

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Coffing, John. C., House
other names/site number

2. Location

street & number -- Main Street (Route 44 west of Lime Rock Road)
city, town Salisbury
state Connecticut code CT county Litchfield code 005 zip code 06068

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private (checked)
Category of Property: building(s) (checked)
Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 2, Noncontributing 0
Total 2
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
Signature of certifying official John W. Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer
Date 11/9/90

In my opinion, the property meets (unchecked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.
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 (checked)
determined eligible for the National Register (unchecked)
determined not eligible for the National Register (unchecked)
removed from the National Register (unchecked)
other, (explain:)
Signature of the Keeper
Date of Action 12/18/90

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellingDOMESTIC/secondary structure

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwellingCOMMERCE/businessDOMESTIC/secondary structure

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL/Postmedieval EnglishEARLY Republic/Federal

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation limestonewalls weatherboardroof asphaltother \_\_\_\_\_

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The John C. Coffing House is a Colonial/Federal style house located on the east side of Main Street (Route 44), just south of the center of the Town of Salisbury. An elongated building which extends back from the road to the east, it was built in several sections: a 1799 main block, with an extended rear wing attached to a former carriage house (Photograph #s 1, 2, 3). The facade faces south and the gable end of the original main block faces the street (Photograph #4). A mid-nineteenth-century barn, which is used as a garage, is built partially into a slope to the northeast of the house (Photograph #5). The landscaped site with an open lawn and mature trees slopes away from the house on the south side to an area which was laid out as a formal English garden in the late nineteenth century and is now being restored.

The main block has the typical form and plan of a center-chimney colonial with a five-bay facade. It is two-and-one-half stories in height with a gable roof and rests on a dressed limestone foundation, a material still quarried locally. A brick chimney, rebuilt from the attic floor up in 1913 following a fire in the attic, passes behind the ridge. A delicate dentil course trims the cornices, and the west pedimented gable peak (facing the street) is flushboarded with a fanlight. An enclosed Colonial Revival portico is located in the center of the facade. An 1865 engraving of the house on a map of the village shows another doorway which is no longer extant. It had a pedimented portico and was located on the right side of the gable end of the street elevation. (See Exhibit A.)

It appears from architectural evidence that the four-bay two-story wing on the east end of the main block incorporates an original two-bay one-story section which was probably built at the same time as the house and used as a summer kitchen. A former plate on the east end of the two-bay section, partially submerged in the first-floor ceiling, marks the end of this section. The subflooring over the crawl space of this wing, visible from the main cellar, matches that of the main block. In the late nineteenth century the wing was extended two more bays to the carriage house, and later raised to two stories. Other additions to the house over time include a one-story late nineteenth-century open porch and small hipped-roof shed addition on the rear elevation. In 1913 the fenestration of the original facade was rearranged on the east end to accommodate an enclosed Colonial Revival-style pedimented entrance portico.

The main block has several unusual structural features. In the cellar a large stone base surmounted by heavy cross beams supports the stack; the beam ends are supported

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

John C. Coffing House, Salisbury, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 1

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by diagonal braces which rest on short beams set into the masonry on either side. Built into the base of the stack is a small space that local tradition maintains was used as a place to hide during the threat of Indian attack. It could be sealed off with a stone (still extant) which exactly fits the size of the opening and has its own flue for ventilation. Although the roof was entirely rebuilt after the fire in 1913, the original framing systems of principal purlins and braced queen posts was maintained.

At the main entrance, the original doorway opening was enlarged when the portico was added in 1913 and now the entrance portico opens directly into the "porch," or front hall. The kitchen on the east side of the main block has a large cooking fireplace with a deep beehive oven (Photograph #6). Like all the fireplaces in the house, it has cheeks and a lintel of limestone. There is a fireback of Salisbury iron, one of two in the house. The oven, with its separate flue and lintel, is concealed behind a door in the panelled fireplace surround of cherry wood added about 1900. A nineteenth-century partition at the north end of the kitchen was moved by the present owner to enlarge the room. The parlor to the west of the entrance has a fielded-panelling on the fireplace wall added in 1989 by the present owners; bolection molding frames the fireplace opening (Photograph #7). The few characteristic interior Federal details include cased corner posts throughout, which are small in scale, and a Federal-style surround in the parlor chamber (Photograph #8). The original triple-run staircase has a balustrade and an open railing around the second-floor opening, both made of cherry (Photograph #9).

The two-story ell has a large fireplace of exposed painted brick built in the east wall of the first floor. It also has a beehive oven with an iron door set in an iron frame, a feature probably added in the mid-nineteenth century. No panelling or mantel piece remains around this fireplace. The entire ell has been laid with new flooring and the first floor currently houses the antique store operated by the present owners. The second floor of the ell has been remodelled. Originally laid out with a long central hall with a series of small servants' rooms on either side, it is now a two-room apartment.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

INDUSTRY  
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1808 - 1872  
1799 , 1913

Significant Dates

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

John Churchill Coffing

Architect/Builder

unknown

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

The John C. Coffing House is historically significant for its association with a leader of Connecticut's iron industry in the nineteenth century (Criterion B). The house is architecturally significant as a well-preserved representative example of the vernacular Colonial/Federal style.

