

United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16).

1. Name of Property

Historic name Robert and Julia Darling House other names/site number Cannon Medical Center

2. Location

street & number 720 Hopmeadow Street not for publication NA city, town Simsbury vicinity NA state Connecticut code CT county Hartford code 003 zip code 06070

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: private (checked), public-local, public-State, public-Federal. Category of Property: building(s) (checked), district, site, structure, object. Number of Resources within Property: Contributing 1, Noncontributing buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total 1.

Name of related multiple property listing: NA Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: NA

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets (checked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of certifying official John W. Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer Date 12-3-90

In my opinion, the property meets (unchecked) does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet. Signature of commenting or other official Date State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is: entered in the National Register (checked), determined eligible for the National Register, determined not eligible for the National Register, removed from the National Register, other (explain:). Entered in the National Register 1/3/91. Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/Single Dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Health Care/Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

20th Century Revival/Colonial

Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone-brownstonewalls BrickTile

roof other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Robert and Julia Darling House is an imposing 2-story Colonial Revival mansion, originally containing approximately 23 rooms, that was built in 1927 (Photograph #1). The building stands in the center of Simsbury, Connecticut, on the east side of Hopmeadow Street, which is the town's main thoroughfare. While the Colonial Revival style is predominant, the Darling House also displays many eclectic features.

The Darling House property contains about 5.4 acres and slopes gently downward to the east from the street (note 1). Around it is a mixture of buildings that vary greatly in age, style, and use; trees and shrubbery shield many of them from full view (Photograph #2). The newer structures do not overwhelm their older neighbors either in size or design. A number of adjacent buildings, like the Darling House, were erected as substantial private residences and have been converted to other, more intensive uses; several of them share with the Darling House a similar setback from the street.

Changes over time have altered the appearance of the property. Originally the Darling estate covered nearly 35 acres and stretched eastward to the Farmington River. In course of several transfers of ownership, the estate was subdivided and Drake Hill Mall was built in the 1960s to the southeast of the house. A railroad spur, furthermore, was removed that historically traversed the property in an arc southeast of the house. The south and east lawns were substantially paved for parking, and a terrace with fountain behind the house was removed except for some vestiges of original brick walls and walks (Photograph #3). Some of the landscaping has been replaced. A large brownstone outbuilding northeast of the house, located across Mall Way, was sold.

The original features of the Darling House remain largely intact, although some interior partitioning occurred after 1958 when the house was converted to professional offices and two residential units (see Figure 2). The most notable alterations have been the enclosure of a porch on the east elevation for office space and construction of

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an addition next to it that is similar in size (Photograph #3), the blocking up of several fireplaces, and the replacement of leaded glazing in some casement windows with single panes of glass. The front, south, and north elevations of the Darling House are unchanged from their original appearance. Inside, while many rooms have been subdivided, significant spaces on the first and second floors, including the hallways, main stairway, and the living room, are also unchanged.

After purchasing the property in 1988, the present owners undertook an extensive renovation. A few additional changes occurred to the floor plan, utilities were updated, and decorative woodwork was applied to non-original partitions to blend with the original trim (Photograph #4). The owners have respected the original features and, in some cases, have reversed inappropriate alterations. The building now houses medical offices and is known as the Cannon Medical Center.

Except for the additions on the rear already noted, the entire house appears to have been erected at one time. The 2-story main block, 95' x 41', has its long side parallel to Hopmeadow Street. A large 2-story ell, 20' x 65', projects from the northeast corner and originally contained servants' quarters and the kitchen. At the intersection of these two components is a curved pavilion with a porte cochere (Photograph #5). On the north elevation is an arcaded porch serving a side entrance.

The foundation of brownstone ashlar is covered with a coat of poured concrete, and the brick walls of the house are laid in Flemish bond. Beneath the second-floor windows is a continuous soldier course. Rough-textured terra cotta tiles cover the broad hipped roofs, from which rise six tall chimneys, of ample breadth, that have corbeled caps and cast terra cotta pots. Hidden within the roofline entablature, which includes a cornice with large block modillions and a bolection molding frieze, are gutters that empty through ribbed copper downspouts fastened to the house with curvilinear straps embellished with shields. The windows, which occur singly or in groups of up to five in wood surrounds, are casements in the main block and 6-over-1 sash in the ell. The leaded casements in the front bay windows flanking the front door have 15 lights apiece, while the other casements are mostly single lights set under 3-light

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transoms. Embellishing the front bay windows are copper-clad friezes with an Adamesque motif.

