

1049

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

AUG - 8 2005

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 any 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 Robbins, Unni II, House

other names/site _____

2. Location

street & number 1692 Main Street

N/A not for publication

city or town Newington

vicinity N/A

state Connecticut

code CT

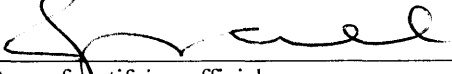
county Hartford

code 003

zip code 06111

3. 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally . (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)



7/29/05

Signature of certifying official

Date

Jennifer Aniskovich, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission of Culture and Tourism

State or 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 or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Unni Robbins II House
Name of Property

Hartford County, CT
County and State

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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): _____

Signature of the Keeper [Handwritten Signature] Date of Action 9-21-05

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>	<u>1</u> buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u> sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u> structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u> objects
<u>1</u>	<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/single dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)
POST MEDIEVAL ENGLISH/Late Colonial.

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)
foundation stone
walls weatherboard
roof asphalt shingle
other brick

Narrative Description

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

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Unni Robbins II House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section 7 Page 1

The Unni Robbins II House, erected in 1792, sits high above Main Street (Route 167) and West and East Robbins avenues (Route 287), an intersection still known today as Robbins Corner. Once the centerpiece of a 63-acre farm, the house now occupies less than an acre of land. Land to the west along present-day Walsh Avenue, was donated for a trolley line in 1897. When the curve in Robbins Avenue was partially straightened in front of the house, a small triangular green south of the intersection was carved out of the property. Ancient maples, elms, and sycamores in front of the house and along the green were sacrificed for the widening of the highway in 1962. At that time an additional half acre was lost when the present steep 20-foot bank was created along the Main Street frontage.

The Robbins House consists of a two-story main block (41' x 31') and an extensive rear ell with porches on the east and north, added after 1810 (Photographs 1, 2, 3). A small 1985 attached garage, which sits at an angle off the northwest corner of the ell, is sheathed with clapboard and has a gabled roof. Corner and sill boards set off the clapboard walls of the house and ell. Molded rake boards of the main block have slight cornice returns. The five-bay facade is highlighted by a centered, double-leaf paneled door, with interior strap hinges hung on pintels (Photograph 4). It is covered by a single board-and-batten storm door. The double-hung sash windows in the main house have several configurations, including 12-over-12 and six-over-six, the latter added around 1850. On the east elevation, these later replacement windows have projecting caps as well as trim blocks below the sills, the latter feature also found on the second-story facade windows. The ell displays 12-over-12 windows at the first floor and 12-over-8 at the second. Two windows on the north side under the recessed porch have nine-over-six sash.

The plan and interior appearance of the main block are more typical of earlier Colonial-style houses (see attached schematic). The hall, parlor and keeping room are arranged around a center-chimney stack that supports five fireplaces. Finishes include plaster ceilings and walls, except for fireplace walls in the parlor and hall, which have fielded paneling, as do most of the passage doors. Crown molding borders the canvas covered plastered ceilings in these rooms.

The parlor fireplace is framed with bolection molding (Photograph 5). Similar molding is found around the built-in corner cupboard, which has open shelves and two paneled cupboard doors below (Photograph 6). A molded chair rail runs along the wall at the window sill height. In the hall, the wide brick firebox (56" x 41" x 21") has a small beehive oven in the right rear wall, set behind a round-arched brick opening with a brownstone sill (Photograph 7). The same pattern of diagonal chasing on the face of the oven sill is found on brownstone blocks that frame the opening to the beehive oven in the keeping room. There, more typically, the front of the oven is next to the firebox (36" x 43" x 18"), which has an iron lintel (Photograph 8). A paneled door covers the opening to the oven and the storage spaces below. Two wall cupboards are found above the molded mantel board.

A third bake oven is located in the summer kitchen of the ell, where the beehive opening has a cast-iron door (Photograph 9). The firebox there is nearly the same size as the one in the hall (54" x 43" x 19"). Other features in the ell are a covered well and large soapstone sink in the pantry. The purpose of a windlass, or winch in the ell attic has not been determined. It consists of large spoked wheel on a long axle, which is rotated by ropes that run down through a chase in the bedroom below.

Although the triple-run staircase in the main house appears Colonial in style because of the fielded panels and applied curved brackets under the end of each tread, it is not as steep as earlier eighteenth-century examples (Photograph 10). To extend the run, thereby shortening the rise, required extra steps that extend into the front entryway. The balustrade also has a colonial appearance: balusters and newel posts are square in section and the posts, which have simple molded caps, extend down over the paneling. In keeping with the general colonial simplicity of the house, the similar fireplaces in the

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

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Unni Robbins II House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section 7 Page 2

parlor and hall chambers on the second floor, which have the same size openings (36" x 28" x 19"), have molded enframements. The mantel boards supported by cast-iron brackets are a later nineteenth-century addition (Photograph 11).

