

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

<b>FOR NPS USE ONLY</b>	
RECEIVED	
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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC Elkanah Watson Home

AND/OR COMMON

Elkanah Watson Home

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

Lake Street

\_\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Port Kent

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

30th

STATE

New York

CODE

036

COUNTY

Essex

CODE

031

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
___DISTRICT	___PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	___AGRICULTURE ___MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	___UNOCCUPIED	___COMMERCIAL ___PARK
___STRUCTURE	___BOTH	___WORK IN PROGRESS	___EDUCATIONAL X PRIVATE RESIDENCE
___SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	___ENTERTAINMENT ___RELIGIOUS
___OBJECT	___IN PROCESS	___YES: RESTRICTED	___GOVERNMENT ___SCIENTIFIC
	___BEING CONSIDERED	___YES: UNRESTRICTED	___INDUSTRIAL ___TRANSPORTATION
		X NO	___MILITARY ___OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Mr. & Mrs. Lloyd Mori

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Port Kent

\_\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

New York

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Essex County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Elizabethtown

STATE

New York

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

DATE

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

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

# 7 DESCRIPTION

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

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Elkanah Watson House is situated on an eminence above the western shore of Lake Champlain, at Port Kent, New York. Located on a small portion of Watson's 5000 acre property, the house has become surrounded by houses of the later period.

The square two story house has a hip roof topped with a square cupola. Constructed of local stone in coursed ashlar masonry, all the walls but the front (east) wall have been stuccoed over, and there are structural problems including cracks in the wall. A double-tiered porch, with a porte-cochere similar to but not the original, extends across the front and halfway down the south wall of the house. There is a pedimented portico on the front of the second story which reflects architecture of a later period.

An historic frame extension on the rear of the house which incorporated the servants' quarters and other outbuildings was removed some time ago, and a conglomerate addition has been added in its place. Stables and other outbuildings which existed during Watson's occupancy have been destroyed, with the possible exception of the small icehouse just south of the house, which is constructed of the same local stone as the main house. Its origin date is unknown.

An interesting architectural detail of the front facade is the pair of circular windows, one at either end of the first floor. The circular motif is echoed by the rounded arches over the doorway and its flanking windows, as well.

The interior of the house has been altered, most notably in the relocation of the staircase in the central hall. With the exception of the two rear bedrooms on the second floor, the majority of the rooms reflect a remodeling done within more recent times.

The house continues to be used as a private residence and contains no furnishings associated with Watson. Watson himself is interred in the family cemetery which is located not far from the house.

# 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 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 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		

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SPECIFIC DATES	1828 (built)	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Elkanah Watson
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## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Although Elkanah Watson's most significant national contribution was the creation of the agricultural fair, his career encompassed such varied roles as Revolutionary diplomat, canal promoter, educator, businessman and banker, as well as agriculturist. Born in Massachusetts in 1758, Watson turned to farming in 1807. Far in advance of his time he persistently supported the creation of a National Board of Agriculture.

The agricultural fair, under Watson's leadership, evoked the spirit of competition so that it might stimulate the production of better crops and livestock. Moreover, Watson sought to involve all of the farming community, including the women and children. His successful efforts thus created the agricultural fair as it exists to this day.

In 1828, Watson moved to Port Kent, New York, and there built a handsome stone villa high on the western shore of Lake Champlain. Although some interior and exterior changes have been made, the house remains a private home, essentially unchanged since Watson's day.

## BIOGRAPHY

Watson began his unusual career early in life. Born in Plymouth, Massachusetts, on January 22, 1758, he became an apprentice to the influential Providence merchant, John Brown, in 1773. Four years later, when Brown became fearful of British seizure of his wealth, Watson carried \$50,000 of the merchant's money to Charleston, South Carolina. The money was sewed into the lining of his clothes. Having proved himself by successfully carrying out that job, Watson was then asked by the Continental Congress to carry money and dispatches to Benjamin Franklin in Paris, which he did. While in Paris, he met the ill-fated queen, Marie Antoinette, whom he thought delightful. Perhaps Watson's most glorious moment in the Old World, however, came when he delivered the final peace treaty between the United States and Great Britain to London in 1782. On December 5 of that year he stood close to the throne of his former sovereign, George III, as he spoke, acknowledging the independence of the United States.

(continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation Sheet

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 1 1/2

UTM REFERENCES

A 

1	8
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6	2	6	6	8	0
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4	9	3	1	2	0	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the southwest corner of the intersection of Lake Street and South Street, proceed south along the west curb of Lake Street for 375', thence west in a straight line perpendicular to Lake Street for 151', thence north in a straight line to the south curb of South Street, thence east along said curb to the point of origin. These boundaries enclose the Watson House and icehouse while excluding the post-historic developments.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

Original form prepared by Richard Greenwood, Historian

NAME / TITLE Rewritten: Cecil McKithan, Historian

ORGANIZATION <u>Historic Sites Survey Division, National Park Service</u>	DATE <u>December 1977</u>
STREET & NUMBER <u>1100 L Street, N.W.</u>	TELEPHONE <u>523-5464</u>
CITY OR TOWN <u>Washington</u>	STATE <u>D. C.</u>

## 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 89-663), 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.

**Landmark Designated:** April 19, 1978 date

**Boundary Certified:**  
*[Signature]*  
April 19, 1978 date

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	DATE
<i>[Signature]</i>	<u>4/24/78</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE
ATTEST:	DATE
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

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Elkanah Watson Home

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

Upon his return to America, Watson quickly resumed activity in his native land. First moving to North Carolina, he established a plantation on the Chowan River, near Edenton. He shortly moved from there, however, to Albany, New York. Settling in that old Dutch town in 1789, with his bride, Rachel Smith, Watson remained there for eighteen years. Canals, roads, banking, education and business--none of these had escaped his interest or attention before he moved from Albany in 1807. Moreover, he had also amassed a fortune.

Watson turned to farming in 1807, something he had always loved. With his wife and five children, three sons and two daughters, he moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, where he had purchased a farm. Watson was more than just a dirt farmer, he was promoter of agricultural improvement. Throughout all of his American and European travels he had observed agricultural practices; and he had visited George Washington at Mt. Vernon in order to talk of farming with him. As a result, he had become convinced that "We are not farming the soil, we are mining the soil."<sup>1</sup> Now wealthy, he set out to campaign for improved farming in America.

Watson's furious energy soon made itself known in behalf of agriculture. He talked incessantly to farmers and their organizations, advocating new practices. He employed his own funds to stimulate American consuls in foreign cities to send new seeds and farm tools, as well as the best stock, to the United States. He, far in advance of his time, persistently supported the creation of a National Board of Agriculture, writing both Jefferson and James Madison about that. He wrote pamphlets on agriculture, which stood as excellent contributions. Finally, and this was his great work, he originated the agricultural fair.

The agricultural fair grew out of Watson's purchase of a pair of imported merino sheep from Chancellor Robert R. Livingston of New York. Watson had already advertised the merits of his imported swine and English bull, but he himself was so impressed with his two merino sheep that he tethered them under a large elm on the common in Pittsfield in 1807. Excitement over the sheep soon welled up. And Watson, who had purposely exhibited the sheep, then thought:

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1. Quoted in ibid, 36.

(continued)

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

If two animals are capable of exciting so much attention, what would be the effect on a larger scale, with larger animals.<sup>2</sup>

Inspired, Watson organized the Berkshire Agriculture Society, to be a model for numerous other societies, and in 1810 it held a cattle show on the green. Invoking the blessing of the father of the country, Watson had the show's program topped with this statement, "The multiplication of useful animals is a common blessing to mankind. Washington."<sup>3</sup> The fair was a great success. The 1811 fair improved on its predecessor, even beginning with a colorful parade. Bickering and criticism induced Watson to resign from the Berkshire Society in 1814, but the agricultural fair became a feature of American life.

It is true that Watson was not the first one to show cattle. What he did, though, was to instill a spirit of competition in order to encourage progress. The agricultural fair, under Watson's leadership, epitomized the spirit of competition so that better cattle, crops and so on, would be produced. Moreover, Watson sought to involve all of the farming community, including wives and children, in the fair. He succeeded in both aims, thus creating the agricultural fair as we know it.

Watson's Pittsfield activities exhausted his personal wealth. He thus returned to Albany, recouped financial security and then moved to the present village of Port Kent, which he helped to found. Until his death in 1842, Watson pursued his interest in agriculture, both on his farm and in the general agricultural world.

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2. Elkanah Watson, History . . . of Modern Agriculture Societies. . . (Albany, 1820), 116. Author's italics.
  3. Ibid. 118.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Percy Bidwell and John Falconer, History of Agriculture in the Northern United States; 1620-1860 (Washington, D.C., 1925).

S. S. Bradford, "Elkanah Watson House," National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings report, January, 1964.

Edward J. Dies, Titans of the Soil (Chapel Hill, 1949).

Elkanah Watson, History of the Rise, Progress and Existing Conditions of the Western Canals in the State of New York. . . , Together with the Rise, Progress, and Existing State of Modern Agriculture Societies, On the Berkshire System . . . (Albany, 1820).