

56-1731

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

### 1. Name of Property

Historic name: Abijah Comstock House  
Other names/site number: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

### 2. Location

Street & number: 1328 Smith Ridge Road  
City or town: New Canaan State: CT County: Fairfield  
Not For Publication:  Vicinity:

### 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 at the following  
level(s) of significance:

national  statewide  local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

A  B  C  D

<u>Mary B Dunne / Deputy SHPO</u>	<u>9/1/17</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>CT SHPO</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

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

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**Signature of commenting official:** **Date**

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**Title :** **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

**4. 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 of the Keeper

10/16/17  
Date of Action

**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

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Site

Structure

Object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>2</u>	<u>          </u>	buildings
<u>1</u>	<u>          </u>	sites
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	structures
<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>	objects
<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

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

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COLONIAL/ Georgian  
EARLY REPUBLIC/Federal

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**Materials:** (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

Foundation: STONE/granite; Walls: WOOD/shingle; Roof: WOOD/shingle;

Other: BRICK (chimneys); STONE/granite (stonewalls)

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

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### Summary Paragraph

The Abijah Comstock house is part of a historic former farmstead located in New Canaan, Connecticut. The property, located at 1328 Smith Ridge Road, sits on the west side of the road at the north end of New Canaan not far from the New York border. There are three contributing resources on this two-acre property: a house, an Eaves-Front Bank, and the site. The site consists of the grounds surrounding the house, which includes stone walls and a stone well. The house sits close to the road behind a stone wall. The terrain slopes down from the street to a stream and small pond at the western edge of the property. The house, which now includes Federal-era and Greek Revival-style elements on the exterior, is a two-and-one-half story, side-gable building clad in wood shingles on both the roof and walls, and a fieldstone foundation. Two brick chimneys are evenly spaced

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along the ridge of the roof and a wooden deck runs across the full width of the back of the building. The barn, which is a small, three-bay, carriage barn with vertical siding and a wood shingle roof, sits north of the house just to the west of a gravel parking court. Stone walls are located throughout the property, marking property boundaries, terraces down the slope, and resulting from a barn that formerly stood on the property, south of the house. A modern pool is located at the base of the slope, to the west of the main house. While the property has lost its main barn and has had modern features added to it over time, it retains sufficient integrity to demonstrate the historical significance of the property.

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**Narrative Description**

The property is located at the northern end of New Canaan, just south of the New York state line (Figure 1). This part of New Canaan is characterized by relatively large houses set back from the road on properties converted from former agricultural land. Zoning requires four-acre lots for new construction. The landscape in the area is a mix of woodlands and open lawns. The property has a similar mix, with mature trees shielding the property from the nearby road, and open space framing views across the valley behind the house. Foundation plantings run along the east and north sides of the house, while a gravel drive fills the area in front of the barn. The gravel continues across the front of the house, filling the area between it and the stone wall that separates it from the road. Large fieldstones create a walkway through the gravel from the driveway to the front door.

**Abijah Comstock House (c. 1770, c. 1810, contributing building)**

The central feature of the property is a two-and-one-half story, five-bay-wide, double-pile house built in two phases (Figure 2). The northern portion (three bays) of the house was constructed ca. 1770 with a scribe-rule timber frame, while the southern portion (and the current roof structure) was part of an addition constructed with a square-rule timber frame likely built between 1799 and 1818.<sup>1</sup> A cornice encircles the building, with a simple

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<sup>1</sup> Scribe-rule and square rule are two different approaches to laying out a timber frame. In general, scribe-rule timber frames were constructed prior to square-rule timber frames. A scribe-rule timber frame is one in which each joint is unique and must be assembled with specific elements for the frame to be at its strongest. The irregularities of one timber are scribed onto its

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molded board fascia and a soffit adorned with modillions. Slight cornice returns punctuate the lower corners of each gable. The façade (east elevation) has five openings evenly spaced across each floor (Photo 1). (Photo locations for exterior photographs are shown in Figure 3.) The first floor includes a centrally located door flanked by a pair of windows on each side of it. The trabeated surround, six-panel door, and molding profiles on the door and surround suggest that it may have been added during the Greek Revival period (ca. 1830-1860). Windows to the south of the door are 12/12 sliding-sash; those in line with the door and to the north are 12/8 sliding sash. The difference in windows demonstrates the two main construction phases of the house. The majority of the windows appear to be historic.

The north (side) elevation has three openings on each level: windows flank a central door on the first floor; three windows are evenly spaced across the second floor, and three windows are located in the gable (Photo 2). The windows on the lower two floors are 12/8 sliding sash while those in the gable include a central half-round window flanked by quarter round windows. A trabeated surround with plinths, pilasters, and a simple cornice encloses the centrally located door. The south (side) elevation has two pairs of 12/12 sliding sash windows on each of the first two floors and three windows matching those in the northern gable in the southern one (Photo 3). The windows on the west (rear) elevation match those on the east (Photo 4). A simple door is centrally located in approximately the same location as the front door. A wooden deck runs across the west elevation. Because of the house's siting on a steep ridge, more of the fieldstone foundation is exposed on the west elevation than on the east. At the southern end of the west wall is a large, currently unexplained, bulge in the foundation wall. It appears to be intentional but its original use has not yet been determined.

The interior of the house contains approximately 3000 square feet of living area (New Canaan Assessor n.d.) with eleven

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mate so that their joint will be tight. Timbers that make up a joint are labeled with matching raising numeral so that the correct pieces, such as the rear, left chimney post and the left chimney girt, are joined together at the time of raising. A square-rule frame is one in which the elements of joints are reduced to standard dimensions at the point of intersection. No raising numerals are required as it no longer matters which specific timber is used in the appropriate location, e.g. either chimney girt can be joined to either chimney post.

