

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JUN 6 1984
date entered JUL 5 1984

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

1. Name

historic Bradley-Wheeler House

and/or common Charles B. Wheeler House

2. Location

street & number 25 Avery Place N/A not for publication

city, town Westport N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield code 001

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Westport Historical Society

street & number 25 Avery Place

city, town Westport N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westport Town Clerk's Office

street & number 110 Myrtle Avenue

city, town Westport state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 Prospect Street
Hartford Connecticut

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" 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 Wheeler House is located in the center of the Town of Westport on the north side of Avery Place, a short, tree-lined street which joins Main Street and Myrtle Avenue, two of the main streets in town.

The house faces south on a mixed-use area that serves as a buffer zone between the main commercial and residential areas of the town. The Wheeler House was built in 1795 and although no visual representations survive of the house in its original form, it was probably a five-bay house. (For the basis of this statement see p. 8-1, paragraph 1.) The house was remodelled in the Italianate style in the second half of the nineteenth century, probably c. 1867. On the grounds, at the northwest corner of the lot, is an unusual two-story octagonal cobblestone barn, thought to have been used in the mid-nineteenth century as a smithy. This cobblestone structure, with its attached frame shed, is the only surviving outbuilding.

Views of the house from the early twentieth century show that it was originally surrounded by a picket fence. A turn-of-the-century gazebo and another frame shed, the former moved from the site and the latter demolished, also stood on the property.

Today the Wheeler House presents the appearance of an Italianate house that has been very little altered since the late nineteenth century (Photograph #1). It is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence punctuated by tall polygonal stuccoed posts dating c. 1930. The main facade faces Avery Place. The house itself is two and a half stories tall and five bays wide and it is sheltered by a shallow hipped roof surmounted by a cupola. The foundation is fashioned of rubble stone. The first-floor facade is sheltered by a hipped-roof porch supported by chamfered columns. The area under the porch is sheathed in horizontal flush boards which contrast with the narrow clapboards used on the rest of the structure. The central entry is flanked by two pairs of early twentieth-century glass doors. Both the entry and the paired doors have wide two-part molded surrounds with shallow pediments which flare boldly at the sides. The second floor follows the five-bay pattern of the first floor and the six-over-six sash windows are large and rectangular. Molded peaked lintels project boldly above the windows, which are flanked by louvered shutters. The wide, plain frieze is enlivened by three pairs of bull's-eye windows; one pair above the central bay and one pair over each of the flanking two bays. The deep overhang of the roof is ceiled and a molded cornice provides a finishing touch to this controlled and handsome composition. The cupola is square in section with a hipped roof.

The east elevation of the house faces Myrtle Avenue and the present Westport Town Hall. Both the main block and the two-story rear ell are two bays deep. The window treatment for the main block is the same as for the second floor of the main facade. On the first floor near the front of the house is a three-sided canted bay which illuminates the east front parlor. Two pairs of bull's-eye windows adorn the frieze. Behind the main block projects a small, one-bay wide entry porch with details similar to the front porch. The rear ell, like the main block, has a shallow hipped roof (Photographs #2, 3 and 3A).

(Cont.)

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The west elevation is similar to the east elevation in the symmetry and regularity of its bays, but it lacks a three-sided canted bay.

The rear elevation shows the most recent changes made to the house. The major alteration was the addition in 1982 of a small rectangular concrete vault at basement level. A modern glass door flanked by a window provides entry to the basement level from the exterior. It is located just east of the vault. The roof of the vault has an iron balustrade and forms a patio off the rear of the house. The rear elevation is formed by the ell and is two bays wide (Photograph #3A).

As mentioned above, at the rear of the lot is a two-story octagonal cobblestone barn with a conical roof (Photograph #4). The origin of this curious design is unknown and the form is not repeated in Westport. The barn is thought to have been constructed in the mid-nineteenth century by Farmin Patchin, the owner of the house, a blacksmith by trade.

The interior of the house is more indicative of its eighteenth-century date than the exterior. A modified central hall plan is followed on the first floor. The main door dates from the second half of the nineteenth century and has two arched etched-glass panels in the upper part of the door. The door opens onto a wide central hall with the stair rising in one straight run on the left side of the hall. The stair has turned balusters and a mahogany rail that terminates in a circular newel post at the bottom of the stairs. A circular plaster ceiling medallion is located in the center of the hall from which an early twentieth-century lighting fixture was suspended (Photograph #5).

