

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 18 1982

DATE ENTERED

4-15-82

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Nathaniel Curtis House

AND/OR COMMON

Nathaniel Curtis House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

600 Housatonic Avenue

N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Stratford

N/A VICINITY OF

Third -

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

STATE

Connecticut

CODE

09

COUNTY

Fairfield County

CODE

001

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

**CATEGORY**

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

**OWNERSHIP**

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED
- N/A

**STATUS**

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

**PRESENT USE**

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Edward W. & Margaret C. Richardson

STREET & NUMBER

460 Highview Drive

CITY, TOWN

Radnor

N/A VICINITY OF

Pennsylvania

STATE

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE,

REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Stratford Land Records, Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER

2725 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Stratford

STATE

Connecticut

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

See continuation sheet

DATE

" " "

\_\_FEDERAL \_\_STATE \_\_COUNTY \_\_LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

" "

CITY, TOWN

" "

STATE

"

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE 1973

---

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

#### Over View

The Nathaniel Curtis House, c. 1735, is a 2½-story, 28x38-foot, central chimney, central doorway, five-bay frame structure (Photograph 1), moved to its present site, to avoid demolition, in 1973. It is located on the west bank of the Housatonic River in Stratford, Connecticut.

The house faces west toward a cul-de-sac at the north end of Housatonic Avenue in a middle-class residential neighborhood. The lot is narrow and deep, running down to the water's edge in the rear. Adjoining houses include a 20th-century contemporary stucco house, a raised ranch, and several frame houses from early in the 20th century.

#### Exterior

The facade of the house is its chief element of interest. The facade is an elaborate and well-designed composition of flush boarding, pedimented doorway, 12-over-12 windows, and good moldings in the window lintels and sills and at the eaves. The horizontal flush boards are beaded at their lower edges.

The doorway surround consists of fluted pilasters that support an entablature and pediment. The pilasters rise from high flush plinths and have molded capitals. The entablature, made up of a molded architrave and pulvinated frieze, breaks out over the pilasters. Its cornice is flat, with no cymatium while the raking cornices are heavier, with fuller moldings. The pediment projects further from the wall plane than the entablature and pilasters. The apex of the pediment touches the sill of the central second-story window, which is 6-over-6 and smaller than the others. Each leaf of the double door has two lights at the top and, at the bottom, a sequence of molded, recessed panel, raised flat section and second recessed panel.

The top surface of the moldings below the windows is slanted downward, over an ovolo and cavetto profile. Each of these moldings is shaped from a single piece of pine. The window cornices have a bold cyma recta molding over a cavetto, are wider than the windows, and return at the ends. A small block to left and right of the window supports the ends. (Photograph 2.) The second-floor windows, including the central 6-over-6, have similar moldings, although the cornices are shallower and abut the two-tier eaves moldings.

The doorway is approached by concrete steps, and the visible foundation wall is also concrete. A narrow piece of finish wood separates the foundation wall from the flush boarding. There are plain, narrow corner boards at the corners of the house. The roof is covered with asbestos shingles. The chimney visible above the roof is stone, its center set back slightly from the roof ridge line.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) <b>Historic Preservation</b>
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES      c. 1735      BUILDER/ARCHITECT      Nathaniel Curtis

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### Criterion

The Nathaniel Curtis House is one of the relatively few 18th - century structures in Stratford, and has an especially handsome Georgian facade. It has withstood the vicissitudes of time, including a move in 1973 up river about a mile from its original site, thereby eluding the threat of demolition and assuming an important place in the chronicles of historic preservation in Stratford. The architectural significance of the house endures despite the fact that it has been moved. (Criterion C, Exception B.)

### History

Curtis was a prominent name in the settlement and colonial history of Stratford. One history book lists two columns of Curtises in its index,<sup>1</sup> and at one time there were more than 30 houses in Stratford owned by Curtises. This house was built by Nathaniel Curtis, c. 1735, according to Wilcoxon, a long-time Town Clerk who wrote a book about the town.<sup>2</sup> The 1735 date is consistent with the architecture of the house, except for the facade, as discussed below.

The original site of the house was at 1460 Elm Street (formerly Front Street), a little more than a mile down river from where it now stands. The house appears in an 1882 view of Stratford, and in an 1824 map reproduced as part of that view.<sup>3</sup> (Figure 9.) The house was next to the river but faced west, as it does today. The Curtis family continued to own the house until 1859.