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rooms. The main entrance opens into a central circulation space, with the stairs to the second floor directly accessible. The kitchen and informal space on the ground floor is just to the north of this space, while the more formal spaces are located south and west off of this entry. Bedrooms are located on the second floor. The house is finished with wood floors, plaster ceilings and walls, and wood trim in most of the rooms. Windows are sliding sash throughout.

The interior of the building reflects its two phases of construction. The timber frame and some of the elements in the north portion of the house likely date to ca. 1770. No physical evidence in the building contradicts this construction date. Changes during the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are predominantly limited to this section of the house. The southern two bays are a result of a thorough renovation during the Federal period (1790-1820). The history of ownership suggests that the changes were likely made by the building's second owner, Samuel Comstock, during his period of ownership, between 1799 and 1818.

At the northern end of the first floor is a modern kitchen that stretches nearly the full depth of the house, with a small bathroom and storage area at its eastern end and stairs in the northwest corner (Photo 5). (The location of interior photographs is shown in Figure 4.) To the south of kitchen on the east is a large open space with a paneled fireplace in the northwest corner, the entry in the southeast corner, and a flight of stairs in the southwest corner (Photo 6). The stairs have a straight run from east to west, with simple turned balusters and a molded bannister. The wall adjacent to the stairs is paneled, as is the area beneath the stringer. Plans drawn during renovation work undertaken during the late 1930s suggest that at least the hand rail, and perhaps more of the stairway, was changed at that time (NCHS Files). While the firebox and surround appear to come from the first phase of the building, it is an unusual plan. A wall separating the fireplace from the stairs, and creating a side-hall plan, may have been removed, although no physical evidence of this could be found. A room sits to the west of the chimney, behind the stairs, and contains a small fireplace with a simple Federal-style fireplace surround (Photo 7).

To the south of the stairs are two rooms of equal size flanking the southern chimney (Photos 8 and 9). Each room has elaborate Federal-period wood trim, four windows, and an elaborate chimney

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surround. There are 12/12 windows, taller in this part of the house to take advantage of the higher ceilings, which are finished with double-architrave surrounds incorporating flat panels beneath each window (Photo 10). The doors have four panels, flat with molded edges on the front and narrow beads along the stile edges on the back, and elaborate surrounds. On the north side of each doorway a simple, single architrave is in keeping with the more restrained design of these spaces. On the south, in the more elaborately decorated rooms, the architraves have four distinct parts. The trim starts with plinths on each side of the door. Rising from these are flaring pilasters that increase in width as they rise from elaborately molded bases. The pilasters support an elaborate frieze band that runs across the lintel of the door. In the east room, the frieze includes a central, oval fan (centered on lenticular boss), flanked by rectilinear pilasters that rise from the pilasters flanking the opening. The surround ends with a soffit with a recessed and gently bowed central section (Photo 11). In the west room the door surround is capped with a similar but subtly different treatment. There the fan element is semi-circular and located not in the frieze but on the underside of the soffit, emphasizing the bowed shape of its central section (Photo 12). The final design element in each of these rooms is a fireplace surround that uses many of the same elements as the door surrounds. In the east room, tapering pilasters (similar to those flanking the doors) rise to support a frieze that includes a central fan element flanked by pilasters on each side. The central plaque includes an oval fan with quarter round fans in each of the corners. A mantel projects from the top of the frieze; like the cornice on the doors it has a slightly bowed central section. The wall above the mantel is plastered (Photo 13). In the west room, a similar approach with many of the same elements is used (Photo 14). The pilasters flanking the firebox flare as they rise, the mantel has a gently arcing central section, and the decorative frieze over the firebox has a central, decorative plaque. However, in this room a large panel reaching to the crown molding surmounts the mantel and the plaque is a simpler version, without the corner fans.

The second floor has a similar mix of materials from the original construction of the house, Federal-era renovation, and twentieth-century renovations. The northern end of the house, over the kitchen, is divided into three rooms of roughly equal size. These rooms include a fireplace and smoke chamber in the central section and a continuation of the stairs in the northwest corner. The central section of the second floor was



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rearranged during a 1938 renovation, with bathrooms added at the northeast and southwest corners. The posts and plates of the 1770 portion of the house are visible in this section of the building. The southern section of the second floor is a step up from the rest of the level to accommodate the taller rooms on the first floor. The scale of the rooms in this section on the second floor mirror that on the first floor but have a lower ceiling height and simpler, Federal era fireplace surrounds.

The attic shows that the current roof runs continuously from one end to the other, demonstrating that this roof was put on at the same time as the building was extended to the south. The roof is constructed of common rafters connected by half-lap joints. Because of the relatively low pitch of the roof and the depth of the house, the rafters are supported by purlin plates. The cellar contains a large chimney base for the northern chimney. The basement is full height only under the northern section of the house; the southern section sits over a low crawl space. The cellar floor is concrete throughout.

**Eaves-Front Bank Barn (ca. 1800-ca. 1830, contributing building)**

A one-and-one-half story, three-bay by one-bay, square-rule framed, Eaves-Front Bank Barn is located north of the house and faces east (Photo 15). Bank or Side-Hill Barns, as they are also called, became popular by the 1820s because they "provide[d] a frost-free manure storage area beneath the stables. The barn cellars also housed animals, especially pigs, and provided storage for farm implements" (Visser 1997, 70). There is a tradition of pigs being housed in the lower level of the barn at one point during its history.

