

PROPERTY NAME

Mount Tom Tower, Morris, CT

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Department of the Interior

National Register of Historic Places Form

1274

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Mount Tom Tower

Other Name/Site Number: NA

RECEIVED

OCT 20 1993

NATIONAL REGISTER

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: Mount Tom State Park

Not for publication: NA

City/Town: Morris, Litchfield, and Washington

Vicinity: NA

State: CT County: Litchfield Code: 005

Zip Code: 06759, 63, 93

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Category of Property

Private:     

Building(s):     

Public-local:     

District:     

Public-State:   x  

Site:     

Public-Federal:     

Structure:   x  

Object:     

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

Noncontributing

     buildings

     sites

  1  

     structures

     objects

  1  

  0   Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: NA

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

[Signature] 10/14/93  
Signature of Certifying Official Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- Determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- Determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
National Register
- Removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 12/2/93  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: outdoor recreation

Current: RECREATION AND CULTURE Sub: outdoor recreation

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY
REVIVALS/JACOBEBAN REVIVAL

Materials:

Foundation: STONE
Walls: STONE

Roof:

Other Description: WOOD, CONCRETE

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Mount Tom Tower is a stone lookout tower 15 feet in diameter and 34 feet high sited atop Mount Tom, ten miles southwest of Torrington. Erected pursuant to a gift to the State of Connecticut by Charles H. and Gustavia A. Senff, it marks the highest point in the 233-acre Mount Tom State Park. The park is in the Towns of Morris, Litchfield, and Washington; the tower is in the Town of Morris, abutting the Morris/Washington line, as delineated on a 1932 survey.

The entrance to Mount Tom Park is from Old Town Road, one-quarter mile south of State Road 202. (Figure 1). About one-quarter of a mile into the park the roadway changes to a trail for the 20-minute climb of 500 feet up to the top, where the elevation is 1291 feet above sea level. Facing south, the tower stands in a small cleared area on the rounded peak of the mountain. (Photograph 1) The principal building material is a rough black gneiss quarried on the site and laid up as rubble with deeply recessed mortar. (Photograph 2) Secondary building materials are concrete for the window enframements and observation level floor and wood for the stairways and other floors.

The tower is built in the shape of a section of a cone on a base 34 inches high which extends outwards from the walls 24 inches. The inside diameter of the first floor is 12 feet, 9 inches, which, with walls 2 feet, 3 inches thick, gives an exterior diameter of 17 feet, 3 inches. Rough voussoirs around the entrance doorway are the only attempt at "finish" in the structure. The first floor has three tall narrow windows, reminiscent of a fortification, as well as the door opening. The windows, slightly tapered in concrete enframements, are 6 inches wide x 39 inches high.

A wooden ladder-like stair ascends in a straight run from the first floor to the first landing. The treads, 43 inches wide, are 8 inches above one another without risers. There are four windows at this level, their positions rotated one-eighth of the perimeter

of the structure as compared with first- and third-level window positions. The stair continues to the second landing, where the wall is 1 foot, 7 inches thick (as compared with 2 feet, 3 inches at the first level). The floors of the first and second landings are wood. In the final run of the stair, leading to the observation platform, the treads are 30 inches wide.

The observation platform is open. Its floor is concrete, with a diameter of 10 feet, 2 inches and a parapet of 3 feet, 3 inches. The view is fine, extending on a clear day to Mount Everett in Massachusetts, the Catskills, and Long Island Sound. (Photograph 4) There is a U.S. Geodetic Survey 1981 merestone in the floor. Many names and initials are carved into the wood or painted on the stone at this and other levels.

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8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:\_\_\_ Statewide: x Locally:\_\_\_

Applicable National Register Criteria: A x B\_\_\_ C x D\_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D\_\_\_ E\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ G\_\_\_

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance		Significant Dates
ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION	NA	NA	1921
ARCHITECTURE	NA	NA	1921
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: \_\_\_\_\_

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

Mount Tom Tower is significant historically because of its early contribution to the formation of the State of Connecticut park system. Its land was the first to be offered to the state for a park. The structure is significant architecturally because it is an example of a plain lookout tower. A more sophisticated plan for the tower, which was not executed, influenced the design for Haystack Mountain Tower.

