

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

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

For NPS use only

received **SEP 20 1985**

date entered **OCT 17 1985**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Perkins-Rockwell House

and/or common Dr. John Rockwell House

**2. Location**

street & number 42 Rockwell Street N.A. not for publication

city, town Norwich N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county New London code 011

**3. Classification**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Ownership</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Present Use</b>	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N.A.	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

**4. Owner of Property**

name Faith Trumbull Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution

street & number 42 Rockwell Street

city, town Norwich N.A. vicinity of state Connecticut 06360

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Hall, Norwich (Town Clerk's Office)

street & number 100 Broadway

city, town Norwich state Connecticut 06360

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1975  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 So. Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Perkins-Rockwell House is a large, Federal-period residence which was constructed of load-bearing granite in 1818. Located on a large open lot, bordered by stone walls, it faces south-southeast onto Rockwell Street. When the house was built, it was the only residence on this hill which is situated above and to the north of the center of Norwich. The surrounding residential neighborhood was not established until the late nineteenth century. The Federal-style Nathaniel Backus House is the only exception, but it was moved to the east side of the property by the D.A.R. in 1951.

The two-story, hip-roofed main block of the Perkins-Rockwell House (33' x 46') has a three-bay facade with a side entrance (Photograph # 1). The addition on the northeast front corner (22.5' x 22.5'), originally a one-story kitchen ell, was raised to three stories about 1886 and joined to the main block with a hip roof (Photograph # 2). Both sections display exterior walls of cut granite, laid in a random ashlar bond. Rose-colored lime mortar was used on the principal elevations. The color may or may not have been added during a later repointing. A full basement, with mortared granite rubble walls, exists under both sections. It is divided by a brick firewall, which extends up through the house to the roof between the main block and the addition.

Other additions to the house over time include a one-room, single-story addition at the front southeast corner (Photograph # 2). It is wood-framed and sided with flush boarding. A curved, wrap-around porch supported by panelled posts, which extends across the facade and the west elevation, terminates at the northwest corner (Photograph # 3). At that location is another single-story, one-room addition, which served as a professional office at various periods in the nineteenth century (Photograph # 4). Both of these one-room additions were built about 1840. The porch was a later addition, probably after 1886. A wood-framed garage is attached to the house at the rear northeast corner. It is presently sided with aluminum, but it may also date from the nineteenth century.

Full-height triple-hung sash windows (each sash has six panes) with granite lintels are located on the first story of the facade of the main block, suggesting that an earlier porch of some kind may have existed. They are flanked by dark green shutters with movable louvers. Double-hung, six-over-six sash, also with stone lintels, is used in the windows in the rest of the original house. Shutters are on all elevations except the rear of the main block and the three-story addition.

The main entrance to the house is recessed slightly within a round-arched opening of granite with a keystone, and flanked by granite pilasters (Photograph # 6). The fanlight over the door has a simple radial pattern of leaded comes with a small sunburst at the center. The six-panel door may be original, but the middle panels have been removed and replaced with translucent glass. The original hardware on this door has been retained, including a large caselock on the interior.

Three brick chimneys which extend above the ridge line are painted dark green to match the shutters. The two original stacks are integral with the exterior walls on the west elevation. At the rear a large projecting stone section was added to the outside wall to accommodate the fire box of the late Victorian fireplace in the northeast corner of the main block. The chimney for this fireplace may be a modification of the stack for the kitchen hearth of the original ell (Photograph # 5).

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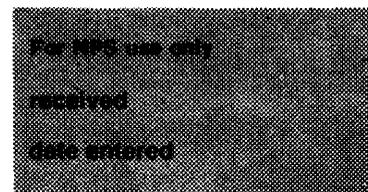
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The interior of the house is generally Federal in style, although a number of minor changes occurred in the late Victorian period. The most notable feature is the use of arched openings between rooms and recessed into walls. These openings are framed with wood moulding with a keystone block at the top of the arch. With the exception of the opening between the front and rear parlors, which has a shouldered arch, all of these openings have round arches repeating the form of the main entrance.

There are two recessed openings in the rear (west) parlor. The recess on the interior wall, which was built to accommodate a Hepplewhite chest, may be original. Across the room a similar opening contains a Wilson cast-iron stove, believed to have been installed when the house was built.<sup>1</sup> Although the stove is approximately the same age as the house, it appears that the original Federal-style fireplace surround in this location was modified to accommodate the arch, leaving the pilasters and the ends of the entablature and mantel in place (Photograph # 7). A comparison of these architectural features with those of the fireplace surround in the front parlor tends to confirm this impression (Photograph # 8). Although it is simply executed, that surround is purely Federal in style with narrow, paneled pilasters and a full entablature. The brick firebox is framed by blue Minton china tiles imported from England.<sup>2</sup>

In both parlors interior blinds fold back against the jamb on either side of the window.<sup>3</sup> In the front parlor they consist of two equal halves of eight panels. In the rear parlor the blinds are divided into three unequal panelled sections, with a folding hinged section on the right hand side. The front window in the added room on the southeast corner has interior blinds which are similar to those in the front parlor. The other window in this room has replacement (or new) blinds with modern fixed louvers. Access to this later room is through the original location of the side door of the house. The stone sill and sidelights remain in place.

