

PH0000 787

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

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

| | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| STATE: Connecticut | |
| COUNTY: Middlesex | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER 7102090013 | DATE 7/30/91 |

1. NAME

COMMON: The Goodspeed Opera House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Goodspeed's Hall

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER: Norwich Road

CITY OR TOWN: East Haddam

STATE: Connecticut CODE: 09 COUNTY: Middlesex CODE: 007

3. CLASSIFICATION

| CATEGORY (Check One) | OWNERSHIP | STATUS | ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC |
|---|--|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure <input type="checkbox"/> Object | <input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both | Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress |
| PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate) | | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial <input type="checkbox"/> Educational <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Entertainment | <input type="checkbox"/> Government <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial <input type="checkbox"/> Military <input type="checkbox"/> Museum | <input type="checkbox"/> Park <input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence <input type="checkbox"/> Religious <input type="checkbox"/> Scientific | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____ _____ |

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME: The Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc.

STREET AND NUMBER: Goodspeed Plaza

CITY OR TOWN: East Haddam STATE: Connecticut CODE: 09

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.: Town Hall

STREET AND NUMBER: Main Street

CITY OR TOWN: East Haddam STATE: Connecticut CODE: 09

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY: Connecticut Historic Structures and Landmarks Survey

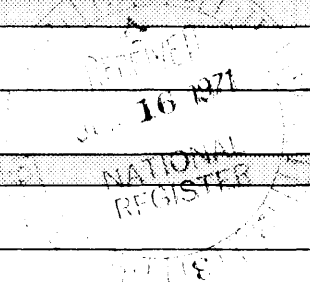
DATE OF SURVEY: 1968 Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: Connecticut Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER: 54 Pratt Street

CITY OR TOWN: Hartford STATE: Connecticut CODE: 09

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



STATE: Connecticut

COUNTY: Middlesex

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7. DESCRIPTION

| | | | | | | |
|-----------|---|------------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| CONDITION | (Check One) | | | | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent | <input type="checkbox"/> Good | <input type="checkbox"/> Fair | <input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated | <input type="checkbox"/> Ruins | <input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed |
| | (Check One) | | | (Check One) | | |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered | <input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered | <input type="checkbox"/> Moved | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site | | |

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

(Excerpts from: The Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Connecticut, 1963
 Prepared for the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc., by Fred Van Name)

Long before the Opera House was a reality, William Goodspeed had made his mark as a successful merchant, banker, shipbuilder, hotel owner, steamboat and railroad tycoon... His father, Joseph, was a descendant of one of the area's earliest settlers and operated a general store at Goodspeed's Landing on the Connecticut River. Succeeding to his father's business at an early age, young William lost little time in expanding the family enterprises - he had the "Midas" touch, coupled with vision far beyond his time... In the early 1870's, Goodspeed's general store housed the offices of his shipbuilding concern as well as the old Hartford & New York Steamboat Line. It was a modest building on the river front and had sufficed for years, but William H. had outgrown the cramped surroundings. A larger more imposing building took form in his mind: a multi-purpose building with the dual advantages of serving both the river and the land traffic... In any event, the old building was torn down and the ground prepared for a new undertaking, modestly to be called Goodspeed's Hall. The man not only had an astute business mind, he also had considerable civic pride. He believed in East Haddam and had visions of making it a thriving, important center of commercial and cultural development...

Thus, in the Centennial year of the United States, the present building with its Opera House came into being. Stone for the bastion-like foundation was quarried from the ledges near the eastern approach to the present East Haddam bridge. Jebez Comstock, a master builder from Hadlyme, was selected as general contractor; Charles Arnold, of Haddam Neck, became construction superintendent. Started early in 1876, it took 18 months to complete sufficiently so its inaugural could be staged on October 24, 1877. A dockhouse, or basement, on the river side provided ample room for the passenger and freight service of the river steamers. The original bar was conveniently located on this level, directly beneath the present Victorian serpentine bar included in the plan of restoration. The street floor was primarily for commercial use; here, the Goodspeeds maintained their spacious general store where travelers and townspeople alike could buy most anything, domestic or imported, from food to fancy clothes, or from a packet of pins to cumbersome farm implements. The brothers' offices were adjacent to the store, commanding a view of the river. There were various business and professional offices on the second floor and an actors' dressing room. The two upper floors were given over to the theatre auditorium. It was an impressive building, rising six flights above the riverside landing and four stories above the street entrance; it was then, and is today, the tallest wooden structure along the 400-mile shore-front of the Connecticut River.