As expected, the Robbins House utilizes post-and-beam construction, which is visible in the cellar and the attic of the main block. In the cellar, a hewn longitudinal beam (nominal 8" x 10") runs west to east behind the chimney base, with a later brick partition wall under the west end. Hewn joists (nominal 6" x 7"; 28" o.c) run in the same direction as the beam on the south side of the cellar and north to south at the rear. The stone chimney base (9' x 7'), which displays sections of later brick infill, especially around the opening for ash dump, has angled wooden hearth supports on three sides (Photograph 12). In the attic, which has a modified rafter-and-purlin system, lateral braces are found at the ends of the purlins, but only the queen posts on the west side are braced to the girts in the floor (Photograph 13). Purlins (8" x 7") and rafters (nominal 3" x 5") are hewn while posts and secondary timbers display up-and-down saw marks.

Unni Robbins II House

Name of Property

Hartford County, CT

County and State

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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

1792 - 1955

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: Newington Historical Society

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Unni Robbins II House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section 8 Page 1

Statement of Significance

The Unni Robbins II House, an exceptionally well-preserved, late eighteenth-century example of the Colonial style, is distinguished by an exceptional level of interior craftsmanship. Locally significant for its continuous association with six generations of the Robbins-Welles extended family, descendants of settlers of Newington and Wethersfield, the Robbins House exemplifies the persistence of colonial methods of construction and traditional features well into the post-Revolutionary period even in the more developed rural regions of the state.

Historical Background and Significance

Newington was a parish of Wethersfield until it became an incorporated town in 1871. The parish was settled in the early 1700s by descendants of early Wethersfield families. Prominent among them was the well-connected Robbins family, settlers in all of Wethersfield's daughter towns, who were related to "Standing Order" in the colony by blood or marriage. Gentleman John Robbins (d. 1660), the patriarch and the first of that name in Wethersfield, was a deputy to the General Court (1653-1659). His advantageous marriage to the sister of Thomas Welles, the second governor of the Connecticut Colony, was just the first of at least seven intermarriages between succeeding generations of these families, including the parents of the last member of this extended family to own the nominated property.

John's grandson, Thomas Robbins (1706-1754), one of the first settlers in the Western Division of Newington Parish, built his house there about 1730 on land he received from his father, Captain Joshua Robbins (1673-1763). As Thomas had predeceased his father, Captain Joshua provided for the grandchildren in his will of 1759. Unni Robbins (1741/42 – 1816), the eldest, was a major beneficiary of his grandfather's estate. He inherited a 150-acre farm in Newington, which extended all the way west to the Farmington line, and built a brick house about 1763 at Robbins Avenue and Main Street southeast corner (still extant).

So many other members of the Robbins family built houses nearby that this intersection became known as Robbins Corner. Unni II (1742-c.1810) built his house (the subject of this nomination) on the northwest corner soon after his marriage in 1791 to Lucy Lowry, daughter of David Lowry, a well-known clockmaker. Unni III (1799-1869), the youngest of their three sons, inherited the house and the 63-acre farm in 1810. Apparently, the size of his share of the estate was based on services he rendered to his father between 1797 and 1810, which were detailed in the estate inventory and valued at 2691 pounds. His older brother, David Lowry Robbins (1793-1862), lived with the newlyweds until his marriage to Emily Foote about 1839. According to the historic maps, another brother, Martin Robbins (1796-1880), who never married, also lived in this house, while Unni III (and his son Henry) occupied the brick house built by his grandfather. Unni III and his brother David Lowry Robbins were among the wealthiest farmers in town. According to the federal census of 1860, their personal and real property was valued at more than \$40,000.

D. Lowry Robbins (1848-1888), son of the first David Lowry Robbins, married Catherine Woodhouse in 1875 and built a new Victorian on the site of the 1730 Colonial erected by Thomas Robbins. Active in the Newington Congregational Church, and the incorporation of Newington in 1871, D. Lowry Robbins also was a member of the Centennial Commission in 1875 and represented the town in the state legislature. Henry Robbins (1839-1898), son of Unni III, married Sarah Kellogg in 1875. The first selectman in Newington for 25 years, Henry eventually owned most of the Robbins property in town. A gentleman farmer, he employed four laborers on the home farm and probably had tenant farmers on the other parcels. A public spirited citizen, in 1890 he offered some of his land for a college for women (never built). When plans were made to run a trolley between Hartford and New Britain in the 1890s, the line was planned for Main Street. Henry donated land for an alternative right-of-way that ran along present-day Walsh Avenue. In 1890 Henry Robbins, who had no children, quitclaimed much of his property to Catherine Robbins (D. Lowry

