

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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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

Tapping Reeve House and Law School

AND/OR COMMON

Tapping Reeve House and Law School

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

South Street

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Litchfield

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

__ VICINITY OF

sixth

STATE

Connecticut

CODE

09

COUNTY

Litchfield

CODE

005

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

__DISTRICT

BUILDING(S)

__STRUCTURE

__SITE

__OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

__PUBLIC

PRIVATE

__BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

__IN PROCESS

__BEING CONSIDERED

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

Litchfield Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

On the Green, (P.O. Box 385)

CITY, TOWN

Litchfield

__ VICINITY OF

STATE

Connecticut

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Litchfield Town Hall

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Litchfield

STATE

Connecticut

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey (1 photograph)

DATE

1938

FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

District of Columbia

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED (school)	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	(house) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD (house)	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	(school) <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Tapping Reeve built this house on South Street in Litchfield in 1773 and lived and practiced law here for more than 50 years, until his death in December 1823. The Reeve house is a two-story frame mansion with a square central section and wings on the south, west and north. The frontispiece is composed of a shallow pedimented portico with full entablature, supported by fluted Ionic columns. Fluted Ionic pilasters frame the door which is placed to the left of center.

Under the cornice of the central section is a row of small grills, for attic ventilation, probably added in the second half of the nineteenth century, when the interior was also redecorated. The house was altered many times, judging from the number of wings and irregularities in the walls, fenestration and roofline. Photographs from a 1919 White Pine Monograph Series article show a second story on the south wing and a one-story porch across the front facade, probably nineteenth century additions and now removed. The two-story porch on the south side of the rear section, also visible in the 1919 photograph, remains.

In 1931 a group of lawyers raised a fund of approximately \$100,000 to restore the Reeve House and law building and to provide for future care of the property. Richard Henry Dana, Jr., supervised the 1930 restoration of the two buildings, and groups from Harvard, Princeton and Yale funded the work on some of the rooms. The Litchfield Historical Society has maintained the structure as a house-museum since 1929, but they were unable to provide an early description or details of the restoration.

The one-room frame law school building is located south of the house. The original site and design details of the building are unknown since it has been moved at least four times and has been used as part of another structure. Though it is only a simple one-room building it has been so often moved and altered that it is nearly impossible to determine what parts of the present structure are original to the Reeve law school. Most likely, the frame and flooring and perhaps one window is about all that is left.

The original site of the law school has not been determined although it was probably due south of the house and nearer South Street than it is now located. Also it is not known whether the gable end or the long side faced the street.

Contemporary descriptions say that the law school was one large unheated room. A 1846 drawing and early photographs show no chimney; however, since 1914 there has been one. No doubt much evidence of the original was destroyed during the movings and renovations; in 1846 it was first moved and made part of a house; in 1886 it was added to and given two dormers with gothic trim; in 1907 it was bought and moved again; in 1911 it was moved to a location adjoining the Historical Society Museum; in 1930 it was returned to a spot (not the original) south of the Reeve House.

A brick fireproof addition, with a concrete vault, nearly as large as the small building itself, was built on the west end, and partitions, bricked-over sections of floor, a heathstone and chimney, and the nineteenth century paneling are all obviously not

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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES 1774-1823 BUILDER/ARCHITECT unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Tapping Reeve's proprietary law school, the first in the United States not associated with a college or university, was founded in 1784 and remained in operation until 1833. Since so many of the approximately 1,000 men who attended the school became prominent lawyers, judges and politicians, the school significantly influenced the development of American law.

As early as 1782, Reeve had begun to present a formally developed law course in his home. This was an innovation, as aspiring lawyers of that day generally read law in a lawyer's office, absorbing what advice the lawyer offered. However, the value of Reeve's course was immediately recognized.

In 1784, to provide space for classes, Reeve erected a small building beside his house for use as a law school. From that time until 1798, when he was appointed to the Connecticut Superior Court, Reeve prepared about 200 men to become lawyers.

Following his appointment to the bench, Reeve placed James Gould, a former pupil, in charge of the school; however, he continued to do a portion of the teaching until 1820. Under Gould the school continued in operation until 1833, when ill health and the establishment of law schools at Yale and Harvard forced the precedent-setting institution to close.

The extent of the school's influence is clearly shown by the fact that two former students, Aaron Burr and John C. Calhoun, became Vice Presidents; six served as Cabinet members, three became Justices of the United States Supreme Court; 90 became members of the House of Representatives; and 26 became Senators.

Reeve's home, a handsome two-story clapboard house which he built in 1772, is located on South Street in Litchfield. Beside it is the small frame building which Reeve erected in 1784 to house his law school.

History

Reeve, who was born on Long Island in ¹⁷⁴⁴1774, graduated from the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University) in 1763. Following graduation he taught for seven years, from 1769-70 as a tutor at Princeton. In 1771 he moved to Connecticut and was admitted to the bar in that state the next year.