It was the day of ornate, elaborately decorated "saloons" on the larger type of river steamers and Mr. Goodspeed decided to furnish his Opera House in much the same manner, though slightly more restrained. The boxes, the hanging horseshoe balcony suspended only by slender rods, the proscenium - all featured gold-leafed rococo designs with delicately painted medallions of women's heads spaced at intervals on the forward

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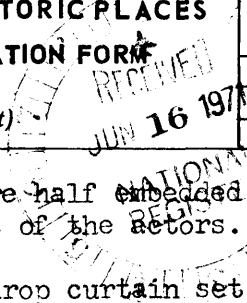
SEE INSTRUCTIONS

1977

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Continuation Sheet)

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| STATE Connecticut | |
| COUNTY Middlesex | |
| FOR NPS USE ONLY | |
| ENTRY NUMBER 76.07.09.0013 | DATE 7/20/71 |



7.a

(Number all entries)

face of the balcony... The boxes were half embedded into the original stage apron, affording an enviable closeup of the actors.

At Goodspeed Opera House, the drop curtain set the atmosphere. Painted by a well known set designer, John A. Thompson of New York, it depicted the steamer "State of New York", largest and costliest steamer of the Line, upward bound, passing Clark's Creek just below East Haddam. It was hung in such a manner that the audience might imagine they were looking through the wall of the building to the river itself, with the hills and farmsteads of Haddam and Chester beyond... This was no ordinary country playhouse; Goodspeed spared no expense in providing the finest entertainment available. Entire shows were brought from Broadway to East Haddam, often for just a one-night stand. As general manager of the steamboat company this presented no problem to Goodspeed and it was reliably reported that the troupes thoroughly enjoyed the excursion...

When Goodspeed died, in 1882, his cherished Opera House was draped in black and the community felt it had lost one of its most valued members... After his death, various attempts were made to continue the Opera House on the same lavish scale it had enjoyed previously; but one element of success was missing: the master promoter, the entrepreneur... There were minstrel shows, amateur theatricals, costume balls in the 90's, but its fortunes went into slow decline... The last use of the auditorium for public entertainment was in 1920, less than a year later, fire safety legislation made further use of the place impossible without a vast outlay for fire escapes and other forms of mandatory protection. Yet, for more than a decade afterwards, offices were used on the second floor and the general store downstairs continued in business. From then on, the building was used principally for storage purposes... In 1943, the State of Connecticut acquired the Opera House and 4.38 acres of land from the New Haven Railroad for \$4,000. Shortly thereafter, the balconies and the east and west facades were removed, as well as the veranda overlooking the river. State Highway trucks were garaged there and miscellaneous equipment stored in various rooms on the street level. The floor above was used for filing records, blue prints, topographical charts and other data connected with highway operations. The building was utilized in this manner during World War II and finally fell into disuse.

Early in 1952, a rumor that the old Opera House might be dismantled and completely leveled before the end of the year brought a resurgence of interest in the landmark... The combined effort of those vitally interested in saving the Opera House bore fruit... To this end, The Goodspeed Opera House Foundation became a corporate, non-profit entity in August '59... The goal of the Foundation was twofold: to restore the Opera House as faithfully as possible and to reactivate the playhouse as a year 'round operation - not just a summer theatre on the "straw hat circuit." Work on the restoration got under way in July, 1960... Frederic Palmey, who designed the reconstruction of the interior of the Opera House, in collaboration with H. Sage Goodwin of the firm of Schutz & Goodwin, architects, of Hartford,

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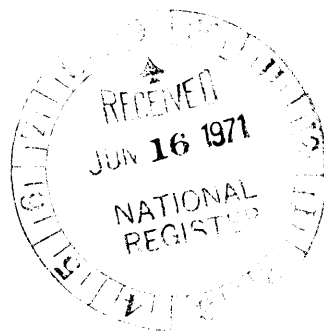
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7.b

never deviated from the original concept of restoring the auditorium and the exterior as faithfully as possible to their former elegance. The theatre itself is a gem of architectural accomplishment and decorating genius... As a concession to modern theatre requirements, a sunken orchestra pit was included in the restoration plan and a projection booth installed at the rear of the balcony. So-called creature comforts have not been overlooked; the theatre has modern heating facilities and, of course, air conditioning. ... The foyer and grand staircase, just inside the front doors, is a focal point of this amazing restoration. Of course, the staircase did not exist in Goodspeed's time; it is the product of the designer's imaginative and fertile mind. The inspiration stems from the lavish staircase treatment so prevalent on the side-wheelers and steamers that churned the river and coastal waters a century ago... The overall effect of the Goodspeed auditorium, however, is that of the intimate European palace theatres of the 18th century. Their elaborate decoration was simulated here by the use of available wallpaper borders and chromo-prints so popular in Victorian times. The exterior of the Goodspeed Opera House is basically of late 18th century design, but the neo-classic decoration is replaced with restrained use of ornaments produced on a jigsaw - that new mechanical invention in whose use the Victorian builders reveled.