In 1973, when the house was to be torn down to make way for a condominium, a descendant of Nathaniel Curtis purchased it and undertook the task of floating it upstream on a barge to its present site. stone foundations were not moved or replicated at the new site, the central stone chimney was disassembled, moved, and rebuilt, including the two large stone fireplaces in the kitchen and cellar. The massive base was re-created although above the base and below the roof line it was necessary to use some cinder block, and to make the dimensions of the stack smaller than it was originally.

The dormers in the rear slope of the roof were added at this time to make usable space of the lean-to garret, and the rear deck was constructed to take advantage of the fine river prospect.

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet.

**ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED**

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one.

QUADRANGLE NAME Milford

**UTM NOT VERIFIED**

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	657	650	45	620	90
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			

B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

C			
---	--	--	--

D			
---	--	--	--

E			
---	--	--	--

F			
---	--	--	--

G			
---	--	--	--

H			
---	--	--	--

### VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property is described in the Stratford Land Records, volume 482, page 820.

### LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

David F. Ransom, Consultant

ORGANIZATION

Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

August 31, 1980

STREET & NUMBER

59 South Prospect Street

TELEPHONE

203 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE March 3, 1982

### FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Entered in the  
National Register

DATE

4/15/82

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

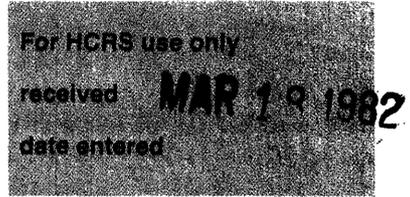
ATTEST:

DATE

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Nathaniel Curtis House

**Continuation sheet**                      **Surveys**                      **Item number**                      **6**                      **Page**                      **1**

---

State Register of Historic Places                      X State

Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford                      Connecticut  
1975

Census of Old Buildings in Connecticut  
1930s                      X State

State Library  
Hartford                      Connecticut

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Nathaniel Curtis House

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number 7

Page 1

For NCRS use only  
received MAR 19 1982  
date entered

The other three elevations of the house are covered with new wood shingles which are replacements for hand-riven shingles fastened with hand-wrought nails. The fenestration of the north elevation includes three windows, vertically, under the ridge line, 6-over-6 at first and second stories, and a smaller window in the attic. Additional openings toward the back of the house include a modern door at first-floor level and a 6-over-6 window at second-floor level. All four windows have the same molded cornices as the facade windows, but no moldings below the sills. The ground slopes off to the rear, exposing more of the foundation wall. The roof line extends to first-floor level in the rear, creating a salt box effect. The gable-end boards are modern and plain.

The south elevation is similar (Photograph 3), but the four windows have the sill moldings of the facade, as well as the cornices. Moreover, the new side door has the molded cornice, indicating that it replaces a former window.

The rear (east) elevation, toward the river, has been altered by the addition of a large central shed dormer in the roof, flanked by two smaller ones, and a porch. (Photograph 3.) The roof overhangs by approximately 1½ feet, with a plywood soffit. The open porch, or deck, of wide planks occupies the south two-thirds of the elevation, and is supported by round iron posts. Its balustrade has square balusters. The central basement entrance is at grade; it has sliding glass doors with two 1-over-1 windows to left and right. At first-floor level, central sliding glass doors give access to the deck. There are two 12-over-12 windows to left and right, with the molded sills and cornices as found on the facade.

Interior

The house has a conventional pre-Revolutionary War floor plan consisting, on the first floor, of a hall and stairs in front of the central chimney, a front room on either side of the chimney, and a kitchen area in the rear. On the second floor there is a chamber over each front room.

The entrance opens to the front hall. The stairs to the second floor start at the right (south) with a single riser, followed by two winders, and then eight risers along the front of the chimney in a straight run north to the second floor. There are two slender, square balusters per tread. The step ends have whale's tail moldings. (Photograph 4.)