The barn has a side-gable roof with overhanging eaves, asphalt shingle sheathing, and a low cupola. The barn is built into the hillside with a full-height basement exposed on the west (rear) elevation. It has a hewn, square-rule frame and the walls are sheathed with vertical wood boards. The foundation is made up of large fieldstones.

Two pairs of large doors for vehicles are located on the south end of the facade, with a pedestrian door at the north end of that wall. Three openings are located on the second floor of the facade, including two 3/3 sliding sash windows and a central utility door that provides access into a loft. A pair of double doors at the north end allows access to the basement area. A single 6/6 window sits in the first floor of that end, with a

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pair of 6/6 windows in the gable. The south gable has a pair of 6/6 windows on the first floor with a pedestrian door at the east end and a pair of 6/6 windows in the gable. The west wall has three six-light windows and a door in the cellar and a pair of six light windows under the eaves. While the square rule framing of this barn indicates that it is not as old as the earliest part of the house, its construction and type are consistent with the period of significance of the property.

### **Comstock House Grounds (ca. 1770-present, contributing site)**

The property includes a series of historic stonewalls (Photo 16). One runs across the front of the property while others mark the side boundaries of the property or create terraces stabilizing the hillside to the west of the house. The walls are dry-laid fieldstone with an approximate depth of 2-4 feet. The walls appear to have been extended over time. A historic photo (Figure 5) suggests that those directly in front of the house were likely added in the twentieth century. This may also be the time at which some of the terracing at the rear of the house was also added. The most significant may be the walls south of the building which historic photographs document formed the foundation of a large barn formerly located there. The walls outline a rectangle that is approximately 30' x 40'.

In addition to the stone walls and foundation, the property retains two other significant features. It still has its historic well, now located under a modern cap to the north of the barn. The property also retains a commanding location in the landscape, providing the house and grounds with a sweeping view across the valley to Oenoke Ridge Road to the west.

At the base of the slope to the west of the house is a contemporary in-ground pool (Photo 17).

### **Integrity**

Because it has been well preserved, the property retains integrity in the following aspects: location, materials, workmanship, design, and association. The integrity of feeling is slightly compromised by the changes to the use of the property and the loss of some of the outbuildings. However, the house has retained its overall mass and volume, its barn provides a tangible reminder of the agrarian past of the property, and open space provides a reminder of the former

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landscape. It is still recognizable as a product of its period of significance. For these reasons, the property as a whole retains its integrity of feeling. Because the neighborhood has changed with the introduction of additional housing the property no longer retains its integrity of setting.

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## 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.)

- 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 old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY  
ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1770-1830  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

1772  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Abijah Comstock House is significant at the local level under Criteria A and C. It qualifies for Criterion A in the category of Social History for its association with slavery and the history of African Americans in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Connecticut. The period of significance for this Criterion is ca. 1770-ca.1830, based on the documentary evidence of slave ownership by Abijah Comstock and his descendant who owned the house during this period. It also qualifies under Criterion C for the high-style Federal period woodwork that is present in the main rooms on the south end of the house. The period of significance for this Criterion is 1799-1819, based on the ownership period of Samuel Comstock and the period during which this style of finish work would have been fashionable. Samuel Comstock, who had been given the house by his father in 1799, died in 1818. The renovation of the ca. 1770 building with high-style Federal-period elements was likely undertaken during Samuel Comstock's period of ownership.

No archaeological investigations have been undertaken at the site; therefore it is not known whether it qualifies under Criterion D. The property could be considered archaeologically sensitive due to the visible remains of ancillary buildings, the minimal ground disturbance around the house, and its associations with the settlement period of the town and enslaved occupants. However, significance under Criterion D is not included in this nomination because no subsurface investigations have been performed.

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**Narrative Statement of Significance** (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

**Criterion A: Social History**

The property is locally significant under Criterion A: Social History as a well-documented example of a property where slavery was practiced in New Canaan. Slave owning in New England, with the exception of parts of Rhode Island, was characterized by features that distinguish it from slavery elsewhere in the colonies (and later country). Reflecting the practice of small-scale subsistence farming in New England, it appears that slaves in New England may have forged closer personal relationships with their owners (Cruson 2007). The property at 1328 Smith Ridge Road and its owner from 1766 to 1797, Abijah Comstock, provide an illustrative example of slave owning in Connecticut

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during this period and the personal relationships that developed between slaves and their masters. New England slave owning, especially as it was practiced in Connecticut, grew during the mid-eighteenth century, reaching its height in the 1790s before diminishing over the ensuing decades.

Slave ownership in Connecticut was not uncommon in the second half of the eighteenth century. Censuses from this period show both the number of slaves owned, and the gradual decline in slave ownership over the period. In 1756, the colony contained 126,975 white residents and 3,636 non-white residents, the majority of whom are thought to have been enslaved (Trumbull and Hoadley 1878, 492; Cruson 2007, 19). Slaves accounted for approximately three-percent of the population at that time. In Fairfield County, the percentage was slightly higher, at three-and-a-half percent, with 711 black residents likely enslaved (compared to 19,849 white residents). Norwalk showed a slightly lower percentage, with 94 residents of color (or approximately three percent of the population likely enslaved), out of a total population of 3,050 (Trumbull and Hoadley 1878, 492).

The percentage of likely enslaved people had increased slightly by the time of the next census in 1774. At that time, the census showed 197,856 residents in the colony, with 6,464 non-white residents. Approximately three-and-a-quarter percent of the population were likely enslaved. In Fairfield County, the total population had grown to 30,150 people, included 1,214 non-white people, or slightly more than four percent (Trumbull and Hoadley 1878, 489). At this time, Norwalk had a population of 4,393 residents, including 145 people of color. Slightly less than three-and-a-half percent of its population is thought to have been enslaved at this time (Trumbull and Hoadley 1878, 488-491).

