UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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Sarah Whitman Hooker/House		
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LOCATION		
STREET & NUMBER		
1237 New Britain Avenue		NOT FOR PUBLICATION
West Hartford	MOUNTY OF 15t	CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
	CODE LST	- William R. Cotter COUNTY CODE
Connecticut		Hartford
CLASSIFICATION		
CATEGORY OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
DISTRICT X_PUBLIC	OCCUPIED	_AGRICULTURE X_MUSEUM to
X_BUILDING(S)PRIVATE	X UNOCCUPIED	COMMERCIALPARK
STRUCTUREBOTH	XWORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONALPRIVATE RESIDENCE
SITE PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	ENTERTAINMENTRELIGIOUS
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CONDITION

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DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sarah Whitman Hooker House is located on the south side of New Britain Avenue (Route 71), just east of the intersection with South Main Street, in the southern part of the town of West Hartford, Connecticut (Photo 1). The intersection is a busy one, with stores and restaurants on the four corners, attracted there by the heavy traffic. One of these structures, on the southeast corner next door to the Sarah Whitman Hooker House occupies land that formerly was the side yard of the house. Another 18th-century house, much altered, is almost directly across New Britain Avenue, and an early 19th-century Greek Revival house is located on the north side of New Britain Avenue west of South Main Street.

The house is on its original site, facing north. The plot now has 170 feet frontage on New Britain Avenue and is 75 feet deep. It is bordered on the east by a cross street, Randall Avenue, and on the south and west by a parking lot (Photo 2). In colonial times the location was known as Four Mile Hill, being four miles west of the Old State House in Hartford on what was then the South Road to Farmington. Over the years, as New Britain Avenue has been improved from time to time, the road bed has been lowered, leaving a steep bank in front of the house that now is ascended by a flight of concrete steps (Photo 3). The Town of West Hartford owns the house, and has leased it to the West Hartford Bicentennial Trust, Inc., who have a program of restoration in progress.

Built c. 1720, the Sarah Whitman Hooker House is a 2½-story, five-bay, gable roof, central doorway, clapboard, colonial structure on stone foundation. The roof is covered with wood shingles. The gable eaves return briefly. The gable ends project in 4-inch overhangs. The framing for the first floor, visible in the basement, is discontinuous in the center of the house (Photo 4), giving rise to the supposition that the house originally had a central chimney. The postulate is that during extensive renovations c. 1807 the central chimney was removed and twin chimneys were installed. A photo taken at about the time of the Civil War shows the house with the twin chimneys. The east chimney, with molded cap, remains in place, the other having been removed at some time after the Civil War for reasons unknown.

While the present 12-over-8 double hung sash in the first and second floors are not original, the window casings and cornice moldings of the front facade are thought to be as old as the house. The Civil War photo shows a double front door. The present Dutch door, installed in the 1960's was original to the 18th-century Arnold-Butler-Francis House on New Britain Avenue that was demolished during the course of construction of Interstate 84.

The two 6-over-6 attic windows in each gable end appear to be original as their stiles and rails are joined by wooden pegs. Fenestration at first-and second-story levels of the other three facades has been changed from time to time. The east end now has two windows and two doors in the first story and two windows in the second, while the west end has two windows at

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Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Existing Surv. ITEM NUMBER 6

PAGE 1

W.P.A. Census of Old Buildings in Connecticut

1930s

State

Connecticut State Library

Hartford

Connecticut

State Register of Historic Places

1979

State

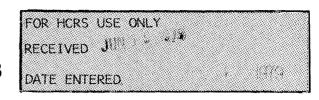
Connecticut Historical Commission

Hartford

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT



CONTINUATION SHEET Description ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 1

each level. The rear facade has four windows and a door on the first floor, and three windows above. An ell running to the rear from the southwest corner was removed prior to the current restoration. It appeared to have been built at about the turn of the 20th century, perhaps replacing or incorporating an earlier, smaller ell.

The framing of the house including plates, sills, flared corner posts, joists, purlins, and rafters all appears to be original or to date from the 1807 remodelling. The east front room on the first floor is the most elaborate remaining room. As it is the east chimney that survives, this room has a fireplace, It also has a panelled dado on the north and east walls (Photo 5), a summer beam running in the direction of the width of the house, and wideboard flooring. The corresponding room in the rear has a fireplace opening from the same chimney, and this fireplace has a bee hive oven at the side. The attic, probably dating from the 1807 renovation, appears unchanged (Photo 6); it has unusually heavy purlins, and a smoke house in the chimney with original door and hardware. In the attic it is apparent that the chimney is positioned back of the center of the house. To compensate, the chimney brick in the attic are laid on the slant so that the upward thrust of the chimney tilts to the front, thereby allowing the chimney to emerge from the roof nearly centered on the ridge line.