The door from the hall to the south front room has six recessed panels on both sides, molded on the side toward the room. A similar door connects this room to the kitchen. The doors have H hinges. This room has no panelling, chair rail or summer beam. The corner post, not flared, is exposed, as are the chimney and end girts. The walls and ceiling are newly plastered; the fireplace surround is not original, and the brick fireplace and hearth are new. (Photograph 5.) The north front room is similar, without decorative trim, and with a new brick fireplace and hearth.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Nathaniel Curtis House

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number

7

Page

2

For HCPS use only  
received **MAR 18 1982**  
date entered

The rear kitchen area is dominated by a stone fireplace and hearth. The firebox is 90 inches wide, 56 inches high and 28 inches deep, with the opening for a bake oven, now bricked up, at the right toward the top. The 90-inch width is spanned by a wood lintel. (Photograph 6.) The central area and the south area, behind the south front room, are now a single space. A line in the floor where the 15-inch floor boards meet at right angles suggests that there once was a partition separating the two, but as the south end of the fireplace is at the doorway from the front room leaving little space for a partition between them, it must have been quite a tight arrangement. The ceiling joists in the kitchen area are exposed, but show signs of once having had lath and plaster. Feathered, vertical, beaded boards 15/16 inches wide form the north wall of the kitchen, a section of the west wall toward the south, and a dado on portions of the east and south walls. There is a corner cupboard in the southeast corner with a narrow door and straight shelves.

A second stairway to the upper floor rises from the southwest corner of the kitchen, along the partition to the south front room. There is one riser, toward the front of the house, then two winders to the north, toward the center of the house, and eight risers in a straight run to the second floor, the same arrangement as the front stairs. The door at the bottom of these stairs is made of two wide, feathered boards. Most of the section of the kitchen space north of the fireplace is now utilized as a bathroom.

On the second floor, in the front, there is a hall directly above the first-floor hall. A section of the hall floor extends toward the chimney to provide a terminus to the front stairs. The stair rail returns and continues with square balusters as a balustrade along the hall. The newel post at the top of the stairs is oblong in the east-west direction to accept both the stair rail and the hall balustrade. The north and south chambers are plain, without fireplaces, chair rails, panelling or cornices, but do have wide floor boards. Their doors have a recessed panel on one side. The walls and ceilings are plastered, with the exception of the south wall of the north room, which is vertical beaded boards.

The rear part of the second floor is two steps down from the front level. The central shed dormer provides room for a bathroom, and the smaller, flanking dormers provide light. Prior to the dormers, this space must have been a garret. The dormers were installed at the time the house was moved.

The attic stairs rise from back to front on the north side of the chimney. The attic has wide floor boards and roof boards. The roof framing consists of 11 pairs of 4 x 4½-inch rafters on approximately four-foot centers, joined at the ridge line by mortise and tenon and peg. The chimney visible in the attic is constructed of cinder block. When the chimney was disassembled for the move it was found to be laid up in mud clay.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Nathaniel Curtis House

Continuation sheet

Description

Item number

7

Page

3

For HCRS use only

received

MAR 18 1982

date entered

In the attic the rafters, at the front, disappear below the attic floor. At the back the rafter ends are visible in the second-floor garret space, as is the framing. The rear plate, into which the rafters are framed, is carried on girts to the rear of the chimney posts (Photograph 7). This arrangement suggests that originally the front and rear slopes of the roof were the same, and the present lean-to roof, therefore, is an addition or alteration. The further inference is that the rear wall of the house, at least at second-story level, was the back of the chambers.

Stairs to the cellar run under the rear second-floor stairs. In the cellar there is a large, square, stone chimney base, with an unexplained opening, now filled in, in the south face. On the east face, underneath the kitchen, there is a near duplicate of the kitchen fireplace.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCPS use only

received MAR 18 1982  
date entered APR 15 1982

Nathaniel Curtis House  
Continuation sheet Significance Item number 8 Page 1

Architecture

The flush boarding of the facade, the handsome entrance and the well-molded lintels and sills of the windows of the facade and the elevations constitute the chief architectural interest of the house. It is difficult to think that these features are original to a structure built c. 1735. Although there is no documentary evidence to support the analysis, it seems likely that these decorative elements, typical of the Georgian style of architecture, were added during the period of popularity of the Georgian style in the American colonies and early republic, roughly from 1750 to 1825.

Two elements in the way the trim fits the house also suggest that it may not have been part of the original structure. First, the apex of the entrance pediment touches the sill of the second story window above it. Second, the label moldings of the attic windows extend into the gable-end roof boards. (Photograph 8.) These tight fits are unusual and suggest the possibility that the trim was not designed for this house, but may have been re-cycled from another structure. The moldings of the window labels and sills, of good profile, are duplicated at the Judson House, now occupied by the Stratford Historical Society, even to the downward slant of the sills. There is the possibility that such trim was used on several houses in Stratford and for one reason or another was available for use in alterations to the Nathaniel Curtis House. Under this hypothesis the trim could have been added to this house at a date later than is associated with the Georgian style.