Historical Significance

John Churchill Coffing (1776-1847) came to Salisbury from Southbury, Connecticut, in the late eighteenth century. In the early 1800s, Coffing entered into a business partnership with John Milton Holley of Salisbury, known as Holley & Coffing. The partnership incorporated as the Salisbury Iron Company in 1828, establishing an inter-family dynasty which revitalized the iron industry of northwestern Connecticut.

Salisbury had become the center of the iron industry in Connecticut in the eighteenth century. In addition to the high-quality hematite iron ores in the area, the industry flourished there because of the availability of waterpower, limestone, and hardwood forests for charcoal, all required in the production of iron. In the early years iron ore was oxidized with charcoal and hot-forged under relatively low temperatures (600°F) in a bloomery, producing bar iron. Limestone was introduced as a flux in the later blast furnaces which operated at higher temperatures (1200°-1400° F) and produced a higher quality pig iron. Blast furnaces were customarily built near waterpowered forges since waterpower was also needed to power the bellows for the blast. Cold air blasting was done until 1828, when the more efficient hot air blast was introduced. Salisbury's colonial blast furnaces could produce as much as five tons a day and made direct sand castings of cannon, anchors, cannonballs, etc. for the Revolution. The industry prospered through the Revolutionary period but declined in the late eighteenth century.

The partnership of Holley & Coffing was typical of the entrepreneurial spirit of the post-Revolutionary generation. It combined capital, expertise, and through Holley's father, Luther, control of the best sites for the mining and production of iron in Salisbury. Luther Holley had purchased the old Lakeville blast furnace, the first

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Howell, Kenneth T. and Einar W. Carlson. Men of Iron: Forbes & Adam. Lakeville, Conn.: Pocketknife Press, 1980.  
Roth, Matthew. Connecticut: An Inventory of Historic Engineering and Industrial Sites. Washington, D.C.: Society for Industrial Archaeology, 1981.  
Salisbury Bicentennial Celebration. Lakeville: Lakeville Press, 1976.  
Salisbury, Map of., 1865.

**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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property 2.5

**UTM References**

A 

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

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Salisbury Land Records. Vol. 124, Page 72, August 27, 1979.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The lot described above encompasses the remaining buildings and land associated with the original builder of this house, John. C. Coffing.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant, Reviewed by John Herzan, National  
organization Cunningham Associates Ltd. date 5/29/90 Register Coordinator  
street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (203) 347 4072  
city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

John C. Coffing House, Salisbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 1

in the town, control of the Lime Rock and Mount Riga forge sites, and hundreds of acres of woodland for charcoal production in 1799. He had also bought shares of the hematite iron ore beds on Salisbury's Ore Hill, which produced the highest quality iron. In 1808 Holley & Coffing established a major ironworks at Mount Riga. It completed construction by 1810 of a blast furnace, a dam, two forges, and a triphammer. The furnace was operated by Joseph Pettee, the iron master until his death in 1838. The standing ruins of an industrial community of several hundred houses and the remains of the furnace and dam are all that is left from this operation which functioned until about 1860. Although the open-pit iron mines in the area remained in production, the ironworks closed because the nearby hardwood forests used for making charcoal had been totally stripped. In 1825 Holley & Coffing built another blast furnace at Lime Rock, which they sold in 1830 to the Barnum Richardson Company, manufacturers of railroad car wheels. By the Civil War, eight blast furnaces there were supplied with charcoal brought in by rail and iron ore from Ore Hill. Although the coke-fired iron and steel industry had generally relocated by the late nineteenth century to New York and Pennsylvania, chill-cast wheels were made there until 1923.

The Holley-Coffing iron dynasty continued for three generations. It included George Coffing, John Coffing's son who inherited his estate; Alexander Hamilton Holley, John M. Holley's son, elected governor of Connecticut in 1857; and his son Alexander Lyman Holley. A. L. Holley was a reknowned metallurgist who is credited with acquiring the rights to the Bessemer process and bringing it to America.<sup>1</sup> Together with John Griswold and John Winslow, he perfected the process which revolutionized the American steel industry in Troy, New York, in 1865. The business partnership was consolidated by intermarriage between the families in 1835 when John C. Coffing's daughter Marcia (a.k.a Mary) married Alexander H. Holley, who had joined the firm in 1820. Alexander H. Holley also founded the Holley Manufacturing Company, producers of cutlery, in 1844 in Lakeville at the site of the first blast furnace in Salisbury. Pocket knives were made there until the 1930s.