A turning point in slavery in Connecticut was reached in 1774 with passage of the first law limiting slavery. An act was passed banning the importation of any "Indian, Negro, or Mulatto slave" into Connecticut. The stated reason was that: "the increase of slaves in this colony is injurious to the poor and inconvenient" (Cruson 2007, 14). Additional laws enacted to limit slavery were passed in the following years. In 1784 gradual emancipation was introduced, with all children born after March 1, 1784 released from their servitude upon turning 25 (Cruson 2007, 14). Laws were strengthened in 1788, with a law stating that involvement with the slave trade, either directly or indirectly, was illegal (Cruson 2007, 14).

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Transportation out of state of those slaves who would gain their freedom upon turning 25 was also made illegal. In 1792, it became illegal to transport any slave out of Connecticut (Cruson 2007, 16).

Federal census records show a significant decrease in the number of slaves over the ensuing years. In the 1790 census, the number of free blacks, 2,801, exceeded the number of slaves, 2,759. By 1810, the number of slaves had fallen dramatically, to 310. By 1820, the number of slaves was under 100, and in 1840, eight years before slavery was completely outlawed in Connecticut, the number of slaves had dropped to 17. In 1848, the year slavery was completely outlawed, only six slaves remained in Connecticut, and all were over the age of 64 (Census 1790-1840; Cruson 2007, 14-18).

Federal census records for Norwalk and New Canaan (once New Canaan became a separate town in 1801) show an even faster decline in the slave population. (Canaan Parish, where the house was located, was made up of residents from both Norwalk and Stamford. Since the Comstocks were recorded in the Norwalk census records, that town's census information was used instead of Stamford's.) In 1790, Norwalk had a population of 11,942 people; census records show that 152 were enslaved (Census 1790). By 1800, Norwalk had a population 5,187 people, with only 41 enslaved people (Census 1800). For the first time since the 1750s, slaves made up less than one percent of the Norwalk population. By 1810, New Canaan had been formed from Norwalk and Stamford; the new town had nine slaves in a population of 1,599, an even smaller percentage of the population (Census 1810). In 1820, New Canaan had grown to 1,689 residents, including 4 enslaved residents (Census 1820). By 1830, the population had grown to 1,826, and the number of slaves had dropped to 1 or 2 (Census 1830; King 1981, 197). By the time of the next census, only 17 slaves remained in the state and New Canaan's slave population had dropped to one slave, Onesimus Comstock (owned at that time by Phebe Comstock) (King 1981, 197). He legally remained a slave until slavery was completely abolished in Connecticut in 1848 (King 1981, 197).

The Comstock family that lived at 1328 Smith Ridge Road was among New Canaan's slave owners for many years. Abijah Comstock purchased the parcel of land on which the house sits in 1754. At that time, no house existed on the property (Norwalk Land Records, v. 11, 101; NCHS n.d.). It has traditionally been thought that the house was built after Abijah Comstock's wife



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died in 1770 (King 1981; NCHS n.d.). No physical evidence in the building contradicts this construction date.

The earliest reference to the family owning a slave while living at 1328 Smith Ridge Road appears in the Rev. William Drummond's "Journal of Family Visitation" (Hall, Keeler, Hoyt 1935). There Drummond recorded on December 7, 1772, that he visited the Comstock family, which at that time consisted of "ABIJAH COMSTOCK. Children - Hannah, Dinah, Deborah and Samuel" along with two slaves, Dover and Belinda (Hall, Keeler, and Hoyt 1935, 84-85). The Comstock entry is in a group of six families, all of whom lived on upper Smith Ridge Road in the general vicinity of the Comstock House (Hall, Keeler, and Hoyt 1935). The entry highlights the surprising amount of documentary evidence about the Comstock slaves. Slaves often appear only in bills of sale or census records, often without names, so the mention of Dover and Belinda is unusual. In February of 1773, a third Comstock slave, Cesar, wrote a will in which he described himself as "Negro man of Abijah Comstock" (NCHS Files). The will lists a surprising collection of goods, including a great bible, more than a dozen other books, silver buttons and buckles, and several silver spoons. In 1792, Abijah Comstock itemized those "Household goods" that he had passed onto his daughter Dinah; among these was a "Negro girl" (NCHS Files). It is thought that the girl referred to is Belinda, to whom Cesar had bequeathed all his "old caps and handkerchiefs" (NCHS Files). By 1795, Dover, who had been mentioned by Drummond in his "Visitation," purchased land in Canaan Parish, an indication that he had been emancipated (NCHS Files). This reference was followed in 1797 by the formal emancipation of Rose, who had not been mentioned in Drummond's diary. The document was filed in the Norwalk Land Records (NCHS Files).

While Abijah's four slaves appear in a variety of documents, it is not until 1820 that a slave is enumerated in a census as being in residence at 1328 Smith Ridge Road (Census 1820). Abijah Comstock transferred the property to his son Samuel in 1799 and, upon Samuel's death in 1818 (just 11 years after his father, Abijah, had died in 1807) the property was transferred to Samuel's wife Catherine (Norwalk Probate Records). In the 1820 census, Catherine's household includes two female slaves, one between the ages of 14 and 25 and one over 45 (Census 1820). The younger slave girl would have been legally emancipated at the time she reached the age of 25 and the older slave appears to have died by the time of the 1830 census (Census 1830). At that time, Samuel Comstock II appears to have taken over as head

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of household. His mother is not named in the New Canaan census returns but a free white woman of 60-69 does appear in the household. By that time, the period of slave ownership and residence at 1328 Smith Ridge Road had ended.