Structural change in the house is suggested by evidence visible in the lean-to garret. The floor level there is below the floor level of the two front rooms. The framing of the original rear eaves is also visible in the lean-to garret, with plate behind the posts and rafter ends showing. This evidence suggests that originally the front and rear slopes of the roof were the same. Confirmation is found in the Wilcoxson and 1930s Census of Old Buildings photographs (Figures 10 and 11) that show a suggestion of eaves return in the rear slope. This evidence indicates that the house was built one room deep, and the lean-to was added, a not uncommon sequence of events. As the lean-to windows have the molded window trim, construction of the lean-to presumably pre-dated addition of the trim, as might be expected.

These pictures also show 6-over-6 windows on the facade, indicating that the present 12-over-12 sash are post-1930s. The fine two-leaf front door is old, possibly original, or possibly dating from the time of the facade alterations.

**United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only

received

MAR 18 1982

date entered

Nathaniel Curtis House  
Continuation sheet      Significance      Item number      8      Page      2

On the interior, elements of interest include the two stairways, the two massive stone fireplaces, many wide floor boards and the doors and some kitchen trim that probably are original, as well as the original basic framing.

There are several conundrums in the analysis of this house that remain to be resolved. One problem is the reliance, solely, on the Wilcoxson picture caption for the name of the builder and date of construction. In the absence of citation of sources by Wilcoxson, research in the land records and probate records is needed for confirmation or additional information on the house's origins. Stylistically, it seems unlikely that a house initially built with such an elaborate facade would have such a plain interior. Yet, when the front wall was opened up for the purpose of adding insulation, the entrance pediment, which appears to have an inappropriate tight fit under the window above, was found to be integrated with the house framing. Pursuing this line of thought, if the facade is original, then it seems likely that the date of construction is later than 1735. Such unresolved questions typically are part of the fascination of the study of 18th-century houses, and this house is no exception. There are two other points of interest, not fully understood. First, the south gable end, under the shingles, has horizontal boarding the same as the facade, with indication it once was painted dark red. Second, when the chimney was disassembled a fragment of wallpaper was found on its front plastered wall. Moreover, the framing at second-floor level shows that the door from the south room originally was close to the chimney, not close to the front wall where it now is. Taken together, the wallpaper and the door position suggest that the front stairs, which appear to be original, are not.

The Nathaniel Curtis House has seen important changes in its long lifetime, including an increase in size, the acquisition of a handsome facade and a change in location. Today it retains much of its integrity and is a demonstration in Stratford of a determined effort in historic preservation.

1. Orcutt.

2. Wilcoxson, p. 689.

3. Bailey.

United States Department of the Interior  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