It is likely that the 1807 work included replacement of the original lean-to with the present arrangement of the rear of the house, i.e., two rooms on the first floor and three on the second, with the present attic and roof part of the work at the time. The present restoration has brought to light earlier elements that were buried in the partitions, perhaps during the 1807 renovation, including fluted facing that may have been for pilasters flanking the front door, panelled doors, parts of a corner cupboard, and various moldings.

Components of the upstairs of the house include two summer beams running east-west in the west front room, a wall in the west rear room left exposed to show hand riven lath fastened with wrought rectangular-headed nails (Photo 7), and a small area of hair plaster in the east front room. There is brick nogging in the east, north, and west walls. The east front chamber originally had horizontal sheathing with sponge painting. In the 1807 remodelling this sheathing, like many other elements, was cannibalized and re-used. A piece of the sheathing, now used vertically, with two circles of sponge painting is shown at the left in Photo 7. A small area of original, sponge-painted, horizontal sheathing also remains in place.

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

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CONTINUATION SHEET Description ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

A paint record analyzing the various coats of paint at interior locations has been carried out in accordance with procedures recommended by the Lyman Allen Museum of New London. Colors established to be the original colors will be used in the restoration.

On September 1, 1935 a fire damaged the interior of the house, especially the first floor west front room and the central hall. Since that time the west and south sides of the house have been a single, large, L-shaped room. The stair rail survived the fire; it is curly maple, with a high ramp at the second floor end.

PERIOD	AR	EAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	IECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	
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1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	XOTHER (SPECIFY)
		INVENTION		Revolutionary War association

SPECIFIC DATES c. 1720/c. 1807

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John Seymour

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of the Sarah Whitman Hooker House derives in part from the fact that it served as the place of detention for the Tory Skenes, and thus is associated with the Revolutionary War (Criterion A). It also embodies the distinctive characteristics of Colonial post-and-beam, mortise-and-tenon frame construction altered to accommodate the later popularity of the Georgian style (Criterion C). Moreover, the Connecticut Archeological Survey has done a brief dig on the grounds, and may return for further investigations (Criterion D).

The location of the house on the South Road to Farmington establishs it as one of the first houses in West Hartford, then known as the Western Division of Hartford. This was the first part of West Hartford to be settled. The date of the house is determined as c. 1720 because in that year John Seymour purchased the land from Stephen Steel (Hartford Land Records, volume 3, page 337). John Seymour's will of 1747 refers to "my mansion house on Four Mile Hill in the West Division," demonstrating that the house was built between 1720 and 1747. It seems likely that he bought the land with a view to building a house, and therefore the chances are that the house was built soon after 1720.

The design and workmanship of the house comprise the distinctive characteristics of the Colonial style of architecture. The heavy timbers joined by mortise and tenon are the essence of colonial construction. The five-bay facade with central doorway and central chimney was a widely used plan. After colonial days, when Georgian architecture came into favor, the central chimney plan was less in fashion. A central hallway was pre-The Sarah Whitman Hooker House is a demonstration of this trend of the times at the turn of the 19th century. The postulate that extensive alterations were carried out at about this time is supported by a concurrent, substantial increase in the value of the property. Charles Seymour inherited the property in 1802, it was inventoried at In 1804 he mortgaged it for \$1,000, and in 1807 sold the premises to his sister and Jedidiah Wells, who were about to be married, for \$1,280 (HLR 26/243, 37/306). Such doubling of value in a few short years suggests that the central hall, two chimneys, full two-story rear section, attic and roof were executed at this time in a program to bring the house up to contemporary standards of Georgian style.

The house is named for Sarah Whitman Hooker (1747-1837) because she lived there during the Revolutionary War, and the West Hartford chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution was named in her honor. Sarah's

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES Nelson R. Burr, "Many 'Tories' Can Be Told...," West Hartford News, October 24, 1974, page 6. Frances M. Fransson, three articles in the West Hartford News, January 27. July 3. and July 10, 1975. Revolutionary War Archives, Connecticut State Library. **10**GEOGRAPHICAL DATA Less than one ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _ Hartford South QUADRANGLE NAME QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000UTM REFERENCES A[1,8]6 | 8,7 | 7,0,0 [4,6]2,2]1,9,0 EASTING NORTHING ZONE VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION The nominated property is described in the West Hartford Land Records, vol. 660, p. 3 and vol. 570 p. 88. LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES STATE CODE COUNTY CODE STATE CODE COUNTY CODE FORM PREPARED BY NAME / TITLE David F. Ransom ORGANIZATION DATE Connecticut Historical Commission March 29, 1979 STREET & NUMBER TELEPHONE 203 566-3005 59 South Prospect Street CITY OR TOWN STATE Connecticut Hartford, 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS: STATE____ NATIONAL x__ 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 DATE TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission June 13, 1979 FOR NPS USE ONLY I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER ATTEST: DATE CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