From the front of the hall doors open into the east and west front parlors. The east front parlor, as mentioned above, has a projecting three-sided bay window. On the north wall is a handsome, Italianate fireplace of faux marble on a stone base, with a molded mantel shelf with an ogee curved top surmounting a small arched opening with an elaborate cast-iron fireplate (Photograph 6). The windows and doors have heavily molded surrounds which are used throughout the first floor of the house, even on modern closet openings. These surrounds may be additions from the early twentieth century or may simply have been reproduced when closets were added. The elaborate molded plaster cornice is an Italianate feature (Photograph #7).

The west parlor is similar in all respects to the east parlor except for the bay window. Both parlors have a door next to the fireplaces on the hall side which leads to less elaborate and less formal spaces. The smaller of these two rooms lies behind the west parlor. It has a simple mid-nineteenth century post-and-lintel mantel with Gothic pointed-arch molding above the rectangular opening (Photograph #8). The heavily molded wooden cornice is not employed in this room, but the northwest corner of the room boasts a beaded cornerpost, indicative of the house's eighteenth-century origins (Photograph #9).

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A larger room lies behind the hall and the east parlor. A beaded beam is visible which extends from the door to the hall to the north wall. A narrow molded plaster cornice and a simple chair rail enhance the room. A door leads onto the side porch at the northeast corner and another door opens onto the rear ell.

The ell houses two rooms; probably the eastern one was used as a kitchen since its square plain fireplace opening still survives, though without any mantel. An enclosed stair leads from the east room in a single run to the second floor. The west room has been subdivided to house a new flight of stairs to the basement, a bathroom and a modern kitchen for the use of the Historical Society. A new door from the west room leads out onto the roof of the vault.

On the second floor, the wide central hall gives access to four small bedrooms. The banister continues from the stairwell to enclose the broad hall. The landing sweeps to the front of the house, illuminated by the center bay window, which fills the gracious landing with natural light. A door connects the ell and the main block and the center hall continues to the rear of the house although the hall in the ell is narrower than its counterpart in the main block. A rear stairway leads from the ell hall to the old kitchen. The interior finish of the second floor is extremely simple, and no mantels or fireplaces survive in any of the rooms. The wide-board floors and the woodwork are similar to those on the first floor. The interior of the attic shows how the roof of the eighteenth century house was replaced when the house was remodelled in the Italianate style (Photograph # 10).

The cobblestone barn (Photograph #4) has a conical roof and is a story and a half tall. The walls are cobblestone set in a light-colored mortar, but the edges of the octagon are defined by brick quoins. On the east elevation access is gained by a pair of arched double-leaf board and batten doors. The arched door surround is formed by bricks and headers are used in the arch while stringers define the sides of the surround. Large iron strap hinges on the exterior are used to open the doors and a massive iron catch secures both doors. The fenestration of the barn is somewhat irregular. Twelve-over-eight windows are located on the southeast, southwest and west elevations on the first floor. A two-over-two window under the eaves on the south elevation illuminates the loft. The shallow foundation is built of undressed stone blocks. A frame shed, probably of the late nineteenth-century origin, is attached to the south elevation.

On the interior, the barn is very simple. Concrete has been poured over the original floor and a wooden trap door gives access to a well. The remains of a brick flue (Photograph #4A) is visible on the southeast wall. A single beam runs from north to south in the center of the single ground floor room (Photograph #4B). This beam has been shored up by studs recently, forming the framework of a partition. An opening in the ceiling (Photograph #4C) gives access to the loft, but there are no traces of a

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stair. It seems probable that access to the loft was originally by ladder. The interior walls of the loft have been rough plastered. The flooring of the loft is made of wide planks laid directly on the framing. The framing of the roof is in a radial design (Photograph #4D).