The Comstock family's history of slave ownership highlights the way in which slaves were used in Connecticut. Unlike other areas of the country, predominantly in southern colonies (and later states) and southwestern Rhode Island where a plantation system was used, slave owners in Fairfield County owned a relatively small number of slaves at any time (Cruson 2007; Census Records 1790-1840; King 1981). Rather than creating a substantial workforce that would be deployed into large agricultural fields, often under the management of higher-status slaves, and as servants within large houses, Fairfield County's slave owners used a small group of slaves to supplement their family's own labor within the house and out in agricultural fields (Cruson 2007, 20-24). As someone who appears to have owned up to four slaves at one time, Abijah Comstock would have been one of the larger slaveholders in New Canaan. At the time of the 1790 census Abijah Comstock appears to have owned three slaves, Dover, Belinda, and Rose. Cesar had died in 1778. This would have put him in a small group of slave owners in Norwalk and Stamford to own that many slaves. Most slave owners only owned one or two slaves; James Davenport, a noted lawyer, judge and politician, was the only person recorded in that census who owned more than three slaves. He owned 10 (Census 1790).

The smaller number of slaves in Connecticut households meant that rather than living in separate, purpose-built housing (as they would have in a traditional plantation system property), slaves in Fairfield lived in the same house as their owners (Cruson 2007, 20-24). In a broad sense, this proximity is thought to have fostered a stronger relationship between the slave owner and their slaves. One example that would support this view is the will of Cesar. While Cesar bequeaths some of his belongings to fellow slaves Dover and Belinda, the bulk of his possessions are given to his master's children (NCHS Files).

### **Criterion C: Architecture**

In addition to being a well-documented location and illustrative example of slave ownership in Fairfield County, 1328 Smith Ridge Road is also locally significant for its well-preserved Federal-period features. The house was substantially renovated in the

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years of Samuel Comstock's ownership (1799-1818). At this time, the house was expanded to the south and the roof was raised. New, classically inspired elements were added to the exterior to unify the house aesthetically, including a frieze with modillions that runs around the entire building, quarter round windows flanking half-round windows in each gable, and 12/12 windows in the newly created bays at the south end of the house. While these changes transformed the house into a more stylish building when viewed from the exterior, the most impressive improvements took place on the interior. When the house was expanded to the south, two new rooms were created on each floor. On the first floor, these rooms were outfitted with high-style design features. As noted above in Section 7, both rooms incorporate similar Federal-style design elements.

The decorative elements used in the two first-floor rooms in the southern part of the house exemplify the aesthetic associated with the Federal era. They use thin, attenuated forms often highlighted by gently curving elements. The decorations are characterized by lightness and attenuation not associated with the preceding or subsequent style periods. The window, door, and fireplace surrounds at 1328 Smith Ridge Road are illustrative of the character-defining elements of the Federal style and period.

Within the context of New Canaan, the Comstock House is significant because the town contains few houses that display Federal elements as well-preserved, elaborate, or creative as the ones found there. The New Canaan Historical Society's Historic House Register, a list that is described as "a selection of Significant New Canaan Homes," includes 217 properties built prior to 1933 (NCHS Register). Of these, 30 houses were constructed during the period during which the Federal style was popular (1790-1820) (NCHS Register). The State Historic Preservation Office's State Register Database lists 199 properties in New Canaan. Of these, nine are listed as being Federal-style or including Federal-style elements (CTSHPO 2016). While these two lists suggest the relative scarcity of Federal-style buildings, with between 5-percent and 10-percent of the identified historic houses with the likelihood of having some Federal elements, neither list provides a sense of the interiors of the identified buildings. Perhaps the best measure of the significance of the Federal style woodwork in the Comstock House is another New Canaan house listed on the National Register, the Hanford Davenport House. This house is considered significant as a "fine example of the Federal style

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of architecture, noteworthy for its interior Adamesque carving” (Ransom 1989. Sec. 8). The photographs of the interior demonstrate that wood work at the Comstock House is equally significant. In some instances, such as with the continuation of the door surrounds onto the ceiling, the work at the Comstock House includes more creative features than are visible at the previously-listed Hanford Davenport House.

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

- Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office (CTSHPO). 2016. "State Register Database." Electronic Resource. Accessed on line at <http://www.cultureandtourism.org/cct/cwp/view.asp?a=2127&q=293858> in February 2017.
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- Hall, Clifford Watson; Keeler, Stephen Edwards; Hoyt, Stephen Benjamin. 1935. "Canaan parish, 1733-1933, being the story of the Congregational church of New Canaan, Connecticut, as told by the observance of its two hundredth anniversary, June 20 to December 20, 1933. Also the history and addresses of the Methodist Episcopal and St. Mark's churches given upon the occasion of their 100th and 150th anniversaries, respectively." *New Canaan Advertiser*, New Canaan, CT. Accessed online at <https://archive.org/stream/canaanparish173301cong#page/n5/mode/2up> in September, 2016.
- King, Mary Louise. 1981. *Portrait of New Canaan: The History of a Connecticut Town*. New Canaan, CT: The New Canaan Historical Society.
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- Norwalk Probate Records. Volumes 3-4.

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United States Census Bureau (Census).

1790 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1800 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1810 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1820 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1830 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1840 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

1850 Federal Decennial Census. Accessed online at <https://ancestry.com> in September, 2016.

Visser, Thomas Durant. 1997. *Field Guide to New England Barns and Farm Buildings*. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England.

