic use.

The Wilson House stands in the southeast quadrant of the central street intersection in the small village of East Dorset. The north-south street and primary axis of the village, now known as Village Street, was formerly part of U.S. Route 7. That highway was shifted one block westward when reconstructed during the 1960s, and the street was then terminated at the north edge of the village. The east-west street, known historically as East or Peru Street but now called Mad Tom Road, was terminated previously at the east edge of the village after being abandoned where it ascended the steep mountain on that side of the valley.

The hotel dominates the village center, being the largest single building. Diagonally across Mad Tom Road to the northeast, the Congregational Church constitutes a somewhat smaller local landmark. In front of the west-facing church and directly opposite the Wilson House's north facade, the informally landscaped church grounds serve as a central green shaded by a few deciduous trees. Across Village Street from the hotel's main

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Wilson House  
Bennington County, Vermont

(west) facade, the historic two-story general store building has been converted to apartments. The Rutland Railroad depot stood next to the north of the general store until its removal after the abandonment of passenger service in the 1950s. Away from this central nucleus, both streets are predominantly residential in character.

Paralleling the edge of each street next to the hotel, a sidewalk laid with thin rectangular slabs of local marble delimits the narrow strip of lawn along the west and north perimeter of the building. In front of the main (west) facade, two similar walkways of marble slabs link the sidewalk and the two-tier marble block steps serving the two entrances. Aligned with the walkway to the main (north) entrance, a rectangular marble horse block is placed at the outer edge of the sidewalk. A square marble hitching post now stands next to the horse block's south end; the post has been moved from its original position about 15 feet to the south. Short coniferous shrubs are planted at intervals between the sidewalk and the front porch.

Only two mature maple trees now survive on the front strip of lawn to provide shade for the hotel. Several maple saplings have been planted recently to replace other trees that previously formed a continuous row along the front and north side of the building. Other mature shade trees stand along the south edge of the lawn occupying the more expansive south grounds.

The Wilson House consists of three distinct but connected blocks - the main hotel block paralleling Village Street, an east ell block paralleling Mad Tom Road, and a former barn that now constitutes an east wing connected to the ell. The three blocks share simple rectangular plans, two-and-one-half-story height, post-and-beam wood frames, clapboard sheathing, and gable-roofed form. The Greek Revival style main block and east ell block retain their original domestic uses. The third and easternmost block was originally a detached carriage barn; it was extended westward during the 1920s the few feet necessary to connect it to the east ell, and then adapted to domestic uses (now a meeting room and lounge) relating to the hotel.

The main block of the Wilson House rests on a mostly invisible foundation of mortared rubble. The wood-framed, post-and-beam structure is sheathed with clapboards of medium exposure. At the corners, broad smooth pilasters with molded capitals support a

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Wilson House,  
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simple entablature that follows both the horizontal and raking eaves. The roof now lacks an interior chimney.

Oriented parallel to the north-south street in front of the building, the main block's gable roof is asphalt-shingled on the peripheral surfaces surrounding the continuous dormers. The shed-roofed dormers displace most of the original west and east roof slopes, being full-length (five bays) on the west and half-length (two bays) on the southeast slope (the latter is limited by the east ell's intersecting roof). Reflecting their c. 1920 origin, the dormers display plainer treatment than the main block; they are clapboarded with a narrower exposure, their corners are trimmed with plain boards, and their eaves have a plain frieze below a simple molded cornice.

The main (west) eaves facade extends a total of eight bays in length. The first story is arranged with a virtually symmetrical five-bay main group of openings plus a three-bay group on the right (south) side; this suggests that the latter section may have been added to the building after its original construction. The second story shows a similar distinction between the symmetrical five-bay main portion and a single bay at the right end. In contrast, the full-length dormer displays uniform spacing of its five bays, reflecting its addition after the possible extension of the building.