The main entry (Photograph #6), which is centered in the facade, and secondary entrances opening onto the south elevation and the porte cochere display extensive Colonial Revival detailing in wood and cast concrete. The front door, for example, is set within a shallow pavilion of smooth concrete blocks with brick quoins, a concrete cornice cap, and heavy bolection molding. A large flat keystone anchors a wreath that partially encircles a shallow recessed disc. Directly above, at the second story, is a tripartite casement window flanked by large volutes.

A combination of steel, brick, terra cotta block, and wood form the interior framework. In the basement, the walls are brick, terra cotta, or channeled masonry block, and steel joists, covered with rough concrete, support the first floor. Similar steel joists support the attic floor. The mechanical systems, recently updated, still include such original components as porcelain pedestal bathroom sinks and several freestanding iron radiators with elaborate foliate detailing (Photograph #7).

Fumed, quarter-sawn oak is used extensively throughout the interior of the Darling House. Beside their oak floors and paneled doors, most rooms have oak baseboards and crown molding. The main floor hallways (Photograph #8) and the living room (Photograph #9) are oak paneled, while the main stairway and upper hall are wainscotted. More elaborate features set the front hall, the living room, and the original dining room, now partitioned, apart. The doors here have large beveled glass panels with small brass rosettes. 2- or 3-light foliated brass sconces embellish the walls. Decorative wood detailing includes paneled pilasters with foliated capitals flanking the living room fireplace (Photograph #10). The most elaborate fireplace is in what originally was the sunroom, the southernmost room of the house; its medieval concrete block detailing includes console brackets decorated with acanthus leaves (Photograph #11).

Notes.

1. As described in the Boundary Justification, the property included in this nomination to the National Register is a portion of the entire parcel; see Figure 1 for its boundaries.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1927

Significant Dates

1927

Cultural Affiliation

NA

Significant Person

NA

Architect/Builder

Unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Robert and Julia Darling House, built in 1927, is architecturally significant because it is a substantial and well-crafted example of Colonial Revival residential architecture of the period, enriched with a number of stylistically eclectic features. Despite conversion to commercial use, the mansion retains its original form and much of its elaborate original detailing. The association of the building with the Darling and Ensign families, important in the civic life of Simsbury, adds historical interest.

The house exemplifies the solid construction, imposing scale, and extensive detailing of homes built in the early 20th century for wealthy and cultured clients, such as the Darlings (note 1). The level of workmanship in all respects is extremely high, and the structural frame of brick, steel, and poured concrete is, in fact, unusual. Generous proportions distinguish the design, inside and out, and, typical of the lifestyle of its occupants, the building includes a large servants' wing, elevator, and billiard room. In short, the Darling House is a successful symbol of the affluence and taste of its original owners.

While buildings of the period in the Colonial Revival style are common, the Darling House is a distinctive combination of Colonial Revival and eclectic features. Establishing the Colonial Revival style are the symmetry of the design and the wealth of well-executed classically inspired decorative detailing, both inside and out, such as the cast-concrete front entrance surround and the paneled fireplace composition in the living room flanked by fluted pilasters with foliated capitals. Some of the Colonial Revival features, such as the window surround over the front entrance, are uncommon

9. Major Bibliographical References

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Simsbury Public Library,
Simsbury, CT

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property approximately 0.5 acre

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

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Zone Easting Northing

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundaries of this National Register property are shown on the attached map, Figure 1. The north and west boundaries are coterminous in part with the boundaries on Hopmeadow Street and Mall Way of the parcel acquired by the present owners in volume 348, page 144, of the Simsbury land records, and the east and south boundaries are

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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organization Consultant date 19 November 1990
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expressions of the style. Other features, among them the tall chimneys with decorative pots, the bands of casements windows, and the front bay windows, add an important eclectic dimension to the design (note 2). The Darling House is unique locally; there is none other like it in Simsbury (note 3).

While the property that originally formed the grounds of the Darling House has been subdivided and subjected to commercial development, a portion survives that is sufficient in size to provide an appropriate aesthetic setting. The house also forms an essential link in a streetscape that includes historically and architecturally significant buildings from the 19th and 20th centuries, among them the First Church of Christ, Congregational, dating from the early 19th century.