husband, Thomas Hart Hooker (1745-1775), was a fifth generation descendant of the Reverend Thomas Hooker, the founder of Hartford. According to Connecticut records, Thomas Hart Hooker entered military service as a private in the 2nd Company, 2nd Regiment on May 10, 1775, and was stationed at Roxbury during the seige of Boston. The Bill of Mortality in the records of West Hartford's First Congregational Church states that he died in service November 25, 1775 "of Peripneumonia." His wife, alone with her two children aged five and three, received into her home in September 1775 for a period of some months two prisoners of war, at the behest of the Committee Appointed to Take Care of Prisoners. The committee, in turn, received their instructions in a directive from Governor Jonathan Trumbull that is now in the archives of the Connecticut Historical Society. The Governor said: "Gentlemen, You are hereby directed to take care and charge of Gov'r P. Skene and pursue the resolve of the Continental Congress relative to him -and agreeable to their desire confine him on his parole of Honor not to go out of the bounds of Hartford -- and agreeable to the Act of Assembly of this colony you are directed to provide said Gov'r Skene with suitable lodgings and entertainment in some remote part of the town of Hartford -and at your discretion you may permit Maj'r Andrew P. Skene to reside with his father said Gov'r Skene."

Philip Skene, Governor of the Forts of Ticonderoga and Crown Point, resided with his son, Andrew, 25 miles south of Ticonderoga. In 1775 the senior Skene made a trip to England, and on his return trip was taken into custody in Philadelphia in June, 1775. A month earlier an expedition led by Ethan Allen, after capturing Fort Ticonderoga on May 10, 1775, had gone on to ransack the Skene home, in the process capturing the son who had been left in charge, and bringing him to Hartford. The Skenes were Loyalists or Tories, not Englishmen sent out to quell the colonial uprising. Their stay with Mrs. Hooker is further annotated by an entry in the diary kept by Major Christopher French, also a captive in Hartford, who related an incident that occurred January 16, 1776 during which a group of some 20 local citizens gathered outside Mrs. Hooker's house with a view to harming her prisoners, but dispersed without doing violence. Additional documents relating to the Skenes' confinement are in the Revolutionary Archives at the Connecticut State Library.

The confinement of the Skenes, father and son, to Sarah Whitman Hooker's house is one of two documented events directly linking West Hartford with the Revolutionary War. (The other is the encampment of General Putnam's forces on Avon Mountain in November 1778.) This link with the Revolutionary War is an association of the house with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

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CONTINUATION SHEET Significance ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

Further interest is added to the house by the existence of a list of furnishings given to Sarah Whitman by her father on the day before her marriage to Thomas Hart Hooker. The impressive dowry of furniture and household goods was recorded by John Whitman January 31, 1769 in his account book that is now at the Connecticut Historical Society (MS 72802 (5)). The information that he wrote down will be of considerable assistance in the present restoration as a guide to the selection of some of the contents of the house.

The house has served as an inn or restaurant several times. It was first licensed as a tavern, to Timothy Seymour, son of the builder, in 1733. In mid-19th century it fulfilled the same function under the name The Sheaf of Wheat, and in mid-20th century again was a restaurant and inn as the Sarah Whitman Hooker House.

The idea has been expressed that there were slave quarters associated with the house. No documentation has come to hand to substantiate this idea. The 18th-century inventories indicate a maximum of one black living on the premises at any one time; the term slave quarters implies several. There is no known record of any blacks living on the premises in the 19th century.

The program of work now in progress at the house will make it a Restored Historic Residence. All 20th-century wallboard, plumbing, and the like has been removed. Sewer and water connections have been made, a new heating system installed, and the walls and attic floor insulated. Next on the schedule will come replacement of the missing chimney, replacement of the rear stairs, and restoration of the east front chamber. The plan is to furnish the house as it was in the Federal period (late 18th/early 19th centuries) with the exception of the first and second floor east front rooms which will be furnished as they were when Sarah Whitman Hooker provided quarters for the Skenes.

Over its long history of $2\frac{1}{2}$ centuries the house has seen many changes. Its sturdy Colonial framing remains intact, modified by Georgian elements from the 1807 renovations. Its association with the Revolutionary War gives it a special place in West Hartford history.

1. "Restored Historic Residence" is a new term under the Connecticut building code carrying less onerous code requirements than "Museum."