On the first story, the main entrance occupies the center (third bay from the left) of the five-bay group. The slightly recessed main entrance retains a solid wood door with four molded panels flanked by sidelights of two-thirds length above single vertical panels; four lights flank each side of the door and the five-light transom surmounts both the door and the sidelights. Echoing the corner pilasters, broad smooth pilasters with molded capitals enframe the entrance opening. The secondary entrance also has the central position (second bay from the right) within the three-bay group. This doorway lacks sidelights and has been fitted with a 15-light door (plus a combination wood storm door). Paneled pilasters with shallow inverted-V surfaces support a peaked lintel board (the only one on the exterior of the building) above the doorway.

The window openings on the first story are fitted with the six-over-six sash and plain surrounds crowned by drip moldings that are common to the house. Additionally the windows on the public facades (west, north, and south) of the main block are dressed

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with louvered wood shutters. The second-story windows are generally aligned above first-story openings except for the single bay on the right above the triplet first-story entrance group; their lintels abut the eaves entablature. The continuous dormer shares the same window treatment but its five regularly spaced bays are not aligned vertically with the lower openings.

Sheltering the first story, a porch spans the main facade in seven bays and wraps around both the north and south facades. The porch incorporates slender posts that are chamfered above rebuilt paneled pedestals of balustrade height. Springing from the posts, jig-sawn and pierced brackets support the molded eaves cornice. The shallow-pitched shed roof is covered with standing-seam sheet metal. The lattice-skirted porch deck is laid with narrow tongue-and-groove boards while the ceiling is beadboarded except for plywood on the south facade section.

The porch spans the north gable facade but only the right (west) two bays remain open; the left two bays have been infilled (prior to 1900) with clapboards to create a one-by-one-bay wing under the porch roof. The three-bay north facade now lacks an entrance; a former door in the right bay opening onto the porch has been replaced by a window.

The porch extends four open bays across the south gable facade and stops at its right (east) corner. Also lacking an entrance, the three-bay south facade displays a somewhat irregular arrangement of its window openings. The first story lacks a central bay; the three second-story bays are positioned nearer the right corner; and a single bay punctuates the gable.

Only the left (south) half of the main block's rear (east) facade is exposed next to the east ell block. Flush with the south gable facade, a plain one-story, one-by-two-bay wing with a nearly flat roof conceals the left half of the first story. An unmolded four-panel door enters the right bay of the wing's east facade while six-over-six sash light the other bays. The two-bay right half of the main block's east facade lacks an entrance. An exterior brick stove chimney ascends the right corner of this facade, interrupting the eaves entablature.

The interior of the main block follows the division of the main facade. Centered in the five-bay portion, the stair hall leads on the first floor to the north parlor (the ex-bar), the east dining room, and the south living room. The secondary south

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entrance opens directly into the library. These rooms are finished similarly with common materials and minimal decorative features. The floors are laid with the original medium-width softwood boards except for the replacement narrow yellow pine boards in the parlor. The walls and ceilings were covered with gypsumboard during the 1980s rehabilitation after the deteriorated original plaster-and-lath was removed.

Nearly all of the historic woodwork remains in place. The baseboards are plain except for single-beaded in the library. The vertical door surrounds are smooth except for those with molded panels in the north parlor. Both the door and window surrounds have peaked lintelboards with cap moldings in all but the dining room; the latter differs by having single-beaded surrounds with flat lintels. The four-panel interior doors generally have raised panels on one side. The open-string front stair incorporates turned newel posts, tapered cylindrical balusters, and rounded handrail.

On the second floor, a longitudinal (north-south) hall serves bedrooms and bathrooms arranged along both sides and at the ends. The larger (double occupancy) rooms overlook the streets while the smaller single rooms face the rear. The rooms share plainer woodwork than those on the first story; single-beaded baseboards and door surrounds provide the only surface relief.

The east ell block connects to the north half of the main block's rear (east) facade, offset one bay northward from the latter's north facade. The ell shares with the main block the stylistic features of broad smooth corner pilasters with molded capitals and a simple eaves entablature. The ell's asphalt-shingled gable roof matches the height of the main block's roof, and it is not interrupted by dormers. A metal kitchen ventilator with a domed cap emerges from the south slope near the center of the ridge; installed during the late 1980s, it replaced a brick stove chimney.