The front hall contains a simple staircase on the east (exterior) wall and arched openings to the rooms (Photograph # 9). A dentil course extends around the cornice, the only room where this type of Federal-style moulding appears. The plain balustrade has simple turned balusters and rounded hand rail. The applied moulding on the string board at the end of each tread is not original. It matches applied moulding found elsewhere in the house which was added in the late nineteenth century.

On the second floor, doors open off a central hall. Although most of the original Federal-style panelled doors and door surrounds remain in place, the floor plan was altered after 1880. At least one of the high-ceilinged rooms (10') was divided by a partition wall with built-in cabinets and closets. Access to the attic was originally by a staircase which ran parallel to and above the main staircase. The first few stairs remain in place but the rest of the staircase has been permanently closed off by a wall behind false cabinet doors. The present access to the attic of the main block is from the three-story addition. The addition itself can also be accessed from the upper hall through a door at the head of the stairs. Because of the difference in floor heights between the second floors of the main block and the addition, the short passage between the two is down a slight incline through an arched opening in the brick fire wall.

## 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Criteria B and C

**Specific dates** 1818 **Builder/Architect** Joseph Perkins

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Perkins-Rockwell House has both historical and architectural significance. It is historically significant because of its long association with the Perkinses and Rockwells, prominent families in Norwich in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Criterion B). Architecturally important as an imposing, well-preserved, vernacular expression of domestic architecture of the Federal period, it is distinguished by the quality of its unusual stone construction, and its well-preserved Federal-style interior (Criterion C). Interior modifications to the house in the Victorian period add to its architectural interest.

### History

Major Joseph Perkins (1759-?), the builder of the house, was a member of the fourth generation of his family to live in Norwich. The Perkins family in America were all descendants of John Perkins (1590-1654) of Newant, Gloucestershire, England, one of the founders of Ipswich, Massachusetts. Several of his grandsons, including the first Joseph Perkins, removed to Norwich about 1695. The family owned extensive land holdings in town, particularly in the Third Society of Norwich, now the town of Lisbon.

Major Joseph Perkins was the first member of his family to build a house in the Chelsea section, today the City of Norwich. He was a direct descendant of the first Joseph Perkins, a wealthy farmer, deacon of the church, and physician. Major Joseph served in the Revolution, receiving his commission in the militia. After the war, as the eldest son, he followed the family tradition and practiced medicine. He was also a merchant in "business at Norwich Landing," probably with his cousin Jacob, the owner of an established firm engaged in trade with the West Indies and Africa.

Major Joseph was married relatively late in life to Mary Watkinson in 1803, but he did not begin to build this house until 1814. In that year, according to his diary, he had a timber-framed barn built on the property and began to cut stones for the house at Deal Hole Quarry, a granite ledge on his land (to the east of the present lot).<sup>4</sup> Plans were drawn by Perkins (on the back of militia lists) for an ambitious house.<sup>5</sup> The "cellar was stoned" in 1816 but he did not begin to lay stones for the walls until the following year. The house was not completed until 1818. The long delay may have been a result of a decline of trade from the river port after the War of 1812.

Mary Perkins (1804-1886), Joseph's eldest daughter, married John Arnold Rockwell (1803-1881) in 1831. She inherited the house at her father's death about 1840. Rockwell was a lawyer who was responsible for the one-room additions to the house.

After John Rockwell died in Washington, D.C., in 1861, while serving as a representative to Congress, his widow returned to Norwich. She did not reopen the family house, however, and it remained closed for thirty years, until about 1883. Her only child, Dr. John A. Rockwell, inherited the house after his mother died. He is responsible for many of the late nineteenth-century changes to the building, including the three-story addition, the fire wall, and probably the wrap-around porch. He also installed central heating and an

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name Norwich

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

### UTM References

A	<u>18</u>	<u>743680</u>	<u>4602040</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

**Verbal boundary description and justification** Although the property has been reduced in size over time, the present lot is unchanged since 1937, identified as Map#85,Block # 52, Lot #2, and described as land and buildings north of Rockwell Street bounded on the north by Tarrant and grantee, on the east by grantee, on the west by Blanche Pendleton. (NLR 212: 190)