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Addendum

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 1

The Sarah Whitman Hooker House was built, c. 1720, probably as a 12-story, 5-bay, central chimney, lean-to structure, but possibly as a one-room structure. This possibility is explored more fully at the end of this addendum. The following members survive from the first half of the 18th century: foundations, cellar, sills, flared front posts, facade fenestration pattern, joists, studs, girts for the first floor and for the second floor, front plate, and first and second-story summer beams. It is likely that the spong painting in the second floor northeast chamber and the dado and flooring of the first floor northeast room are original. The size of the nine front windows when the house was built is uncertain, and the present dimensions may represent an alteration, but the window casings on the front of the house appear never to have been changed and are original to the time when the windows assumed their present dimensions.

The significance of the c. 1720 elements in the house is that they demonstrate Colonial house construction with typical heavy framing using post-and-beam and mortise-and-tenon techniques. The Sarah Whitman Hooker House is one of the oldest structures in West Hartford, and it is of interest that the Colonial framing has survived for 250 years in an urban environment.

When the house was altered and enlarged, c. 1807, the changes were carried out in the Georgian style of architecture that had achieved wide acceptance since the 1700 s. Accordingly, the central chimney was removed, twin chimneys were constructed, and the common floor plan of central hall with two rooms on each side was adopted. At the same time the roof was rebuilt to provide for a full second floor and attic. The present chimney dates from this period, with its two fireplaces on the first floor, one with bake oven, and with its smoke house, including original hardware, in the attic. Several of the interior partitions installed at this time were destroyed by the 1935 fire, and are being replaced during the present restoration. Discoveries made during the present restoration indicate that the changes made in 1807 were extensive. Recently, it has been found that earlier fluted facing (perhaps from the front entrance), panelled doors, parts of a corner cupboard, and various moldings were reused or buried in the walls during the 1807 re-building of the house. The hand-riven lath on the second floor, installed in 1807, is being left exposed as a permanent exhibit, as is some of the sponge-painted sheathing that was re-used at that time. The roof framing of rafters and heavy purlins has been unchanges since 1807, and the roof boards and attic floor appear to have been installed at that time.

The significance of the house as altered c. 1807 to essentially its present condition is an example of the Georgian style applied to an older structure. It provides an opportunity to study the changes made when a

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Addendum

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 2

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Colonial house was enlarged and the central hall plan introduced in the Georgian style then widely accepted. Other examples of similar changes exist, one being the Henry Hooker House in Berlin, Connecticut, listed in the National Register of Historic Places, where the changes did not occur until later in the 19th century. In the Henry Hooker House the fireplaces are smaller and the late 19th-century central stairway is carried up to the third floor where an attic gable, installed in the roof, for the purpose, lights the stair well. This dormer, and the roof as a whole have braced overhangs in the Swiss cottage manner, forecasting the Stick Style. The two Hooker houses offer a comparison in the elimination of central chimneys in Colonial houses, one done with a view to adopting the Georgian style, the other with an eye to what was fashionable well into the Victorian era.

Some elements in the Sarah Whitman Hooker House are either new or of unknown provenance. The front door, although itself old, was salvaged when a neighboring house was demolished. It replaces a two-leaf door that is shown by a post-Civil War picture. Presumably, the side lights in the entrance were put in at the time the present door was installed. The age of the clapboards is uncertain. Some of the sash are new; some are old but probably not original; only those in the attic are thought to date as far back as 1807.

The architectural history of the house shows early 18th-century Colonial construction as modified by early 19th-century Georgian changes. The architectural history together with the association with the Revolutionary War make the house one of exceptional local significance.

A tentative hypothesis on an additional stage in the development of the house is emerging from observation made during the current restoration. Several elements have been found suggesting that initially (c. 1720) the house may have been a one-room structure with chamber above enlarged soon after it was built to become the seven-room house recorded in the 1747 inventory. One of the indications to this effect is the cellar framing where the west summer beam is noticeably larger than the corresponding beam east of the original central chimney. The joists in the west part of the framing for the first floor run north-south and in the east side, east-west. The supposition is that the side with the heavier beam, the west side, was the original one-room structure, with a chimney in the east end wall that later became the central chimney.

FHR-8-300A (11/78)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE.

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Sarah Whitman Hooker House West Hartford, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Addendum

ITEM NUMBER

PAGE 1

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The next step in the development of the house is thought to have been the addition of the east room and chamber above. Differences in the chambers support this view. In the west chamber the ceiling molding stops at the posts and the room was painted Spanish brown. In the east chamber the molding runs around the posts and the walls were finished with whitewash and black sponge painting. At this stage the house had four rooms. Provision for stude in the framing of the back walls of these four rooms suggests that they were the back wall of the house, until the lean-to was added to bring the number of rooms up to seven, as noted in the 1847 inventory.

If further work confirms the hypothesis suggested by these observations it will be important because there are very few houses surviving in the Hartford area known initially to have been one-room structures. The Sarah Whitman Hooker House may be the only one.

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