Historical Background

The builders of the house, Robert and Julia Darling, were among Simsbury's most prominent citizens of this century. Robert Darling (1877-1957) devoted his professional life to the Ensign-Bickford Company, headquartered in Simsbury, and retired as its chairman. Ensign-Bickford, one of the largest manufacturers of safety fuses for detonating explosives in the world, is also the oldest firm in Simsbury in continuous operation under the same management. Its economic presence in the town has been equally formidable; historically the company has been the town's largest property owner and taxpayer, and the principal industry.

Robert Darling's civic accomplishments were impressive. His board memberships included those of many regional corporations and, in Simsbury, those of the Ethel Walker School, the Westminster School, the Simsbury Methodist Church, and the Simsbury Electric Company, the last three of which he chaired at different times. His generosity was reknowned, and he contributed to the payment of college education costs for many young people in Simsbury.

Julia Ensign Darling (1878-1943) was the granddaughter of Joseph Toy, the founder of the Ensign-Bickford Company, and received the property on which the house stands in 1918 as a bequest in the will of her father, Ralph Ensign, also a chairman of Ensign-Bickford. An earlier

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house on the property, of frame construction, burned after 1918, causing the Darlings to build anew in a more fireproof manner. Like her husband, Julia Darling was noted for her civic activities.

After Robert Darling's death in 1957, the property was sold by their son, Robert Ensign Darling, to Dr. John L. Cannon, who converted the mansion into medical offices. The present owners acquired the building in 1988.

Notes.

1. The architect of the house is unknown. Sources consulted in the effort to establish the architect included the town records, the Darling family, architectural publications of the period, and the Avery Index of Architectural Periodicals.

Research has produced some evidence that the architect was J. Sarsfield Kennedy of Brooklyn, N.Y. Architect Robert Schutz of 1075 Prospect Avenue, West Hartford, has indicated, from his own recollection, that the architect of the Darling House also designed the mansion at 995 Prospect Avenue, West Hartford, built in 1916, architect unknown. Title to the latter property is held by the Estate of Ethel Donaghue. The exterior of the Donaghue House bears many similarities to the Darling House in overall plan, features, and materials. Robert Quinn, a trust officer of the bank which is executor of the Donaghue estate, has located plans drawn in 1920 by J. Sarsfield Kennedy for a proposed teahouse on the property; Quinn has been unable to find architectural drawings for the house. 105 Bloomfield Avenue, Hartford (1928) is a confirmed design by Kennedy.

2. The proportions and features bear some resemblance to works by early-20th-century English architects such as Ernest Newton, although there is no evidence of a direct inspiration. See Service, Edwardian Architecture (1977), page 176, plate 220, for an illustration of "Luckley," a 1907 commission near Wokingham, Berkshire, England.
3. See Nettles, The Historic Heritage of Homes in Simsbury, Connecticut (n.d.)

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Ellsworth, John E. 100 Years: The Ensign-Bickford Company and The Safety Fuse Industry in America. Simsbury, CT: The Ensign-Bickford Company, 1936.

Interviews, at various times during 1989 and 1990, with the following:

1. Dr. John L. Cannon, M.D.
2. Robert E. Darling, Jr.
3. Richard L. Mahoney, property manager of the Cannon Medical Center.
4. Robert Schutz, architect, 1075 Prospect Avenue, West Hartford (re architect of the Darling House)
5. Robert Quinn, trust officer, Connecticut Bank and Trust company, Hartford, CT (re architect of 995 Prospect Avenue, West Hartford, CT)

Nettles, Gale G. The Historical Heritage of Homes in Simsbury, Connecticut. n.d.

Service, Alastair. Edwardian Architecture. New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977.

Simsbury, Town of. Records of the Town Clerk, Town Assessor, and Probate Court.

The Farmington Valley Herald, various dates.

The Hartford Courant, various dates.

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Woollacott, Evan W. The Gavel and the Book: the Simsbury Town Meeting, 1670-1986. Canaan, New Hampshire: Phoenix Publishing Company, c.1987.

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Verbal Boundary Description (continued)

40 feet from the corresponding elevations of the Darling House.

Boundary Justification

The parcel of real property of which the Darling House is a part, consisting of approximately 5.4 acres, contains features that detract from the historical and architectural significance of the house, in particular the Drake Hill Mall building. Boundaries for this National Register nomination, therefore, have been drawn to include only that portion of the real property that provides a visually appropriate setting for the Darling House.