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET

Unni Robbins II House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section 8 Page 2

Robbins' widow) and her only child, Bertha. The Unni Robbins II House on its then 59-acre lot was just one of eight parcels she received, which totaled 336 acres. Catherine died intestate in 1944. In the distribution of her estate, Bertha Robbins, who had married Gideon Wells around 1900, received 5 acres with this house. Their son, Gideon Robbins Wells, inherited the property in 1969 and lived here until his death in 2001, ending six generations of family ownership. A prominent member of the Church of Christ Congregational in Newington, Gideon Robbins Wells left the house to the church. The present owner, a collateral Wells descendant, bought the property in 2003.

Architectural Significance

The Unni Robbins II House, which displays a simplicity and conservatism at odds with the wealth and status of this prominent family, is even more remarkable for its pristine condition. Even though many generations of the family had the opportunity to make stylistic changes, the house appears today much as it did in 1792. The elegant fielded paneling and moldings that enhance the interior display an exceptional level of craftsmanship, but these understated embellishments are more typical of center-chimney Colonials built decades earlier, as is the traditional treatment of the balustrade of the triple-run staircase. The design of these stairs, with extra steps extending into the front hall, is quite rare and possibly unique.

Having a bake oven in the formal parlor is a decided anomaly, even in this very colonial house. In fact, its location in the rear wall of the firebox, a convention largely discarded after 1760, raises questions about the building history, as does the size of the fireplace opening, clearly large enough to be the primary cooking hearth. Although both features suggest the possibility that the original house may have been one-room deep, nothing in the visible framing in the cellar or the attic supports this theory.

Concessions to architectural fashion over time, or even material comfort are limited. Granted that stoves were not yet in common use when the ell was added, the fireplace there with its bake oven, is just a larger version of the earlier one in the keeping room. In fact, there is no indication that heat was ever provided by wood or coal stoves, as was common even later in the century. Chimney breast panels are intact, with no sign of a thimble opening.

What has changed about the Robbins House is its physical setting. Few properties could survive such a loss of integrity, but here encroachments from highway construction have left a historic cul-de-sac. Oddly enough, as the Robbins House stands today, isolated well above the busy streets below, and mostly hidden from its modern residential neighbors, it still conveys a distinct sense of time and place, an impression enhanced by its well-preserved interior. In passing through the main front doors, one steps back in time into a way of life virtually unchanged for more than two centuries.

Unni Robbins House

Name of Property

Hartford County, CT

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.6

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	18	689590	4617280	3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing	
2				4			

____. 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 Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant

organization Cunningham Preservation Associates, LLC date 12/10/05

street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (860) 347 4072

city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

Property Owner

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

name: John Bolles

street & number: 1692 Main Street telephone: (860) 666 9566

city or town: Newington state CT zip code 06111

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.).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Unni Robbins House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section 9/10 Page 1

9. Major Bibliographic References

Adams, Sherman W. *The History of Ancient Wethersfield, Connecticut: comprising the present towns of Wethersfield, Rocky Hill, and Newington, and of Glastonbury prior to its incorporation in 1693.* New York: Grafton Press. 1904.

Atlas of Hartford City and County. Hartford: Baker & Tilden, 1869.

Baxter, Elizabeth Sweetser, comp. & ed. *Centennial History of Newington.* Newington : Centennial Celebration Committee, 1971.

Cutter, William Richard, ed. *Genealogical and Family History of the State of Connecticut, Vol. I.* New York: Lewis Publishing Co., 1911.

Federal Census, MS. 1860-1920.

Historical and Architectural Survey of Newington. Connecticut Historical Commission, 1979.

Newington Centennial House Tour, June 6, 1971.

Newington Land and Probate Records.

“Old Trees Don’t Stump State Highway Crews.” *Hartford Courant*, August 5, 1962.

Smith’s Map of Hartford County, Conn. Philadelphia: H. & C.T. Smith, 1855.

Trumbull, J. Hammond, LLd. *The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut.* Boston: Edward J. Osgood, 1886.

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description: The boundaries of the nominated property are described in the Newington Land Records, Town Clerk’s Office, volume 448, page 345.