Nathaniel Curtis House

Continuation sheet

Bibliography

Item number

9

Page

1

For HCRS use only

received

MAR 18 1982

data entered

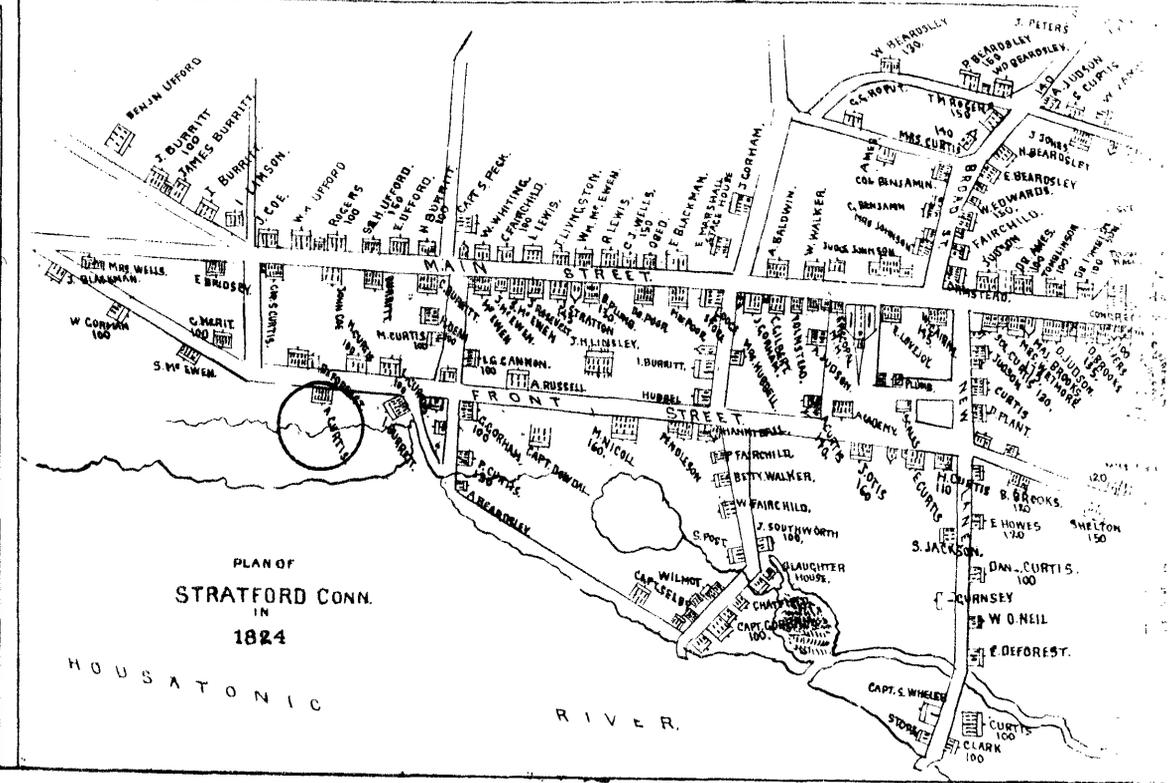
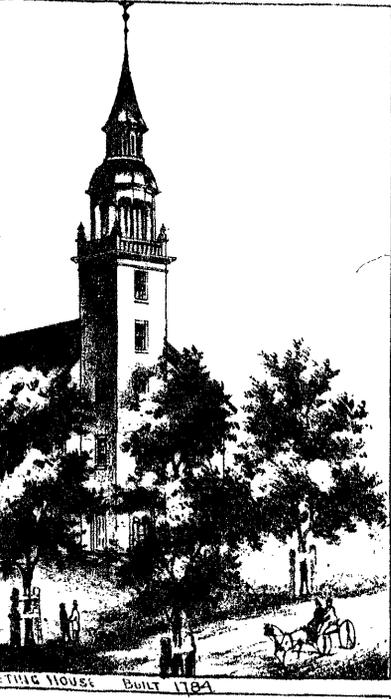
Bridgeport Post, July 17, 1973, p. 1.

Letter from Edward W. Richardson to author, August 27, 1980

"Stratford, Connecticut" view, Boston: O. H. Bailey & Co., 1882.

William Howard Wilcoxson, History of Stratford, Connecticut, 1639-1939,  
The Stratford Tercentenary Commission, 1939.

Samuel Orcott, A History of the Old Town of Stratford and the City of  
Bridgeport, Connecticut, Fairfield County Historical Society, 1886,  
v. 2.



T. OFFICE.  
 HALL.  
 ONIC HALL.  
 N. H. & H. R. R. STATION.  
 PORT LANDING.  
 P. YARD.

STRATFORD

Detail  
Stratford, Conn.  
Boston:  
O.H. Bailey & Co.  
1882

Figure 9

Figure 10

---

SOME LANDMARKS OF YESTERYEARS

---

house must have had a colorful history and not many years back, members of the Shelton family unearthed in the cellar, a chest of early Spanish coins, giving rise to the theory that here perhaps, had been buried a part of Captain Kidd's treasure.

THE NATHANIEL CURTIS HOUSE

Few of the early houses still standing in Stratford today, suggest more forcefully their early origin, than does the ancient Nathaniel Curtis house on lower Elm Street, a few rods south



Photo by W. H. Wilcoxson

THE NATHANIEL CURTIS HOUSE  
Built about 1735  
Later known as the Miller Duck Farm

of Sandy-Hollow. Its outlines still remain the same as when it was first built, even the simple and excellent type of doorway having withstood down through the years, the usual decorations that time brings in the way of porches or verandas.

In its later years it was known as the "Miller Duck Farm", having been purchased by Robert Miller in 1859, from Lewis Curtis and Benjamin Curtis, sons of Dea. Agur Curtis, who died in 1844. at the age of 84 years. Dea. Agur Curtis in-

Figure 11

EXTERIOR:

Front is of beaded flush boarding, once painted red. South gable shingled. Plain corner boards. Rear plate shows at end, and rear rafters.

Doorway: heavy pediment over fluted pilasters (no rosettes); heavy architrave; sunken paneling on doors; two lights in each door. Door in south gable.