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 type="checkbox"/> social/
<input checked="" 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 & C

Specific dates: 1795; altered c. 1867. Builder/Architect: unknown

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bradley-Wheeler House has been associated with several of Westport's most prominent citizens: Ebenezer Coley, a local merchant who built the house for his son, and Farmin Patchin, Morris Bradley and Charles B. Wheeler, all local businessmen who lived in the house during the nineteenth century (Criterion B). The Bradley-Wheeler House was built in the late eighteenth century and was remodelled during the second half of the nineteenth century in the Italianate style, probably under Bradley's ownership. The house has been little altered since this remodelling and represents the evolution of taste and the changing styles and methods of construction in residential construction in Westport. The unusual cobblestone barn on the property is the only documented structure of its type built of stone in the state (Criterion C).

The Bradley-Wheeler House is one of the oldest surviving residences in the center of Westport. Although most of the house's eighteenth-century features are visible only on the interior, the house retains many significant construction details. The only significant feature to be obscured by the most recent renovation was a rare survival of a cistern in the basement which was covered when the basement was renovated and the vault was added. The Victorian features of the house, most of which date from the Post-Civil War remodelling which gave the house an Italianate appearance, exemplify the taste and values of the period. The Bradley-Wheeler House is one of eleven documented Italianate houses in Westport. This style enjoyed popularity in coastal Connecticut from c. 1850 through the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The molded cornice, broad overhanging eaves and curious paired bull's-eye windows give the house a distinctive appearance.

The octagonal cobblestone barn at the rear of the property is very rare and unusual. A recent survey (on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission) listing all octagonal structures in Connecticut notes that only eighteen octagonal buildings have been documented in the entire state. Of these, only seven are masonry construction. Most surviving octagons were built as residences, and the only other barn in the survey is a frame octagon in Woodbury. The Bradley-Wheeler House barn is the only documented cobblestone octagonal barn in the state. Similar nineteenth century structures are more common in western New York State, and the cobblestone barn in Alloway, New York, seems more closely allied to the Bradley-Wheeler House barn than any structure in Connecticut.

(Cont.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1/2 acre

Quadrangle name Westport

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

118	6375120	4155158150
Zone	Easting	Northing

B

Zone	Easting	Northing

C

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D

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E

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F

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

Westport Land Records, V 559, p. 264

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state N/A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kate Ohno, Preservation Consultant, edited by: John Herzan National Register Coordinator

organization Westport Historical Society date July 1983

street & number 25 Avery Place telephone (203) 222-1424

city or town Westport state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

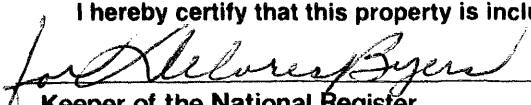
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date 5/31/84

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

 date 7/5/84
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: _____ date _____

Chief of Registration

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Tradition maintains that the Bradley-Wheeler House was built in 1795 by Ebenezer Coley, a leading merchant and farmer of Westport, for his son, Michael Coley. Michael Coley was born on November 1, 1772, and on January 13, 1793, he married Eunice Hyde (sometimes spelled Hide), of the aristocratic Hyde family, owners of property on Long Lots Road in Westport. On June 8, 1795, Ebenezer Coley deeded one acre of land and a dwelling to his son "to be reckoned to my said son as part of his portion out of my estate."²

Like his father, Michael Coley engaged in commerce. On June 6, 1796, he drafted a promissory note to Joseph Byrd³ and John Barrow, the two principals in a firm of New York merchants.³ When Coley defaulted on the note he sold the property deeded to him only three years before back to his father.⁴

Local records do not document the occupant of the house from January 1798, when Michael Coley sold the property to his father, until May 1799, when Ebenezer Coley sold the house and barn and two acres to Ann Avery and her mother Mary Kent.⁵ In June, 1799, Mary Kent deeded her share of the Bradley-Wheeler House property to her daughter, reserving for herself life rights in the property.⁶ In the early nineteenth century Ann Avery married a local Westport merchant, David Ripley.

