National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



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

1. Nam	1 e				
historic Sanf	ford-Humphre	ys House			
and/or common	Sanford-Hur	mphreys Hous	e		
2. Loca	ation				
street & number	61-63 West	Street		N/A_	not for publication
city, town Sey	mour	NΔ	A_ vicinity of	congressional district	5th
state Connec	cticut	code 09	county	New Haven	code 009
3. Clas	sificatio	n			
Category district X building(s) structure site object	Ownership public private both Public Acquisit in process being consid	u v ion Acce y	occupied unoccupied vork in progress essible ves: restricted ves: unrestricted	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park private residence religious scientific transportation other:
name Aust	in M. Adams 21 Bissel	Place			
city, town Sey	mour	n/A	vicinity of	state	Connecticut
5. Loca	ation of I	egal D	escripti	on	
courthouse, regi	stry of deeds, etc.		and Record	s, Seymour Town	Hall
city, town	Seymour			state	Connecticut
6. Rep	resentat	ion in E	xisting	Surveys	
title See C	continuation	sheet.	has this pr	operty been determined el	egible? yes _X_ no
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depository for su	urvey records	11			
city, town		11		state	11

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Page :

Federal Writers' Project, Census of Old Buildings in Connecticut, Seymour No. 21.

1930s

x State

Connecticut State Library

Hartford

CT

State Register of Historic Places

1975

x State

Connecticut Historical Commission

Hartford

CT

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION

CHECK ONE

CHECK ONE

_EXCELLENT X_GOOD

__DETERIORATED
__RUINS
__UNEXPOSED

_UNALTERED

✓ ORIGINAL SITE

 ✓ MOVED DATE......

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Over View

....FAIR

The Sanford-Humphreys House is a large, five-bay, $2\frac{1}{2}$ -story, gable-roofed, twin-chimney, frame structure located on the southwest corner of West and Church streets in Seymour, Connecticut. Both streets are wide, and their intersection provides more than the usual amount of open space. The house is heavily embellished with elaborate classic revival detail that may date from the late Georgian period. (Photograph 1.)

The Town of Seymour is one of several small industrial communities in the Naugatuck River valley. In Seymour, hills rise up rapidly on both sides of the river. A spacious corner lot, well above the river to the west, is the site of the Sanford-Humphreys House, a suitable location for the home of the man in whose honor the community was named Humphreysville from 1804 to 1850. Other structures in the immediate neighborhood include two frame churches, several late-19th-century Queen Anne frame houses, and a brick Georgian Revival house.

Exterior

The house faces northeast toward West Street. The principal, front section of the house is 37 feet wide and 30 feet deep. Extensions to the rear are a further 30 feet on the east and 14 feet on the west. There is almost 2000 square feet of space per floor. A one-story porch, six feet wide, extends across the front of the house. (See sketch.) Foundations are granite ashlar, and the porch is approached by stone steps.

The late Georgian character of the house is established by the wide, fluted corner pilasters that support a wide frieze with triglyphs and projecting, molded cornice. There are guttae beneath the triglyphs and mutules in the soffit of the cornice. The front porch has six attenuated Doric columns. The delicacy of the porch columns contrasts with the heaviness of the facade pilasters and frieze, although both the porch columns and the pilasters have molded bases of similar bold profiles. The porch frieze is narrow and has crude triglyphs of inferior workmanship, compared with those in the eaves frieze. The porch frieze in its returns at the ends of the porch becomes wider and the triglyphs taller as the frieze approaches the facade. (Photograph 2.) The porch balustrade is heavy but well made and has correct panelled pedestals with half balusters over each column. Eleven vase-shaped balusters make up each section of the balustrade between pedestals, each of which has a lamp-shaped finial. There once was a second balustrade above the eaves.

The exterior surface of the front wall of the house is flush, horizontal boards, 6½ inches wide. The windows at first-floor level are tall, with 2-over-2 sash and blinds. The windows have plain sills and flat, molded caps. The central entrance has two doors between heavily reeded jambs with concentric circles at their tops. A central mullion resembles the jambs. The transom window, extending over both doors, consists of two major and two smaller lights divided by double muntins. The molding over the transom resembles those of the windows, not the jambs. The porch ceiling is narrow beaded boards. (Photograph 3.)

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At the second story the flush boarding continues, and the windows are 6-over-6, with blinds. The window caps mark the separation of the flush boarding from the wide frieze. The central double doors to the porch are protected by a projecting canopy supported by Doric columns and pilasters, forming a sort of porch-on-porch. The canopy has a frieze with triglyphs, cornice, and low parapet. (Photograph 4.)