The John C. Coffing House stands on land purchased from Sarah Stiles Holley, which had formerly belonged to her grandfather, Benjamin Stiles. Coffing probably completed his house sometime between April of 1799, when he purchased the lot, and September, when he recorded the deed (SLR 10:479). He also invested in a sawmill and bought a large merchant store in the town. At his death, his estate was left to his children, allowing his widow Maria Coffing, his second wife, life-use of the house. By the time Maria Coffing died in 1865, the older sons had died or had left the area, so the estate, which included ore rights in Salishury mines, passed to George Coffing, the youngest son. In 1883, 11 years after George Coffing's death, his heirs, including his widow Fanny Coffing, sold the house to Donald Warner, the husband of George Coffing's daughter, Maria. Warner was the probate judge for the

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

John C. Coffing House, Salisbury, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 2

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Town of Salisbury until his death in the early twentieth century. After 180 years of ownership by the extended Coffing family, the house was sold to the present owners in 1979.

Architectural Significance

By combining colonial form and plan with Federal detailing, the John C. Coffing House is typical of vernacular architecture of the period. Even its orientation on the site suggests the colonial influence: facing south for winter warmth rather than the more conventional presentation of the facade to the street. Both the interior and exterior Federal-style detailing is understated considering the wealth of the family associated with the house. It does, however, display the fine craftsmanship that was customary in this period for that socio-economic group. Especially notable is the development of the gable end, the public face of the house, with its flushboarded pedimented and very delicate dentil courses.

The interior has been remodelled over time, but has retained its essential integrity. The addition of a Colonial Revival portico in 1913 has created a more spacious entry hall than is customary in a center-chimney house, but it sets off the fine design and woodwork of the triple-run staircase. The late nineteenth-century surround of the kitchen hearth, the legacy of Judge Warner, the last historic owner, is in keeping with the period of the house and handsomely executed in cherry. The paneled wall of the parlor is equally well-crafted. Although this feature of the 1989 restoration is more commonly found in houses built prior to the Revolution, it is in keeping with the pronounced colonial influence in the house. Other minor changes by the present owners have been sympathetic to the period and style of the house and have not affected its integrity.

End Note:

1. The blast furnace process invented by Sir Henry Bessemer (1813-1898), an English engineer, which utilizes a refractory-lined metal converter.

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

John C. Coffing House, Salisbury, Connecticut

Section number Photos Page 1

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List of Photographs

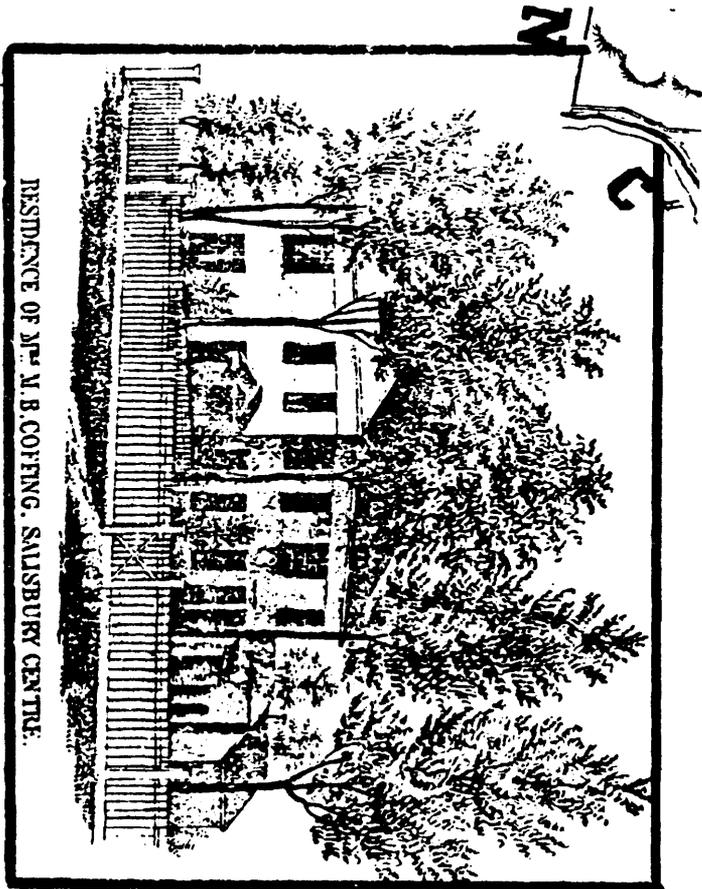
Property: John C. Coffing House, Salisbury, Connecticut

Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd.

Date: 4/90

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

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|--|--|
| 1. Facade<br>Facing: NE                        | 2. Rear and northwest elevations<br>Facing: SE |
| 3. Southeast and rear elevations<br>Facing: NW | 4. Northwest elevation<br>Facing: SE           |
| 5. Barn/Garage<br>Facing: N                    | 6. Kitchen<br>Facing: NW                       |
| 7. Parlor<br>Facing: S                         | 8. Parlor Chamber<br>Facing: E                 |
| 9. Staircase<br>Facing: NE                     |  |



John C. Coffing House  
Salisbury, Connecticut  
EXHIBIT A  
(enlarged photocopy)