Mrs. Ripley is said to have used the residence as both a dwelling and a millinery shop. Ann Ripley died on December 26, 1830, and her children Edward Avery and Hezekiah Ripley deeded the property, including another dwelling at 9 Avery Place, to Samuel Avery, one of Ann Ripley's sons by her first marriage.⁷

Samuel Avery sold the house to Paul A. Curtis in 1836.⁸ Curtis may have occupied the house only for a few years, or not at all, for in 1846 the deed for the property where he conveyed the Wheeler House and barn and one and a half acres to Hezekiah Allen, he is listed as a resident of New York City.⁹

Within the month Allen transferred the property to Farmin Patchin.¹⁰ Patchin was a mason and a blacksmith by trade, but in 1850 he sold his smithy and tools. In the following year he began building a second dwelling on his property, perhaps for rental purposes. Between 1851 and 1854 he was taxed on the basis of two houses and by 1855 he must have effected substantial improvements, for his property value increased from \$1800 (for two houses) to \$3000.¹¹ It is difficult to determine whether this increase was the result of improvements made to the house proper, the erection of outbuildings on the property or improvements to his second dwelling house. The unusual and substantial octagonal cobblestone barn at the rear of the property (still extant) and several frame sheds (one still extant) may account in some part for the high value placed on the property in 1855. An article published in The Hour (Westport), on August 10, 1872, states "while held by Patchin the stone out-buildings were built and the grounds much improved."

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Shortly thereafter Patchin's large expenditures resulted in financial difficulties and in 1857 he mortgaged his two dwellings, assorted out-buildings and three acres to the Saugatuck Bank. A month later he deeded the mortgaged property to the bank outright and apparently left town, for his name is dropped from the tax list.¹²

The house remained in the ownership of the Saugatuck Bank for more than seven years, probably as rental property. On September 7, 1864, the bank (then called the First National Bank of Westport) conveyed the property to Thomas F. Davies. Davies held the property for less than one year, using it for rental property, and then his heirs sold it to Morris Bradley on March 17, 1865.¹³

Morris Bradley was born c. 1805 in Weston and he married Mary Ann Fanton of Weston. Bradley was, like Patchin, a blacksmith. However, Bradley was also a landowner, with property valued at \$90,000 in 1870. Bradley lived a colorful and exciting life. He left his home in Connecticut to join the search for gold in California in 1849 and he was notable as one of the few who actually enjoyed permanent prosperity from the venture. He returned east after the gold rush, only to accept an offer of the presidency of the Silver Mining Company in Nevada a short time later. After several years he resigned from this position and settled permanently in Connecticut. He lived first in his hometown of Weston, and then moved to Westport upon purchasing the house on Avery Place. In 1869 Bradley transferred the house property and the adjacent property at 9 Avery Place to his son, Abraham. Abraham Bradley was born in 1837, and probably simply held the property to protect it from being attached by his father's creditors, since it was the family residence. Abraham Bradley conveyed the property on the same day he received it to his mother, Mary Bradley. Morris Bradley, however continued to pay the taxes on the property until his death in 1886.¹⁴

Like Patchin, Morris Bradley made substantial improvements to his property. Because both Patchin and Bradley owned more than one dwelling in Westport and both made improvements to their property, it is difficult to determine which one converted the Wheeler House from the simple but commodious house that Ebenezer Coley built for his son in the late eighteenth century to the stylish Italianate house which is familiar to Westport residents today. Several bits of evidence support the theory that Morris Bradley was the key figure in the remodelling. On October 16, 1867, the Westport Advertiser mentioned that "Mr. Morris Bradley is remodelling and rebuilding his dwelling." The remodelling was probably a long-term effort, culminating in the early 1870s, for Bradley's taxes failed to increase until 1871, when his annual taxes rose by \$900.¹⁵ The renovation was probably completed in 1872 for Bradley's taxes increased an additional \$500 in 1873. On August 10, 1872, The Hour, another Westport paper, announced "the present occupant [Morris Bradley] ...has rebuilt and enlarged it [the house]. It has little resemblance

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now to the old house." New Italianate houses were built in Westport at about the same time Morris Bradley was undertaking his renovation. Some of these were built as late as 1884. Other notable Italianate houses in Westport include 71 Long Lots Road (1852), 54 Wright Street (1877), 276 Main Street (1870), 130 Riverside Avenue (1868), 18 Bridge Street (1884), and 2 Nash Lane (c. 1876).¹⁶ The bull's-eye windows, one of the distinguishing features of the Bradley-Wheeler House, are also present on the houses at 54 Wright Street, 276 Main Street and 130 Riverside Avenue.