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

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\_\_\_\_\_ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

\_\_\_\_\_ State Historic Preservation Office

\_\_\_\_\_ Other State agency

\_\_\_\_\_ Federal agency

\_\_\_\_\_ Local government

\_\_\_\_\_ University

Other

Name of repository: New Canaan Historical Society

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** \_\_\_\_\_

---

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreege of Property** 2 acres \_\_\_\_\_

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates (decimal degrees)**

Datum if other than WGS84: \_\_\_\_\_

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

2. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

3. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Latitude: \_\_\_\_\_ Longitude: \_\_\_\_\_

**Or**

**UTM References**

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or  NAD 1983

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- |             |                 |                   |
|-------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1. Zone: 18 | Easting: 625063 | Northing: 4561828 |
| 2. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 3. Zone:    | Easting:        | Northing:         |
| 4. Zone:    | Easting :       | Northing:         |

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The boundary of the nominated property is the current property line of the parcel identified as MBLU number 0041/0038/0021 (Figure 2).

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries of the nominated property are consistent with the property limits since 1938, and encompass all extant resources associated with the Comstock House. The historic size of the property, which was 106 acres located on both sides of the highway as late as 1901, was substantially decreased during the first third of the twentieth century when the area was developed with many additional houses. By 1938 the property reached its current size (NCHS n.d.).

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**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title: James Sexton  
organization: \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number: 274 Clinton Ave.  
city or town: New Rochelle state: NY zip code: 10801  
e-mail: jmbjcs@hotmail.com  
telephone: 914.527-6416  
date: 9/24/16

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Abijah Comstock House  
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### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

### Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

### Photo Log

Name of Property: Abijah Comstock House  
City or Vicinity: New Canaan  
County: Fairfield State: CT  
Photographer: James Sexton

Abijah Comstock House  
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Date Photographed: August 7, 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 17. View looking southwest at the façade of the house.
- 2 of 17. View looking south at the northern gable.
- 3 of 17. View looking north at the southern gable.
- 4 of 17. View looking east at the west wall.
- 5 of 17. View looking west across the kitchen.
- 6 of 17. View looking northwest across the entry.
- 7 of 17. View looking northeast across the room to the west of the northern chimney.
- 8 of 17. View looking northwest across the southeast room.
- 9 of 17. View looking northwest across the southwest room.
- 10 of 17. View looking south at first floor window in south end of house.
- 11 of 17. View looking north at the northern door in the southeastern room.
- 12 of 17. View looking north at the northern door in the southwestern room.
- 13 of 17. View looking west at the fireplace surround in the southeastern room.
- 14 of 17. View looking east at the fireplace surround in the southwestern room.
- 15 of 17. View looking northwest at the Carriage Barn.
- 16 of 17. View looking southeast at the barn foundation and walls.
- 17 of 17. View looking southeast at the modern pool.

**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.460 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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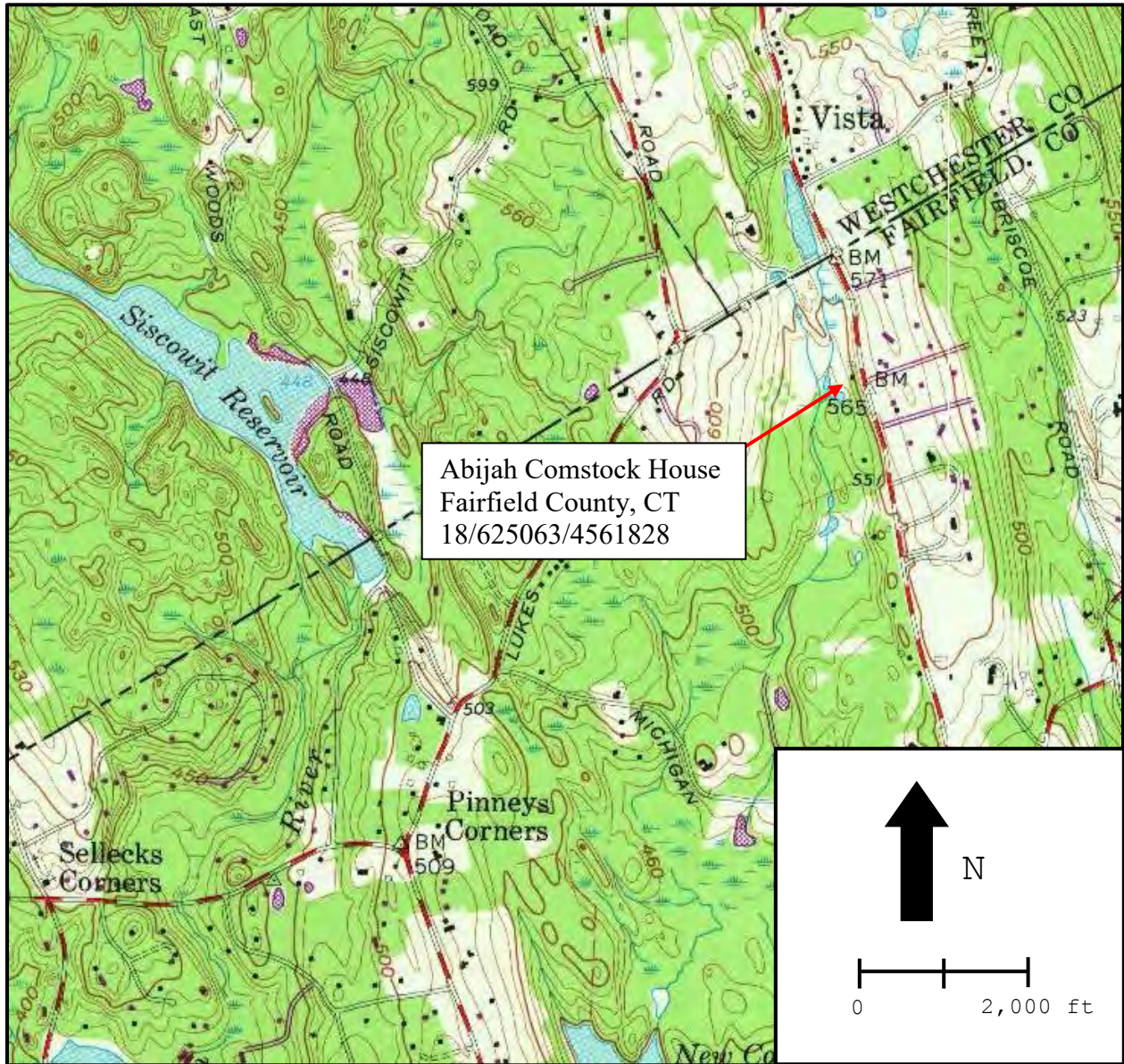