The north eaves facade of the east ell block presents to the street a somewhat irregular seven-bay arrangement that includes two entrances, in the second and fifth bays from the right (west) corner. Each has a one-light, multi-panel door (plus a wood storm door on the second bay) with a plain surround abutted on the right by a six-over-six sash. The second-bay entrance is sheltered by a simple shed hood while the fifth-bay entrance is crowned by a four-light transom. Most of the window bays are

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fitted with six-over-six sash; the two near the left corner of the first story are marked by historic one-over-ones. Only the second-story windows (whose lintels abut the eaves entablature) now have louvered shutters.

Largely shielded from public view, the east ell's south eaves facade extends a total of eight bays (mostly occupied by six-over-six sash) in an irregular arrangement. In the left-central position, a three-bay recessed porch has chamfered posts with brackets like those on the main porch and a rebuilt pent roof with a molded horizontal cornice. The porch shelters on the recessed south wall a left entrance with a door having two vertical lights over two panels; six-over-six sash light the two right bays of the same wall surface. A four-panel door enters the east wall of the porch. On the main wall of this facade, another entrance with a nine-light-over-three-panel door exists at the right corner. Near the left corner, a horizontal fifteen-light fixed window has been installed to illuminate the kitchen.

The interior of the ell contains on the first story the kitchen, the office, and a meeting room. On the second floor, a longitudinal (east-west) hall is flanked along both sides by bedrooms and bathrooms. The latter are finished somewhat differently than those in the main block, indicating either later original construction or remodeling. The floors are laid with narrow tongue-and-groove boards, and the doors have four molded panels. The windows, however, repeat the peaked lintelboards with cap moldings of the main block's first floor.

Connected to the east ell's east gable facade on a southward offset, the former barn follows the orientation of the east ell. The ridge of the barn's asymmetrical gable roof rises to a height somewhat lower than that of the east ell; the west gable peak emerges from the south slope of the ell's roof. The barn's south roof slope extends downward farther than the north slope, the result of a full-length south addition made possibly to provide more garage space for automobiles belonging to hotel guests.

The barn rests on a foundation of marble rubble except for a section of marble ashlar at the southwest corner. The clapboard sheathing has a narrower exposure than on the other blocks. The corners are trimmed with plain boards that support a fascia below the box eaves cornice. The south slope of the roof is shingled with slate of various colors, partly the result of individual replacements. A more general difference in colors



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corresponds to the joint between the original roof and the west extension; the latter surface has predominantly reddish color while the original is bluish-gray. The north roof slope has been covered with asphalt shingles.

Centered on the original barn roof, a rectangular ventilating cupola straddles the ridge. The clapboarded cupola has a vertical rectangular wood louver on each face except the south where the opening has been infilled with vertical flush boards. Above a box cornice, the gable cap is also shingled with slate. A copper weathervane in the form of a stylized flag rises from the center of its ridge.

Reflecting its conversion from vehicular to domestic use, the barn's irregularly arranged north eaves facade has been altered somewhat on the first story. The main entrance in the left-central position now has a one-light, multi-panel door crowned by a four-light transom, echoing the treatment of the fifth-bay entrance on the east ell block's north facade. The four first-story window bays contain six-over-six sash with plain surrounds like those on the other blocks. The second story, however, retains its historic appearance with two vertical-boarded, hinged loft doors of unequal size. Dominating this facade, a massive riverstone exterior fireplace chimney has been added (during the 1940s) near the right corner, interrupting the eaves cornice.

The fenestration of the eight-bay opposite (south) facade was altered during the late 1980s. A pedestrian entrance was installed in a right-central position; recycled from elsewhere, its Italianate door has twin round-headed lights above three molded panels. A rectangular terrace of marble slabs and blocks was laid in front of this entrance. In the second bay from the left corner of this facade, an historic vertical-boarded exterior sliding door remains in place although not now used. The six window bays contain pairs of two-light sliding sash with plain surrounds; these sash were installed after being discovered in storage inside the barn.

The barn's west gable facade is exposed only on the two-bay right (south) side. A vertical-boarded, hinged pass door provides entry near the right corner. A six-over-six sash set at a higher lintel level nearly abuts the left side of the door.