**List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries** N.A.

state	code	county	code

state	code	county	code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Cunningham, Preservation Consultant

Edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Cunningham Associates

date April 17, 1985

street & number 98 Washington Street

telephone (203) 347 4702

city or town Middletown

state Connecticut 06457

# 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

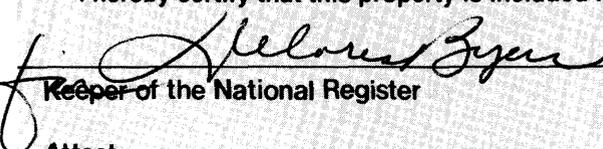


title Director: Connecticut Historical Commission

date September 10, 1985

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

  
Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the  
National Register

date 10-17-85

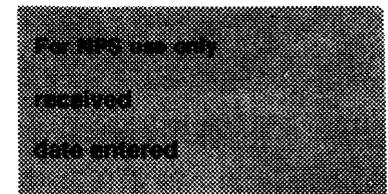
Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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inside bathroom. The office at the rear, which his father had used for his legal practice, became John's medical office. John Rockwell was also responsible for developing the neighborhood as a residential area after 1883. With his brother Alfred and his cousin Joseph Perkins, he widened Rockwell Street and laid out several nearby streets for residential development.

John's daughter, Mary Rockwell Cole, inherited the house in 1934. She presented the property to the D. A. R. that year, along with the original plans for the building. Title to the property was not officially transferred until 1937, at which time the present one-acre lot was set off from the land owned by the grantee to the east and north. At the present time the house is maintained as a museum by the Faith Trumbull Chapter of the D. A. R.

Architectural Significance

Although it was built in the late Federal period, the Perkins-Rockwell House makes few concessions to architectural style or prevailing popular taste, either in form or detail. Despite its size and type of construction, both normally associated with high-style buildings, the exterior of this house is relatively unadorned. Indeed its solidly executed form and plan owe more to logical necessity rather than style. In view of the fact that the house was built by a wealthy and prominent citizen in a community which was then very cosmopolitan, its spare, uncompromising appearance is somewhat unusual. Since it is known from the surviving records that Joseph Perkins was very much involved in its design and construction, this house must be viewed and interpreted as a reflection of his personal taste.

There are many examples of his obvious preference for functional construction. The lack of exterior detail, such as dentils or modillions, probably was deliberate. In this period even quite modest wood-framed houses were embellished with at least a dentil course under the eaves. The entrance way, virtually the only exterior stylistic feature, is austere in its design simplicity.

A great deal of attention was paid, however, to the quality of construction. The stone walls are clearly the work of a master mason. They emphasize the unusual form of the house, a survival from the Georgian-Colonial style.

The existing interior architectural detail is well-crafted, although a greater display might have been expected since there was no shortage of skilled craftsman in Norwich at this time.<sup>6</sup> The original arched openings are a sophisticated treatment, but limiting the use of dentil moulding to just the front hall is unusual. The fireplace surround in the front parlor is another case in point. While demonstrating an understanding of the form and proportions of the Federal style, it minimally interprets them, and in such a formal room, lacks applied detail.

Notes:

1. A Franklin stove patented by James Wilson in 1816. It displays 17 stars for the number of states in the Union at this time. See Reference Guide to the Museum, typescript, n.d., compiled by the D. A. R., p. 8.

2. See Reference Guide, p. 6.

(continued)

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3. Kelly indicates that interior shutters are rarely found in Connecticut.

J. Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut, (New York: Dover Publications, 1963), p. 143.

4. Diary of Joseph Perkins cited in Reference Guide, p. 3.

5. The plans are discussed in the 1934 presentation speech by Mary Rockwell Cole along with a mention of a record of the accounts of the building of the "Stone House." Reference Guide, p. 2.

6. By 1795 Norwich had 66 cabinetmakers, along with 49 silversmiths and 20 clockmakers. At the time of the Revolution, the town was one of the twelve largest in the colonies.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Caulkins, Miss F. M. History of Norwich, Connecticut. Norwich: Thomas Robinson, 1845.

Caulkins, F.M. History of Norwich, Connecticut. Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Co., 1866.

Kelly, J. Frederick. Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut. New York: Dover Publications, 1963.

Nafie, Joan. To the Beat of a Drum: A History of Norwich during the American Revolution. Norwich: Old Town Press, 1975.

Reference Guide to Museum. Typescript, n.d., compiled by the D. A. R. (On file at the museum,)

Typescript, n.d. D.A.R. (On file with the Faith Trumbull Chapter, D. A. R.)