In 1773 he married one of his former students, Sally Burr, daughter of the president of Princeton, granddaughter of Jonathan Edwards and sister of Aaron Burr. In 1774 Reeve

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bulkeley, Alice T. Historic Litchfield 1721-1907 (Hartford, 1907).
 Fesher, Samuel H. The Litchfield Law School 1776-1833 Tercentenary Commission of the State of Connecticut (New Haven, 1933).
 Lewis, William Draper, editor. "Historic Houses of Litchfield, " The White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs, V (June, 1919)
 Swanson, Eleanor P. Tapping Reeve: American Law Pioneer (n.d., n.p.). (cont'd)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1.5

UTM REFERENCES

A	<u>18</u>	<u>650610</u>	<u>4622710</u>	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property deed of 1773 records that Tapping Reeve bought one acre of land on South Street in Litchfield from Oliver Wolcott. A deed of 1840 indicates that Reeve willed to his daughter Elizabeth an area of one and one-half acres. By 1862 the property which included the Reeve House comprised two and one-half acres, the size lot that Yale University purchased in 1929.

The national historic landmark boundary, as indicated on the enclosed plat map, (cont'd)
 LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project; S. Sydney Bradford 1965

ORGANIZATION

DATE

January 16, 1975

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

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.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

Boundary Certified: Blanche Higgins Schroer date 2/15/77

Landmark Dec 21, 1965
 Designated
 date

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

DATE

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

2/15/77

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CONTINUATION SHEET Tapping Reeve House
and Law School ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

original elements. Presently the building is closed to the public pending extensive repairs to the floor beams which are rotting because of the dampness of the basement.

There is also an old wooden barn located due west of the house. Its construction date is unknown, but early nineteenth century deeds include a barn as one of the structures on the property.

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Tapping Reeve House
CONTINUATION SHEET and Law School ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

built this two-story hipped roof house in Litchfield and soon afterward Aaron Burr enlisted the aid of his brother-in-law as a tutor in the law, and moved into the Reeve house. Sally Burr Reeve was an invalid for many years and Tapping Reeve never worked or travelled far from their Litchfield home.

Soon Reeve was tutoring several law students besides Burr. By 1782 he replaced his program of individual instruction by a series of lectures. Reeve's course was said to have been very comprehensive in that it covered the whole field of jurisprudence. Notes taken in 1794 by a student named Seymour include the following headings:

Divorce Statutes, Infant, Parent and Child, Husband and Wife, Master and Servant, Bailor and Bailee, Innkeepers' Contracts, Executions, Legacies, Estate and Administrators, Wills, Occupancy and Evidence, Real Property, Mortgages, Pleadings, Devices, Law and Merchants.

Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the school program was the Moot Court, wherein students acted as counselors, with Reeve passing on the arguments. The Moot Court afforded the student lawyers the opportunity of actual debate over real legal issues, not possible under the usual apprentice system of studying law.

By 1784 enrollment had increased to the point that all boarding students could no longer be housed in Reeve's third floor rooms as they previously had been, and the overflow then became gentlemen boarders in prominent Litchfield homes. In 1784 also Reeve erected a small building south of his residence for a library and lecture room.

The entire course of study covered a fourteen to eighteen month period at a total cost of one hundred and sixty dollars. One advantage of the program was that a student could start at any point of the course. Reeve did not keep either a complete catalogue of students or tuition receipts so that it is difficult to determine the exact enrollment or the length of time some men studied with him.

Until 1798 Reeve conducted the school entirely alone and it is believed that prior to this date he taught nearly two hundred men. In 1798 Reeve was appointed Judge of the Superior Court, his first public appointment. With the new responsibility he found it necessary to have an assistant at the school and he chose James Gould, a graduate of the school that year.

Reeve held the classes he conducted in his home and in later years in the little building adjoining his house, while Gould held the classes in a small law school building near his house. Thus between 1798 and 1820 the students travelled back and forth between the Reeve and Gould homes. Reeve maintained his association with the school until 1820, having shared the teaching responsibility with James Gould for 22 years. In 1820 Reeve ended all association with the school, although students continued to use

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Tapping Reeve House
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his library for some time.

After 1826 the Litchfield Law School began to decline rapidly. The publication of Swift's Digest and Kent's Commentaries made its whole theory of instruction antiquated, and Harvard and Yale established law schools which could offer the advantages of association with universities. In 1833 six students enrolled in the last class at Litchfield, and in that year Gould retired and closed the school.

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Warren, William L. "Tapping Reeve Law Office and School; Report on Repairs and Restoration" (unpublished report of Litchfield Historical Society), November 1971.

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Tapping Reeve House
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entitled Tapping Reeve Property, Litchfield, Connecticut by V. Mion and R. Waissar, June 1954, encloses the lot of about one and one-half acres fronting on South Street in which the buildings and gardens which belonged to Tapping Reeve are located.

Beginning at the northeast corner of the property on the west curb of South Street, the boundary runs south along the curb for about 225 feet, then west approximately 275 feet, then north about 200 feet, then east about 250 feet to the beginning point on South Street.