Historical Background

The State of Connecticut recreational park system got its start in the second decade of the 20th century through donations of land to the state. Prior to that time the only park owned by the state, Putnam Park, was a commemorative site, not available to the public for recreational use. The first offer of a gift of recreational parkland to the state was made in 1911 by Charles H. Senff (1837-1911). His land included Mount Tom. Senff, a New Yorker, was a relative of the Havemeyer family who were prominent in the sugar industry and was a director of the American Sugar Refining Company. The Connecticut General Assembly accepted his gift by special act on August 23, 1911. Senff died that same day, before the property was legally transferred. Consequently, other land became the first actually to be transferred to the state from the private sector for park use.

Gustavia A. Senff was an executrix of her husband's will and estate. She wished to carry out her husband's wishes, and for that purpose bought the land in question from the estate. The land consisted of several parcels, totalling about 180 acres, appraised for estate purposes at less than \$2000. She paid the estate the appraised value, and gave the land to the state in April 1913. Mount Tom State Park became the first to open in the state. For reasons unknown, the transaction was not confirmed by the General Assembly until Special Act #377 in 1917. The parcel in which Mount Tom stands is approximately 20 acres; it is this acreage, partially in Morris, Washington, and Litchfield, which is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

Albert M. Turner became the first secretary of the Connecticut Park and Forest Commission in 1914, serving until 1941. He played an active role in encouraging further gifts to the state, earning the sobriquet "Father of the Connecticut Park system." His interest in enhancing the park system took him so far as to make a design for the construction of Mount Tom Tower, which is discussed below.

### Architecture

A condition of the Senff gift to the state was that the state should maintain in perpetuity a tower at the summit of Mount Tom. An already existing wooden tower, built in 1888, consisted of a platform supported 25 feet above ground by four posts. It was designed by Professor H.S. Monroe of Columbia University, a summer resident of nearby Litchfield.

Established in 1913, the new Connecticut Park and Forest Commission in 1915 recommended erection of a permanent stone tower. The present structure was completed in 1921. It was built by a local contractor (identity unknown), using stone from the site. The needed cement, water, sand, and lumber had to be hauled up the mountain.

In June 1916 Alfred M. Turner drew a plan for the tower. (Figure 2.) It is quite different from the structure as built. It does not have the conical batter, nor the base. It does have an elliptical concrete stairway and a conical roof. In these respects it more closely resembles the Haystack Mountain Tower. At least two of Turner's details did not become part of the Haystack plan -- the smooth concrete finish for the interior wall and a table for a topographic map, under glass, of the field of vision. Turner's 34-foot height is very close to the actual height of the Mount Tom Tower.

Mount Tom Tower and Haystack Mountain Tower are about 25 miles distant from one another, built in 1921 and 1929, both under the influence of Alfred M. Turner. While there is no specific evidence that the architect of Haystack studied Mount Tom, the facts that the architect lived in Washington and that Turner was active in both building programs suggest that the design of Haystack was strongly influenced by Mount Tom Tower as built and by Turner's plan that was not executed.

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Little, Douglas, G., civil engineer, Torrington. Survey of Mt. Tom Pond. 1932.

McCahon, Mary. Historical and Architectural Resource Survey of State-Owned Properties. Statewide Historic Resource Inventory. Inventory form for Mt. Tom Tower. Connecticut Historical Commission, 1985.

Morris Land Records. Volume 9, page 239, April 8, 1913.

Mt. Tom files in archives of the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection.

Charles H. Senff. Obituary. New York Times, August 24, 1911, 7:5.

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: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency, Department of Environmental Protection
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**Acreage of Property: 20 prox.

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A	<u>18</u>	<u>4617200</u>	<u>643560</u>	B	<u>18</u>	<u>4617150</u>	<u>643520</u>
C	<u>18</u>	<u>4616960</u>	<u>643790</u>	D	<u>18</u>	<u>4616900</u>	<u>643800</u>
E	<u>18</u>	<u>4616910</u>	<u>643520</u>	F	<u>18</u>	<u>4617200</u>	<u>643280</u>

## Verbal Boundary Description:

The nominated property is a parcel of approximately 20 acres described at the Morris Land Record, volume 9, page 239.