After Morris Bradley's death in 1886 his widow continued to own and occupy the residence on Avery Place. Abraham Bradley died only a few months after his father, leaving two daughters. Upon Mrs. Bradley's death the Avery Place property was divided between Abraham Bradley's daughters, who received 9 Avery Place, and Julia A. Bradley Wheeler, the daughter of Morris and Mary Bradley, who received the family residence.¹⁷

Julia A. Bradley Wheeler was born on October 2, 1841, and married Charles Beach Wheeler of Westport at her childhood home in Weston in 1868. Charles Beach Wheeler was one of the leading citizens of Westport.¹⁸ The son of Charles and Ruth A. Wheeler of Stratford, he was born on May 5, 1840. Wheeler was involved in commerce, working first in New York City, and later in Bridgeport. In the early 1870s he moved to Westport and went into business with his brother-in-law, Abraham Bradley. Bradley and Wheeler's store still stands in Westport. This partnership endured until Bradley's death in 1886 and Wheeler, then in his forties, led a retired life, with brief ventures into commerce. In 1894 the Pacific Mail and Tea Company established a branch store under the direction of Wheeler and E. F. Marvin, and in 1901 Wheeler advertised, offering his services as a purchasing agent for Westport merchants requiring foods from New York.¹⁹

The couple had two sons: William B. Wheeler, a graduate of the dental school of the University of Pennsylvania, and Lewis H. Wheeler, a graduate of the medical school at Yale. William Wheeler had a dental practice in Westport and died in 1933 and his brother, Lewis, worked for a time as a surgeon on President Woodrow Wilson's private yacht.

Julia Wheeler died in 1933 and she devised the family residence and land to her two sons. William B. Wheeler's heirs deeded their share of the property to his brother, Lewis, in 1934 and Lewis Wheeler, then practising medicine in Westport, continued to occupy the family residence until his death in 1958. Wheeler's estate left the Wheeler House property to Charlotte P. Darby, who occupied the house until her death in 1979. Darby devised the Wheeler House property to Christ and Holy Trinity Church, which sold it to the present owners, the Westport Historical Society, in 1981.²⁰

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End Notes

- 1 The survey, compiled in May, 1983, was conducted by Ann Ross, 229 East Dudley Street, Westfield, New Jersey.
- 2 Fairfield Land Records, v. 26, p. 375.
- 3 Fairfield County Court Records, File 29, Box 211, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.
- 4 Fairfield Land Records, v. 28, p. 64.
- 5 Ibid., v. 28, p. 436.
- 6 Fairfield Land Records, v. 31, pp. 774-776.
- 7 Westport Land Records, v. 1. p. 417 & v. 2, p. 57.
- 8 Ibid., v. 1, p. 57 & v. 4, p. 434.
- 9 Ibid., v. 4, p. 191.
- 10 Ibid., v. 4, p. 192.
- 11 Westport Tax Abstracts, Westport Town Hall, Westport.
- 12 Westport Land Records, v. 7, p. 176 & v. 7, p. 554.
- 13 Ibid., v. 10, p. 48 & v. 10 p. 87.
- 14 Samuel Hart, ed. Representative Citizens of Connecticut, p. 409.
- 15 Westport Tax Abstracts, Westport Town Hall, Westport.
- 16 Westport Historic Resources Survey, Westport Historical Society.
- 17 Westport Land Records, v. 20, p. 199.
- 18 Hart, Representative Citizens of Connecticut, p. 409.
- 19 Westporter (Westport) March 3, 1894. See also Westporter-Herald (westport), October 15, 1901.
- 20 Westport Land Records, v. 6, p. 433, v. 62, p. 255, v. 67, p. 326, v. 160, p. 63, v. 558, p. 145, v. 559, p. 264.

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Birge, E.C. manuscripts, Westport Historical Society Collection, 2 letters to Julie Haggeman; re:Coley family, March 25, 1949 and September 1, 1948.

Fairfield County Court Records, File 29, Box 211, Byrd & Barrow vs. Coley, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.

Hart, Samuel, ed. Representative Citizens of Connecticut
p. 409.

Fairfield Land Records, Fairfield, Ct.

The Hour (Westport), August 10, 1872.

Westport Land Records, Westport Town Hall, Westport.

Westport Tax Abstracts, Westport Town Hall, Westport.

Westporter (Westport), March 3, 1894.

Westporter-Herald (Westport), October 15, 1901.

Bradley - Wheeler House
25 Avery Place
Westport, CT

Sketch map - not to scale