3: SIGNIFICANCE

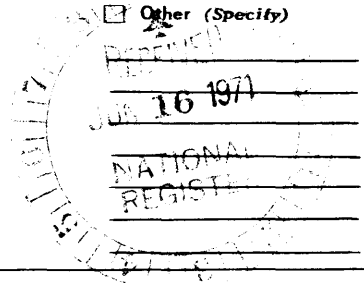
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1876-1877

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

(Excerpts from: The Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Connecticut. 1963
Prepared for the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc., by Fred Van Name)

In this inaugural year, 1963, marking the restoration and reactivation of a famous New England landmark of his making, we would like to believe that William H. Goodspeed is sitting on a lofty perch somewhere in Elysium musing over the splendor and grandeur with which his erstwhile dream has been endowed. Unquestionably, his beneficent spirit will hover over the building on successive opening nights, as the Goodspeed Opera House re-establishes its claim to fame and rightful place in theatrical history... By mid-century, his importance in the community made itself felt to the point that his bank, of which he was a founder and later president, issued bills engraved with a picture of the Goodspeed store, the Goodspeed mansion, or both. In association with F. C. Fowler, he controlled the ferry, which, until the present bridge was opened in 1913, was the only regular connection with the west bank of the river... Young Goodspeed was fired with ambition, constantly reaching for new worlds to conquer. With his brother George as partner, he opened a shipbuilding yard just south of the present Opera House site. The first large full-rigged ship built by the Goodspeed Brothers was the "Hero", launched in 1847 - and a sound ship it was, too... Recognized as reputable builders, many important vessels were built at their yard in the ensuing years, including the bark ship "Goodspeed", the first to bear the family name. In 1861, when the Civil War broke out, the Secretary of the U.S. Navy, Gideon Welles, wanted steam gunboats and he wanted them fast. The Messrs. Goodspeed accepted the challenge and in 90 days delivered the USS Kanawha to the New York Navy Yard; shortly thereafter she was put in commission and saw service in the Gulf Squadron of Mobile Bay. Governmental orders flowed in and to speed production of the wanted gunboats, the Goodspeeds employed as many as 400 men at one time, recruited from the hills of East Haddam and the surrounding areas...

It must be borne in mind that in Goodspeed's time the river steamers constituted the principal mode of travel and East Haddam was an extremely popular summer resort. In fact, in 1874, the town, with its 2,951 population, was rated as the largest community in the entire lower Connecticut valley. Needless to say, this figure was considerably augmented during the summer months... The Opera House was the most notable of Goodspeed's enterprises; in its hey-day, people came from miles around, in carriages, buggies, buckboards, two-seated surreys and farm wagons - and, in winter,

(contd.)

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Van Name, Fred, The Goodspeed Opera House, East Haddam, Connecticut. A Pictorial Vignette, Past and Present. Prepared for the Goodspeed Opera House Foundation, Inc. 1963

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

| LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY | | | | O R | LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES | | | | |
|--|----------|---------|-----------|---------|---|---------|-----------|---------|---------|
| CORNER | LATITUDE | | LONGITUDE | | LATITUDE | | LONGITUDE | | |
| | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds | Degrees | Minutes | Seconds |
| NW | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | 41° | 27' | 6.6" |
| NE | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | 72° | 27' | 46.5" |
| SE | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | | | |
| SW | ° | ' | " | ° | ' | " | | | |

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: 4.38

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

| STATE: | CODE | COUNTY | CODE |
|--------|------|--------|------|
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |
| | | | |

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE:
Herbert C. Darbee Associate Director

ORGANIZATION: Connecticut Historical Commission DATE: 28 May, 1971

STREET AND NUMBER:
54 Pratt Street

CITY OR TOWN: Hartford STATE: Connecticut CODE: 09

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION

NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: *Herbert C. Darbee*
Title: State Liaison Officer and Chairman - Connecticut Historical Commission
Date: 28 May, 1971

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

Ernest A. Connally
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date: _____

ATTEST:

William M. Stutz
Member of The National Register

Date: _____

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

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(Continuation Sheet)