Appended to the barn's east gable facade, a one-and-one-half-story, one-by-two-bay, clapboarded wing (formerly a chicken coop)

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Bennington County, Vermont

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was renovated during the 1950s into a small apartment. The wing carries an asphalt-shingled asymmetrical gable roof with an extended north slope, the opposite of the barn's roof. The two-bay east gable facade includes a left-central entry with a one-light-over-two-panel door and coupled six-over-six sash on the right side.

**Historic Appearance:**

A photograph taken about 1900 shows East Dorset village from the lower mountainside northwest of the partly visible hotel. The main block's gable roof then lacked dormers; instead, a total of three interior brick chimneys rose from the ridge at each end and the center. The north facade of the east ell lacked the entrance in the second-from-right bay and the left two window bays did not exist. The barn's north facade was entered on the left side by double-leaf, sliding vehicle doors.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1852

Significant Dates

1852

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

Wilson House  
Name of Property

Bennington County, Vermont  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreege of Property about 0.5

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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Zone Easting Northing

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 See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Hugh H. Henry, Historic Preservation Consultant

organization N/A date June 1995

street & number Route 2, Box 226 telephone 802-875-3379

city or town Chester state Vermont zip code 05143-9418

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name The Wilson House of East Dorset

street & number P. O. Box 46 telephone 802-362-5524

city or town East Dorset state Vermont zip code 05253

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Wilson House  
Bennington County, Vermont

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wilson House holds significance in architecture for embodying the distinctive characteristics of a building type, period, and method of construction, specifically a wood-framed (post-and-beam) hotel of domestic scale constructed in the mid-19th century (1852) and exhibiting the basic features of Greek Revival style. The hotel was built contemporaneous with the arrival of the railroad in East Dorset village, and reflects the rapid expansion of commercial and industrial activities (especially the marble industry) that rail transport made possible. The hotel also represents the tourist lodging industry that developed in Vermont during the latter half of the 19th century, associated particularly with rail travel and outdoor recreational activities. The Wilson House relates to the statewide contexts of Spas and Hotels and the Outdoor Recreational Industry.

The creation of the railroad network through much of Vermont during the late 1840s and 1850s brought about major shifts in various economic activities. Most villages and towns along the railroads experienced substantial growth in development and population. Commercial and industrial enterprises either were quickly expanded or newly organized in response to the sudden availability of cheap and efficient transport. Among the commercial enterprises that benefited especially were the hotels. Passenger travel increased greatly both for business and pleasure, and travelers needed hostelries convenient to the railroad stations. New hotels were built in many places, including East Dorset, often situated adjacent to the stations.

The hotel that later became known as the Wilson House was constructed in 1852 for Ira Cochran (1810-94), a locally prominent entrepreneur. Apparently it was the first hotel in the village of East Dorset. Both its construction year and site across the street from the depot indicate that its origin related directly to the opening of the Western Vermont Railroad through the village the same year. The Western Vermont Railroad traversed the southwest quadrant of the state between Rutland and Bennington, connecting in those towns to interstate lines.

Although the East Dorset hotel is coeval with the railroad and its advanced technology, the building itself was already outdated in design at the time of its construction. The main block

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possesses the eaves-front orientation more typical of the early 19th century and a veneer of Greek Revival stylistic features left over from the second quarter. By 1852, the Italianate had supplanted the Greek Revival in architectural fashion, especially in the larger towns and cities.

The arrival of the railroad enabled great expansion of the local marble industry that had already begun to extract marble from the enormous deposits inside the mountains along the west side of the valley. Ira Cochran was directly involved in that industry; he developed a steam-powered marble sawing mill at East Dorset about the same year as the hotel. Furthermore, the mountains along both sides of the valley were covered with extensive stands of timber; Cochran both owned large tracts and participated actively in its cutting. Indeed, in a project considered audacious at that time, he and a partner built a mill for sawing timber on the mountainside east of the village and a water flume for conveying the sawn lumber down the mountainside to East Dorset. Cochran's hotel undoubtedly benefited from the increased activity in the marble and timber businesses made possible by rail transport.