Boundary Justification: The boundaries of the nominated property encompass the house and the remaining associated land.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES CONTINUATION SHEET

Unni Robbins House, Newington, Hartford County, CT

Section Photo Page 1

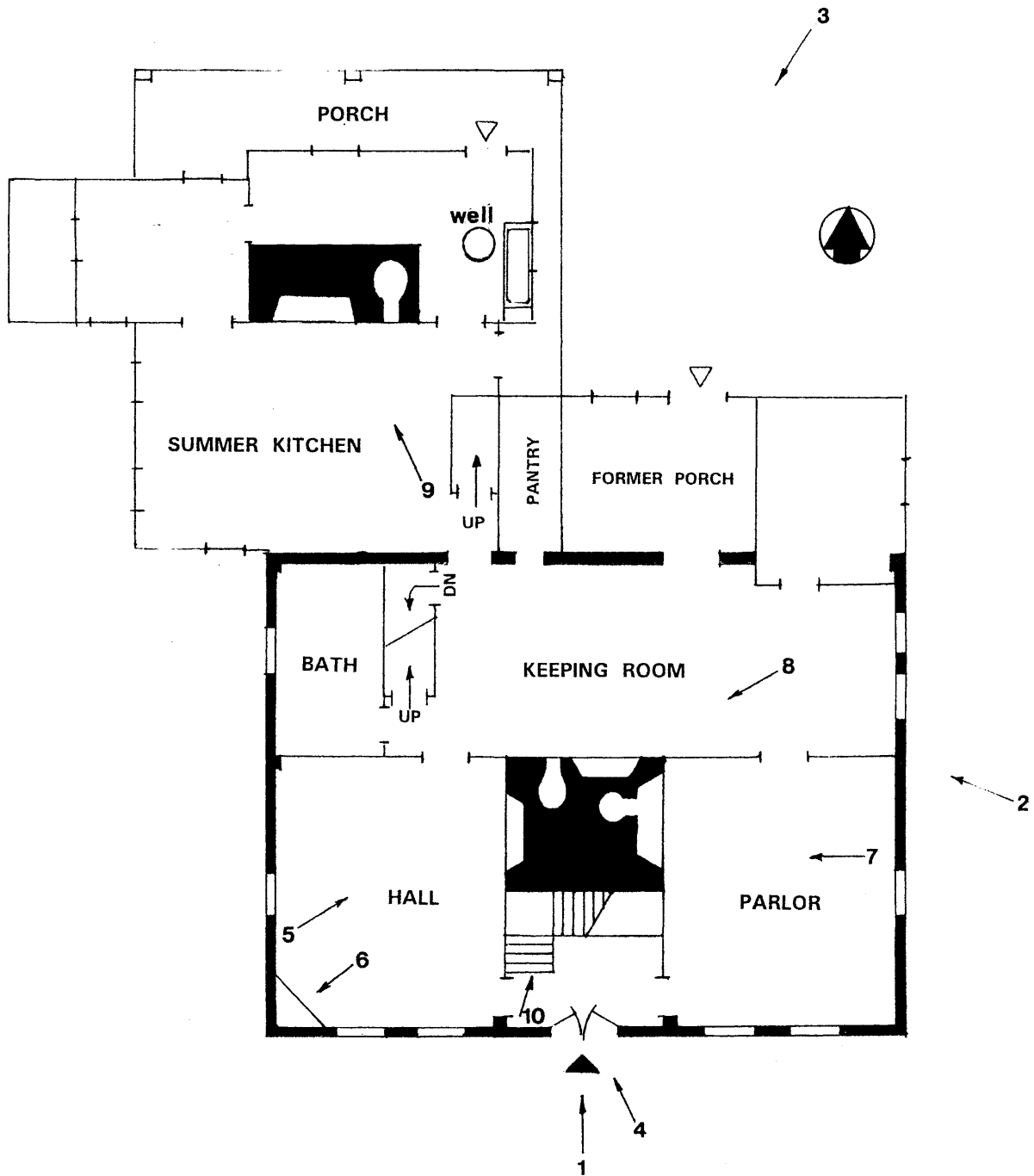
List of Photographs

Photographer: Cunningham Preservation Associates

Date: 11/29/03

Negatives on file: SHPO

1. Unni Robbins House, facade, camera facing N
2. Unni Robbins House, east elevation, camera facing NW
3. Unni Robbins House, rear elevations, camera facing SW
4. Unni Robbins House, front door, camera facing N
5. Unni Robbins House, parlor, camera facing NE
6. Unni Robbins House, corner cupboard, camera facing SW
7. Unni Robbins House, hall, camera facing W
8. Unni Robbins House, keeping room, camera facing SW
9. Unni Robbins House, kitchen, camera facing NW
10. Unni Robbins House, front staircase, camera facing NE
11. Unni Robbins House, parlor chamber, camera facing NE
12. Unni Robbins House, chimney base main block, camera facing SW
13. Unni Robbins House, attic main block, camera facing SW



UNNI ROBBINS HOUSE
 Newington, Hartford County, CT

SCHEMATIC FLOOR PLAN

Approximate Scale: 3/32" = 1'
 Numbered Arrows: Photograph Views

Cunningham Preservation Associates, LLC