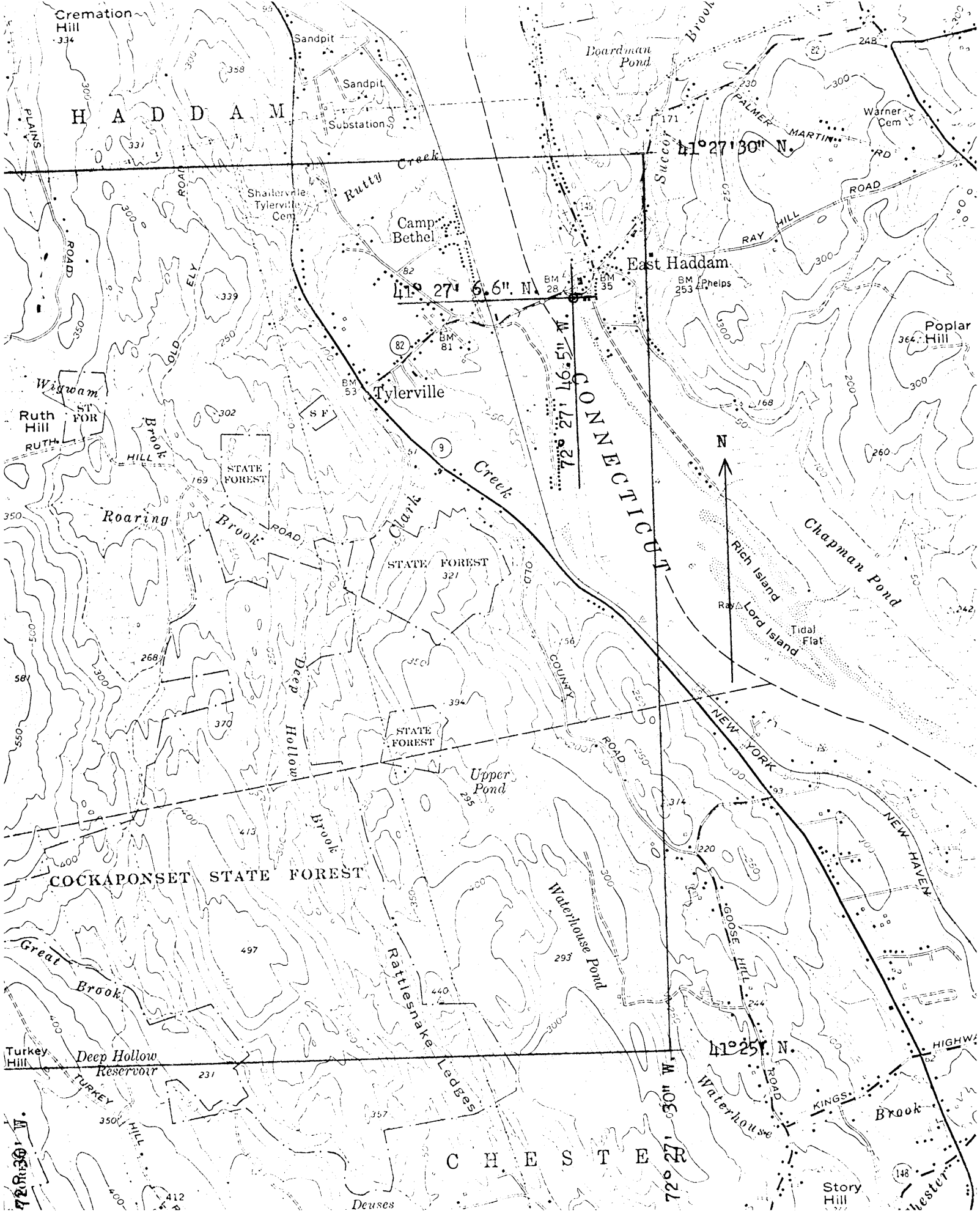
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8.a

(Number all entries)

by sleigh or skates over the river ice... Josh Billings, Henry Ward Beecher, Bloodgood's Minstrels, Tom Whiffen and orators of the calibre of Joseph R. Hawley, Orville Platt, Gov. Morgan C. Bulkley, Joseph L. Barbour - all played Goodspeed's.





Cremation Hill
334

H A D D A M

41° 27' 30" N.

41° 27' 6.6" N.

72° 27' 46.5" W.

C O N N E C T I C U T

N

N E W Y O R K

N E W H A V E N

C O C K A P O N S E T S T A T E F O R E S T

C H E S T E R

41° 25' N.

72° 27' 30" W.

72° 27' 30" W.

Story Hill

148

Deuses