Figure 1. Location Map -- USGS Pound Ridge Quadrangle 1973, scale 1:24,000. Red arrow indicates the location of the property.

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Figure 2. Site Plan -- Property boundary based on map Town of New Canaan assessor's data (source: [www.appraisalonline.newcanaanct.gov](http://www.appraisalonline.newcanaanct.gov), 2017).

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Figure 3. Exterior Photo Key -- Google Earth aerial photograph showing locations of photographs.

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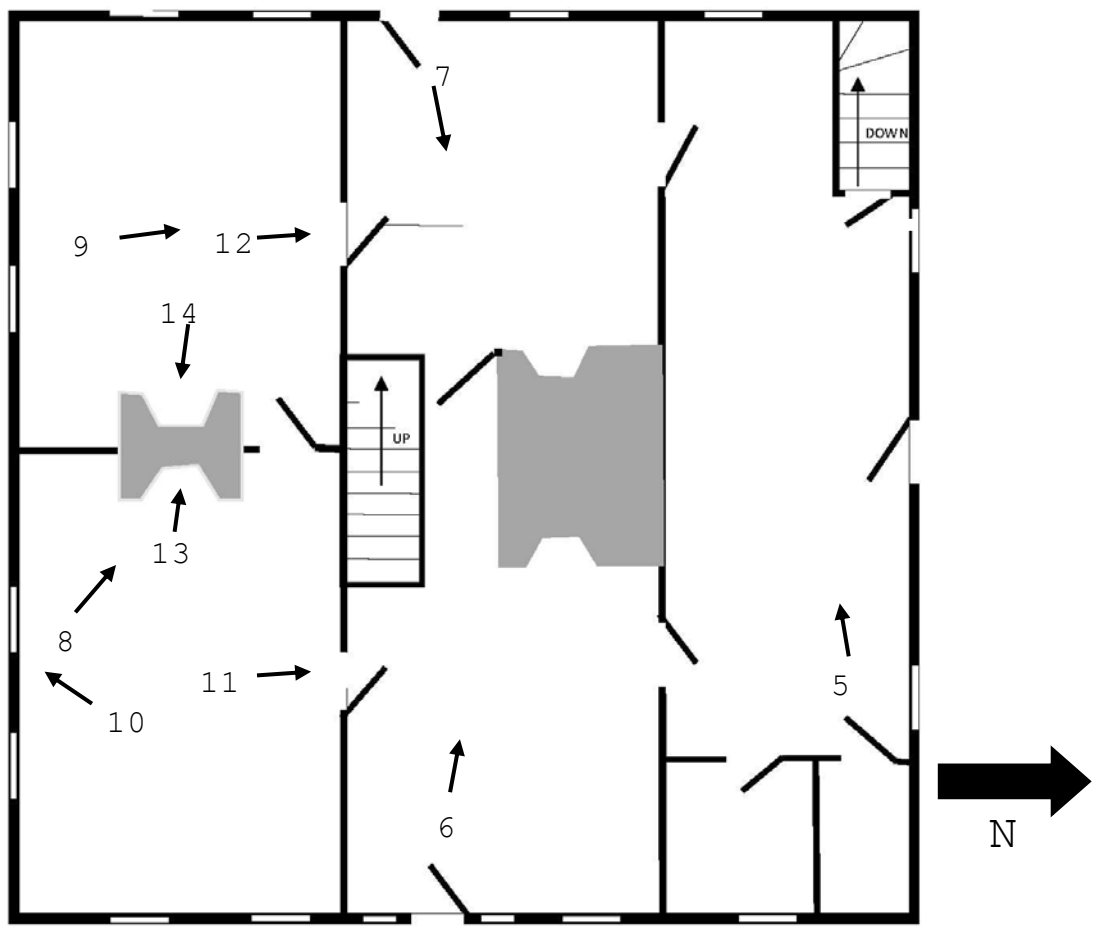


Figure 4. Interior Photo Key - Sketch plan showing locations of photographs.

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Figure 5 - Historic view looking north along Smith Ridge Road at the house, former outbuildings, and walls.  
(Photo in the collection of the homeowner.)









A satellite dish is mounted on the roof of the house.

A brick chimney is located on the roof of the house.

A second brick chimney is located on the roof of the house.

A white-framed window on the second floor.

A white-framed window on the second floor.

A white-framed window on the second floor.

A white-framed window on the second floor.