An inset map of East Dorset village appears on the Bennington County map published by Rice and Harwood in 1856. The hotel is identified as simply the East Dorset Hotel without specific ownership. Ira Cochran then owned both the adjacent house to the east and the third house to the south. The "steam marble works" apparently owned by Cochran were located across the railroad tracks west of the hotel, and his "spout" and "lumber yard" appear at the east edge of the village.

The next proprietor of the hotel, Blake Barrows (1807-81), apparently gained that position at least partly through his marriage to Ira Cochran's daughter, Betsey (1817-1903). In 1859, the residents of the town of Dorset voted to hold the annual Town Meeting alternately at East Dorset and what was then called Dorset Corners (Dorset village). Accordingly, the meeting in March 1860 occurred at Blake Barrows' Hotel. The reasons for the choice of the hotel rather than the Union Church with its larger auditorium across the street are not known although may have related to the availability of refreshment on the premises.

Another map of East Dorset village identifying individual buildings appears in the Bennington County atlas published by F. W. Beers in 1869. The hotel remained in the possession of Blake Barrows. Ira Cochran owned three houses in the village,

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including the adjacent house east of the hotel on what was then called East Street. In the map's business directory, Cochran is listed simply as "resident;" he lived probably in the third house south of the hotel on the main road.

The Beers map shows the extent of the marble processing industry than concentrated at East Dorset. (The quarries themselves were located on the mountainside rising abruptly above the village on the west.) The north-south Rutland and Bennington Railroad effectively separated the residential village on the east side of the track from the several marble shops and steam marble sawing mills along the west side. The Beers map also shows the "lumber spout" paralleling Mad Tom Brook.

The next change of ownership also involved marriage and brought the Wilson name to the hotel. William C. Wilson (1840-85) of Dorset married Helen E. (1843-1927), daughter of Blake and Betsey Barrows. In November, 1871, Wilson acquired from the Barrows "one equal and undivided half" of the hotel property, paying \$3,000 for that interest. The hotel name was changed thereafter to Wilson House.

The proprietors of the Wilson House began to advertise to attract guests from outside Vermont. The 1874 edition of Statia's Hotel List Guide, published in Portland, Maine, contains an entry for the Wilson House. The daily rate was then \$1.50. The Statia guide was probably used especially by traveling salesmen, and the flourishing marble industry at East Dorset undoubtedly attracted a continual stream of them.

The partnership between the Barrows and Wilson continued into the 1880s. The business directory in Child's Bennington County gazetteer published in 1880 records that, in addition to being involved in the hotel, William C. Wilson was foreman at the marble quarry operated by J. K. Freedley and Sons about a mile north of East Dorset. In 1885, however, Wilson died prematurely at age 45, and his widow, Helen, became the manager of the hotel.

A decade later, a birth occurred at the Wilson House that would eventually relate the building to an international social movement. William and Helen's son, Gilman Barrows Wilson (who also worked in the marble industry), and his wife, Emily Griffith Wilson, were living at the hotel when a grandson, William Griffith Wilson (later known as "Bill W."), was born on November 26, 1895 in the rear part of the present north parlor. Within a

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few years, he and his parents moved first into a nearby house and then to Rutland, Vermont.

At the end of the century (November, 1899), the widows Wilson and Barrows sold the hotel to Gilman Wilson. However, his ownership lasted only a year; the transfer of the property in December 1900 to a trustee indicates possible financial problems. Subsequently title reverted to a Manchester bank, and in 1907, the bank sold the Wilson House to William Leary of Dorset. Leary retained possession until 1920 but he leased the hotel to Nellie L. Dunn for a five-year period, 1907-12. The contemporary decline of the local marble industry undoubtedly exerted adverse effects on the hotel business.

Gilman and Emily Wilson were divorced when Bill was eleven, and he and a sister returned to East Dorset to live with the Griffith grandparents in a house north of the hotel. Bill learned to play the violin, and occasionally performed impromptu on the front porch of his grandmother's hotel. After graduating from high school in Manchester and college in Northfield, Vermont, Bill married Lois Burnham (1891-1988), daughter of summer residents in Manchester, and the couple moved to New York.