## Boundary Justification:

The boundary of the nominated parcel is the same as it was when given to the State of Connecticut in 1913 for park purposes.

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: David F. Ransom; reviewed by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinator

Org.: Connecticut Historical Commission

Date: June 19, 1993

Street/#: 59 South Prospect Street

City/Town: Hartford

State: CT

ZIP: 06106

Telephone: 203 566-3005

PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph 1

View northwest

Photograph 2

Detail of Photograph 1

Photograph 3

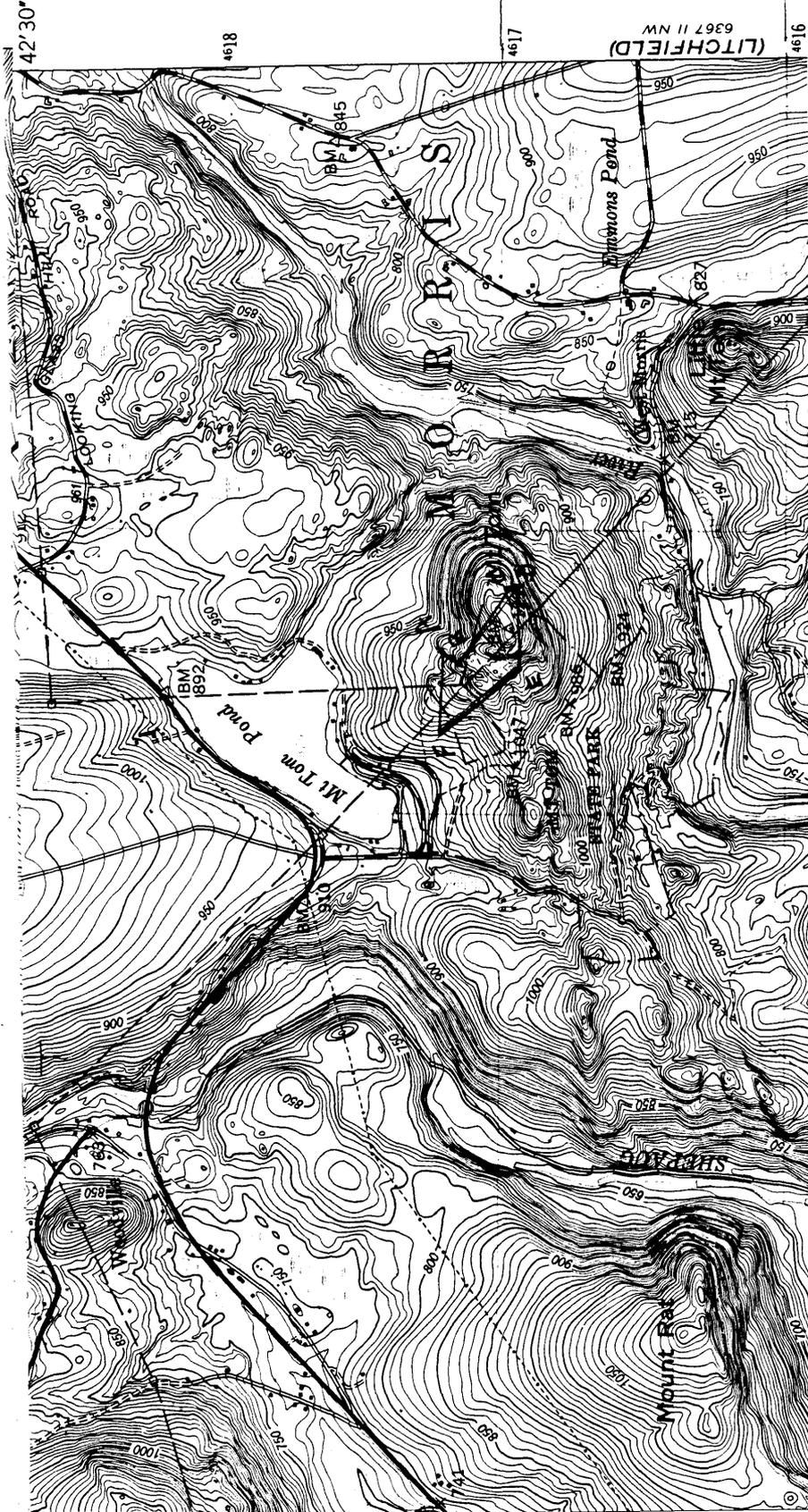
Second landing

View north

Photograph 4

Observation platform

View north



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UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A 18	4617200	643560	B 18	4617150	643520
C 18	4616960	643790	D 18	4616900	643800
E 18	4616910	643520	F 18	4617200	643280



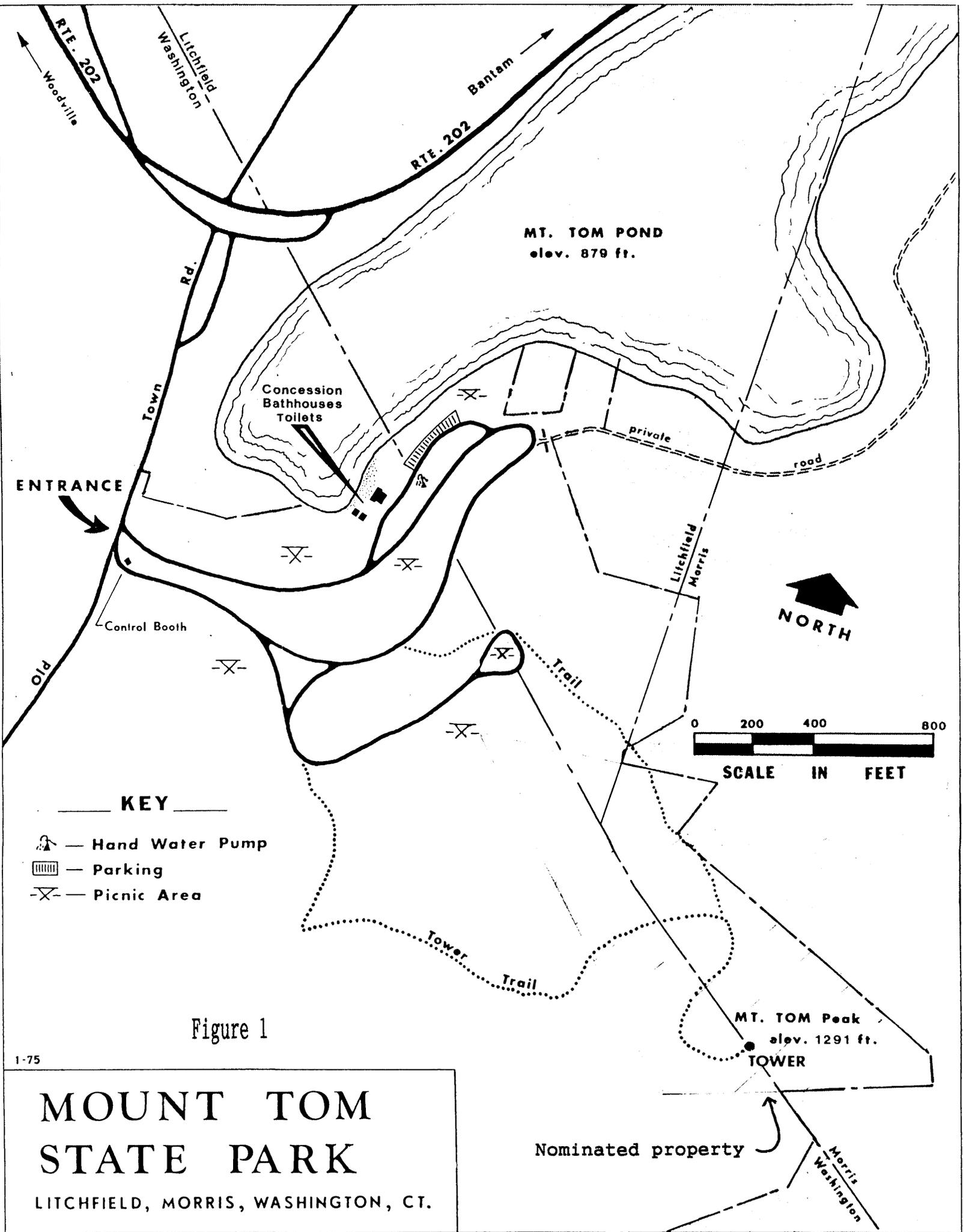
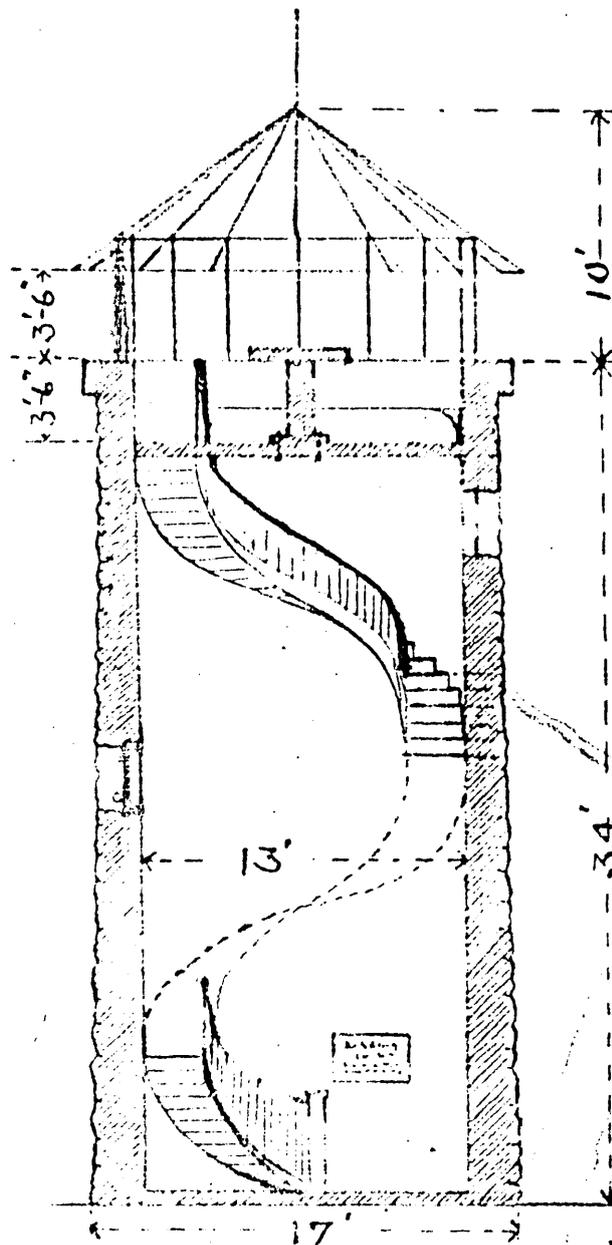


Figure 1

1-75

**MOUNT TOM  
STATE PARK**  
LITCHFIELD, MORRIS, WASHINGTON, CT.



Top of parapet

Floor of old Tower - 25'  
(and about present tree line)

SKETCH PLAN  
(Vertical Section)  
SENFF TOWER

MT. TOM RESERVATION  
CONNECTICUT STATE PARK COMMISSION

Outside Rough local stone  
Inside smooth concrete

Roof of permanent type, to match color of local stone (dk slate)  
Stairs reinforced concrete with wrought iron hand rail

The 4' table is intended to carry (under glass) a section of a topographic map carefully oriented, and covering the field of vision.

Double oak doors at main entrance, to lock open or closed.  
Both floors of concrete.

- Masonry 110 cu. yds.
- Roof 280 sq. ft.
- Glass 150 . . .
- Wrought hand rail 40 lin. ft.

Mount Tom Tower  
Morris, CT  
Figure 2

A.W. Turner June 1916