A white-framed window on the second floor.

A white awning is positioned over the front entrance of the house.

A white balcony with a railing and a lattice skirt is attached to the front of the house.

A stack of firewood is visible through the lattice skirt of the balcony.

A grassy lawn is in the foreground of the house.



























UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Comstock, Abijah, House

Multiple Name:

State & County: CONNECTICUT, Fairfield

Date Received:  
9/1/2017

Date of Pending List:  
9/22/2017

Date of 16th Day:  
10/10/2017

Date of 45th Day:  
10/16/2017

Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: SG100001731

Nominator: State

Reason For Review:

X Accept     Return     Reject    10/16/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary  
Comments: Under Criterion C the apparent 20th century alterations alluded to on page 7/7 could have been given more attention, if only to discuss possible alterations. In particular, the large open entry hall visible in photo 6 is not typical of the Federal Period. This square room would have been a functional waste of space in that period. It appears likely to have been rebuilt with a new staircase and reuse of early 18th century paneling. This unusual floor plan was commented upon by the SRB.  
Also, the historic photograph (figure 5) included in the nomination shows a front entrance portico that was removed and not mentioned in the nomination.

Under Criterion 1 the nomination includes apparently rare documentation of the Comstock house slaves.

Recommendation/  
Criteria

Reviewer Roger Reed

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2278

Date 10/16/17

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



13 OENOKE RIDGE, NEW CANAAN, CT 06840

203 966 1776

NCHISTORY.ORG

March 21, 2017

Jenny Scofield  
State and National Register Coordinator  
One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Ms. Scofield:

I am writing in support of the nomination of the home of Jennifer Holme and David Maratos at 1328 Smith Ridge to the National Register of Historic places.

The property is listed in the book "Landmarks of New Canaan" a reference for many of our oldest homes. The many papers left by the Comstock family and researched for this book, show a rich history covering the period c.1770 when the house was built to its sale outside the Comstock family in the early 1900's. It was from this house, in 1772, that the Reverend William Drummond commenced his New Canaan census for the Congregational Parish.

The house received a plaque from the Society in 2003 with complete title search and history. Social history lives in the house as the Comstocks were slave owners and the records of their slaves provides a special history of slavery in New Canaan. Caesar, much written about, was purchased at the age of 12. At twelve he could read the scriptures and had a library larger than many whites. The Comstocks were among the few in New Canaan to own over three slaves and their lives with the Comstocks reveal what slavery was like in the town.

The house has been well cared for and although renovated has kept its integrity. One of few homes in the Federal style it greatly adds to our history and it is wonderful in this time of demolition of our historic properties that the owners are taking action to preserve this house.

Sincerely,

Janet Lindstrom  
Executive Director



# TOWN OF NEW CANAAN

TOWN HALL, 77 MAIN STREET  
NEW CANAAN, CT 06840

ROBERT E. MALLOZZI III  
FIRST SELECTMAN

TEL: (203) 594-3000  
FAX: (203) 594-3123

March 23, 2017

Jenny Scofield  
State and National Register Coordinator  
Department of Economic and Community Development  
State Historic Preservation Office  
One Constitution Plaza  
Hartford, CT 06103

Dear Jenny,

It gives me great pleasure to endorse the placement of the Abijah Comstock House, 1328 Smith Ridge Road in New Canaan, Connecticut on the National Register of Historic Places by the State Historic Preservation Office.

The home is a wonderful part of New Canaan with tangible historical significance. The present owners have demonstrated a sincere passion and commitment for preserving the home and I believe the designation on the National Register will codify their effort and offers the opportunity to preserve the home in perpetuity.

Sincerely,



Robert E. Mallozzi III



Department of Economic and  
Community Development

State Historic Preservation Office

September 1, 2017

Mr. Roger Reed  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Mail Stop 7228  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240



Subject: Abijah Comstock House, Fairfield County Connecticut, National Register Nomination

Dear Mr. Reed:

The following National Register nomination materials are submitted for your review:

- Printed cover sheet
- CD of National Register text. The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the Abijah Comstock House to the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1 CD of Digital Photographs
- 2 Letters of support

This National Register nomination was approved by the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Review Board on March 31, 2017 and was initiated by the property owners. During the noticing process, letters of support were received from Janet Lindstrom, Executive Director of the New Canaan Historical Society and Robert E. Mallozzi III, First Selectman, Town of New Canaan. These letters are enclosed for your records; New Canaan is not a CLG. No letters of objection were received.

If you have any questions, or if this office can be of assistance, please call Jenny Scofield at 860-256-2766.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenny F. Scofield".

Jenny F. Scofield,  
National Register Coordinator

Enclosures

State Historic Preservation Office

One Constitution Plaza | Hartford, CT 06103 | P: 860.256.2800 | [Cultureandtourism.org](http://Cultureandtourism.org)

*An Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Employer An Equal Opportunity Lender*

SG 100001731



Department of Economic and  
Community Development

State Historic Preservation Office

October 11, 2017

Mr. Roger Reed  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
Mail Stop 7228  
1849 C St, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20240



Subject: Abijah Comstock House, Fairfield County Connecticut, National Register Nomination,  
Replacement Photo CD

Dear Mr. Reed:

The following National Register nomination materials are submitted per your request:

- 1 CD of Digital Photographs

If you have any questions, or if this office can be of assistance, please call Jenny Scofield at 860-500-2343.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jenny F. Scofield".

Jenny F. Scofield,  
National Register Coordinator

Enclosure

State Historic Preservation Office

450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5 | Hartford, CT 06103 | [Cultureandtourism.org](http://Cultureandtourism.org)

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