The booklet entitled Where to Stop When in Vermont, published about 1913 by the state Publicity Bureau, contains a listing for the Wilson House. The hotel then accommodated twenty persons. Appealing specifically to visitors with outdoor interests, the listing states that "Mountain climbing and trout fishing offer entertainment for guests, and Emerald Lake is not far away." The rates were quoted only by the week, \$7 and \$10 (the difference is not explained but probably related to board).

After a half-century, the name of the Wilson House was changed probably in 1920 when Stella and Thomas Ambrose acquired the property. The new name, the Mt. Aeolus Inn, was derived from the prominent 3436-foot peak (also known as Green Peak) that rises southwest of the village. The change of name, however, does not seem to have benefited the Ambroses; their ownership lasted only a year before the hotel again reverted to the bank.

The physical form of the hotel's main block was also altered during this period. Continuous shed dormers were built atop the front and rear roof slopes, intended to enable the creation of additional guest rooms in the attic story. The rooms themselves,



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however, were never finished, owing presumably to financial problems experienced by the owners.

Among the stream of tourists and transient guests, the Mt. Aeolus Inn register from 1925 bears the names of "Bill Wilson & wife, Brooklyn, N. Y." Bill and Lois returned to his birthplace on July 5 near the beginning of an extended motorcycle trip around the country.

The next relatively long-term ownership of the hotel began in late 1925 when John H. and Florence M. Cunningham purchased the property from the bank. The Cunninghams would operate the Mt. Aeolus Inn for 21 years, until 1946. Their specialty during part of that time occurred on Sundays, when a sign in front of the hotel offered "Chicken Dinner \$1.50" to passers-by.

The Mt. Aeolus Inn is listed in a tourist promotional brochure published in 1926 by the Rutland Railroad, whose passenger trains served East Dorset. The inn's daily rate was then \$3.50, European Plan, and the guest capacity was twenty-five persons. The brochure was oriented toward summer outdoor recreation activities, especially mountain hiking and fishing, in Vermont. Its text extols the proximity of villages along the railroad to specific mountains, including "Green Peak for East Dorset." The listing of the Mt. Aeolus Inn in the brochure's directory of hotels indicates that the Cunninghams continued the earlier owners' thrust to attract guests with such interests.

The end of Prohibition enabled the Cunninghams to (re)open a bar in the hotel in 1933. Ironically, it was installed in the north parlor where William G. Wilson had been born. Wilson, by the early 1930s, was beginning his recovery from the alcoholism that had nearly destroyed his career and marriage during the latter 1920s. In 1935, he happened to meet in Akron, Ohio another native Vermonter and alcoholic, Dr. Robert Smith. Both members of the Oxford Group, Wilson and Smith subsequently formed a group specifically devoted to the disease of alcoholism, Alcoholics Anonymous. Reflecting the basic tenet of anonymity to encourage participation, the founders became known as Bill W. and Dr. Bob.

Bill W. conceived the Twelve Steps to guide recovery from alcoholism, and wrote the basic book, Alcoholics Anonymous, published originally in 1939. After the death of Dr. Bob in 1950, Bill W. became the paramount figure in the movement. A.A. subsequently burgeoned into an international movement with

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millions of participants. Bill W. died on January 24, 1971, and was buried at his birthplace, East Dorset, in the cemetery south of the village.

The name of Mt. Aeolus Inn persisted for more than a half-century. The building also underwent little further alteration apart from the interior where a few bathrooms were installed adjoining the guest bedrooms. The last owners under the Mt. Aeolus name, Henry G. and Mary C. Holden, purchased the hotel in 1958 and ultimately became the second longest-term (29 years, after Betsey Barrows) in the hotel's existence.

During the 1960s, the Holdens shifted the emphasis in the hotel's advertising to attract downhill skiers. This reflected the rapid expansion in Vermont during that period of the downhill skiing industry. Several ski areas with mechanical lifts were developed on mountains within 20 miles of Manchester, the next town south of Dorset. Manchester became the regional center for lodging and services relating to those ski areas, and some of the spillover reached into Dorset.