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Photographs

All photographs are of the Robert and Julia Darling House, Hopmeadow Street, Simsbury, CT, and were taken by Gregory E. Andrews in September and October, 1989. Negatives for all photographs are on file with the Connecticut Historical Commission, Hartford, CT.

<u>Number</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>View</u>
1	Facade (west elevation)	East
2	Street view	North
3	Rear elevation	West
4	View of original dining room, now partitioned as shown	East
5	Porte cochere and servants' wing	Southeast
6	Front entrance	East
7	Radiator, second floor hall, servants' wing	Northeast
8	Main stairway	West
9	Living Room	Southeast
10	Capital of pilaster, Living Room	South
11	Sunroom fireplace	North

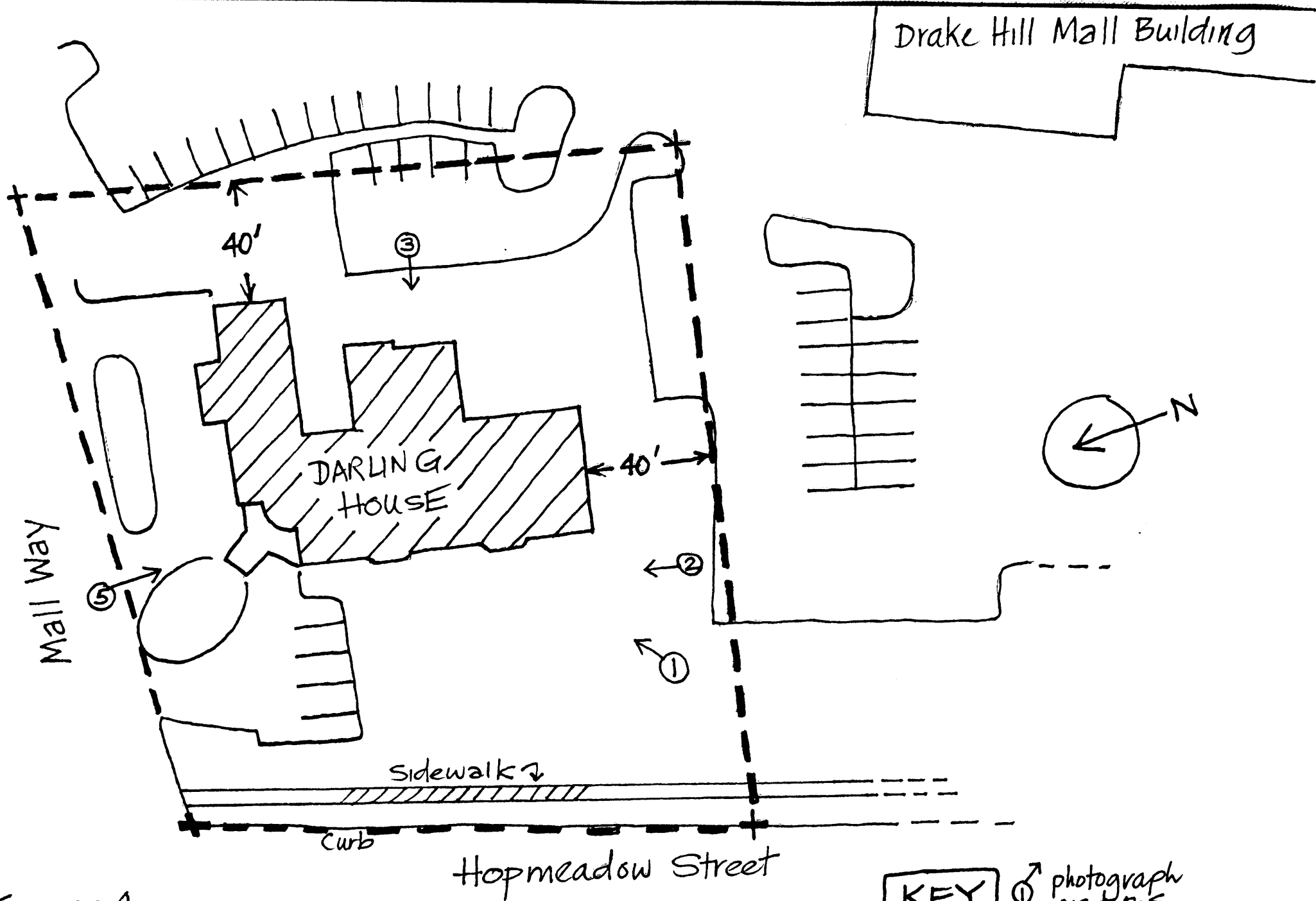


FIGURE 1
 ROBERT AND JULIA DARLING HOUSE
 720 HOPMEADOW STREET
 SIMSBURY, CT

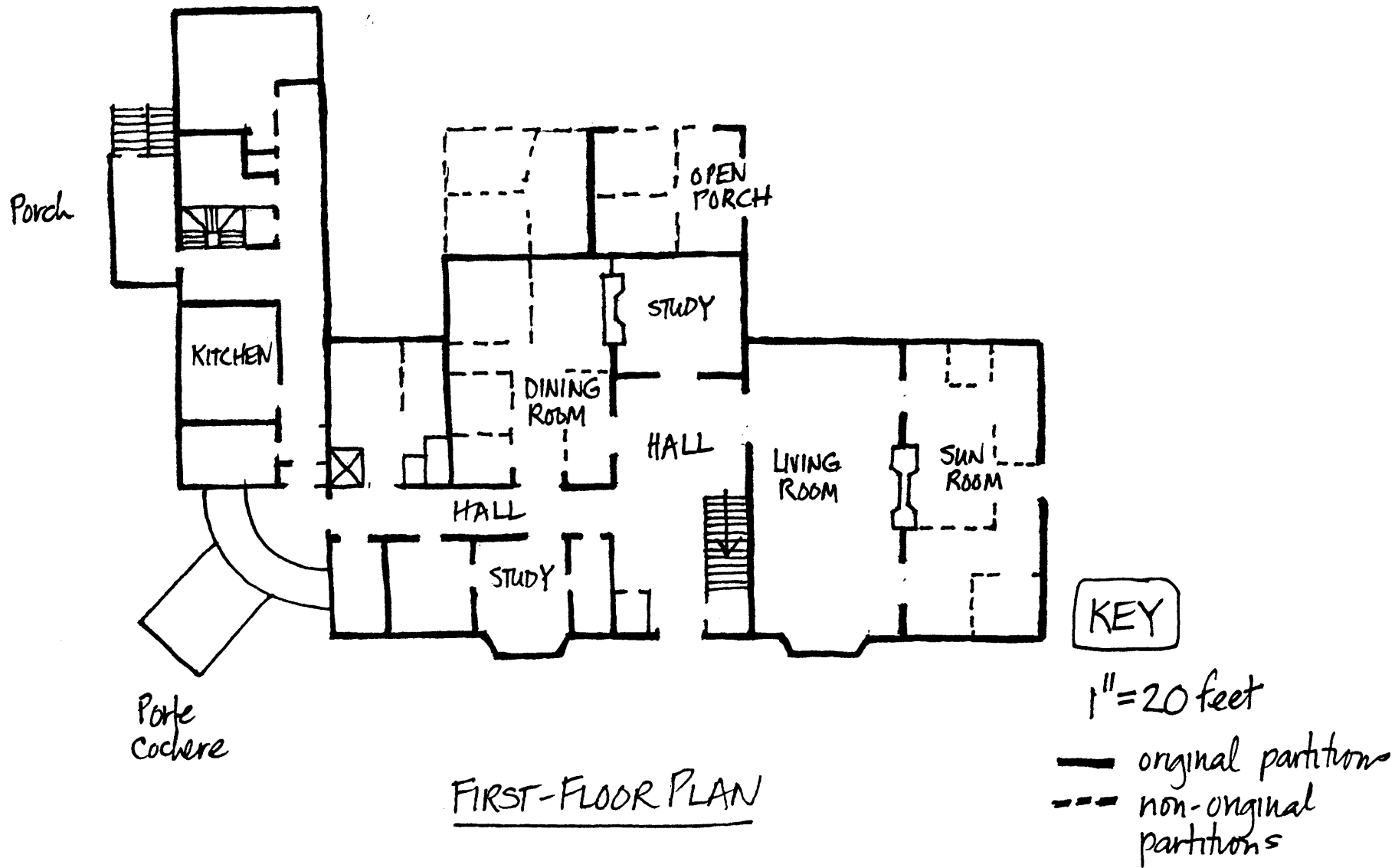


FIGURE 2
 ROBERT AND JULIA DARLING HOUSE
 720 HOPMEADOW STREET
 SIMSBURY, CT