Furthermore, radical changes in means of travel occurred during the 1950s and 1960s. The Rutland Railroad discontinued passenger service through East Dorset in 1953, leaving only interstate bus service for hotel guests who did not drive. Then the main highway (U.S. Route 7) itself was moved westward from the hotel to bypass the village and allow higher speed, resulting in the loss of most transient business to motels. As if to emphasize the shift from rail to highway travel, the East Dorset station was removed to clear the way for a new street between the village center and the new highway.

The nearly total dependence of the hotel on automobile travel and the shift to the winter skier trade left it acutely vulnerable to the disruptions of both caused by the petroleum price and supply shocks of the early 1970s. These were compounded by illness in the owning family, and the result was that the Mt. Aeolus Inn became virtually moribund during the latter 1970s. The physical condition of the building declined steadily, further discouraging potential guests.

The link to Bill W. ultimately spared the hotel from sharing the fate of demolition that has eliminated many similar modest hotels in small villages throughout Vermont. In late 1986, Albert ("Ozzie") Lepper, a friend of the A.A. movement, discovered the

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deteriorating hotel, and then purchased it from Henry Holden in early 1987. Mr. Lepper were inspired to restore the hotel's physical condition and reopen it as a tribute to Bill W. and a place of respite for fellow participants in the movement.

The rehabilitation project began in 1987. The east ell block was in the worst condition; it required extensive structural and cosmetic repairs including the excavation of a partial basement, the construction of a new foundation, and the restoration of the first-floor kitchen and six second-floor guest rooms using existing materials wherever possible. The main block received equally thorough treatment; the bar was removed from the north room and it became the parlor, complementing the dining room and library on the main floor and the seven guest rooms plus bathrooms on the second floor. The exterior painting of the hotel in 1994 marked the virtual completion of the physical rehabilitation.

The hotel was reopened in 1988 under the historic name of the Wilson House. A non-profit foundation has been created to own the property, and volunteers serve to operate the hotel. Reflecting the guiding philosophy of the hotel's management, A. A. and related meetings are held regularly in the former barn that has been adapted to meeting and lounge space. The Wilson House does not advertise to attract guests, and only a small sign hangs over the main entrance to identify the building. Nevertheless, guests from throughout the United States and other countries find their way to Bill W.'s birthplace.

Nearly one and one-half centuries after its original opening, the East Dorset hotel has been restored both in physical condition and in its historic function as a small village hotel. The latter status confers on the Wilson House special significance in Vermont as dwindling numbers of its type survive and continue in their original use. The Wilson House, therefore, constitutes an outstanding representative of the modest hotels that flourished in Vermont villages during the latter 19th- and early 20th-century period when railroads provided the dominant means of passenger travel for business, pleasure, and recreation.

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BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property being nominated consists of the Wilson House (hotel) and its lot of about 0.5 acre of land located at the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Village Street and Mad Tom Road in East Dorset village. The boundary of the rectangular lot extends 135 feet in an north-south course along the east edge of the Village Street right-of-way and 180 feet in an east-west course along the south edge of the Mad Tom Road right-of-way. The deed to the property is recorded in Book 69, Page 503 of the Dorset Land Records.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundary of the property being nominated corresponds to the historic lot of land owned in common with the Wilson House since its construction in 1852.

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PHOTOGRAPHS

The following information applies to all photographs:

Wilson House  
East Dorset, Bennington County, Vermont  
Credit: Hugh H. Henry  
Date: May 1995  
Negative filed at Vermont Division for Historic Preservation

Photograph 1  
Main block, east ell, and barn - west and south facades; view  
looking northeast.

Photograph 2  
Main block - north and west facades; view looking southeast.

Photograph 3  
Main block - east facade; east ell - south facade; view looking  
north.

Photograph 4  
Barn - west and south facades; view looking northeast.

Photograph 5  
Barn and east ell - north facades; view looking southeast.

Photograph 6  
Interior showing north parlor and doorways into dining room  
(left) and main entrance hall; view looking southwest.