The wide frieze with triglyphs and the cornice of the principal entablature continue along the sides of the main block of the house. The end gables form pediments, and the raking cornices continue the mutules. There are pilasters only at the front corners of the house. The sides of the main block and the remainder of the house are covered with clapboards. The west elevation of the main block has two 6-over-6 windows at each floor, the two in the attic being close together. The granite blocks of the west rear wing foundations are larger than those in the front section. This wing has a nearly-flat shed roof, a modern casement window at the first floor, and a 6-over-6 window at the second floor. The rear elevation of this section has an enclosed entry porch and adjacent 6-over-6 window and, above, at second-floor level, a 6-over-6 window and a small l-over-1 window. (Photograph 5).

The east elevation of the main block resembles the west, with the important difference that the tympanum of the pediment is occupied by a central Palladian window that has heavily reeded pilasters and keystone. The central round arch has radial glazing while the window underneath it has 12-over-8 sash, and the side windows are 2-over-2, arranged vertically. The chimney is visible through the window. (Photograph 6.)

The wing to the rear on this (east) elevation is longer than its counterpart to the west, has random ashlar granite foundations, and has a gable roof with ridge line running north-south. There are three windows and a door at first-floor level. and two windows above. All the windows are 6-over-6. The door is flanked by Greek Revival style pilasters, is approached by stone steps, and is protected by a triangular hood that has stick work in its gable end over a row of spindles. (Photograph 6.) The west elevation of this wing has one 12-over-12 and one 12-over-2 window, with a 6-over-6 window at the second floor. The rear elevation has a woodshed to the west and a small 6-over-6 window to the east under an extension of the woodshed roof. At second-floor level there are two 6-over-6 windows, with one small four-pane window in the attic.

The twin brick chimneys of the main block have molded tops, as does a third chimney in the rear wall of the east wing. The roofs are covered with asbestos shingles.

Interior

A chief feature of the interior is the fact that while the house was built as a large, single family dwelling, in the late 19th century it was divided into two sections, to become a double house. A central partition was installed on the first floor, on the second floor, and in the attic. At the front door the partition was brought out to the middle of the transom, and the present central

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jamb and two identical front doors were probably installed at that time. The top of each door is glazed with a large, oblong, etched pane surrounded by small, square, colored lights characteristic of the Queen Anne mode that was popular at the time these alterations were carried out. The section of each door below the glazing has two recessed panels.

Inside, there is a small hall leading to a straight flight of stairs to the second floor next to, and on either side of, the central partition. The stairs are enclosed by a second partition. The baseboard moldings on the two sides of the stairs are not the same.

The west dwelling unit has been altered and modernized, for example by installation of narrow hardwood floors, probably in the 20th century. The east dwelling unit has not been altered, and it incorporates in the front what was probably the drawing room in the original floor plan, and in its longer ell to the rear what probably is the original and oldest portion of the house.

In the drawing room, the window and doorway surrounds have the heavily reeded jambs with circles at the top, as noted on the exterior of the front doorway, with matching lintels. This trim is carried out around cupboard doors on the sides of the chimney. The fireplace is large and elegant with engaged columns and a broad frieze. (Photograph 7.) The absence of more elaborate embellishment is unexpected when compared to the facade. The width of the floor boards in the hall and drawing room is upwards of ten inches. There are hot air grilles in the floor.

The drawing room occupies the full depth (30 feet) of the front block. The dining room is behind it, in the first part of the ell. The two rooms are linked by a wide opening that apparently once had hinged double doors, rather than sliding doors as often found in such openings. The surround of the large doorway on the drawing room side is the heavily reeded and corner circles motif, while on the dining room side it is conventional early-20th-century-type moldings, as is the rest of the trim in the dining room. One doorway on the west wall has the heavily-reeded-and-circles treatment.

A short hall with pantry connects the dining room to the kitchen in the rear of the wing. The kitchen has two exposed, flared corner posts on its west wall, a winding stair to the second floor in the southeast corner, and a large but shallow 18th-century-type brick fireplace, with side bake oven, on the rear (south) wall. The fireplace has a long, narrow mantel shelf with moldings underneath. There is a massive chimney behind the fireplace, between it and the rear exterior wall.

The stairway to the second floor has a wide Greek fret on its breast beam, and a grille in the wall for the purpose of conveying heat from the drawing room to the upstairs. (Photograph 8.)

On the second floor, the partition that divides the structure comes out to the middle of the central double doors to the upper level of the porch, repeating

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the arrangement found at the main entrance. These small double doors are completely glazed, each leaf having three panes, one over the other. This doorway has blinds like the windows.

The front bedroom (northeast corner) has wide floor boards, cased and beaded corner posts, and a small fireplace. In the fireplace mantelpiece narrow panelled pilasters support a wide frieze in a design that is different from but sympathetic to the larger mantelpiece in the drawing room. The rest of the trim in the bedroom is plain, but the narrow upstairs hall has the Greek Revival doorway surrounds as found on the first floor.

In the attic the roof framing consists of 10 principal rafters, about $5x6\frac{1}{2}$ " in size. There is no ridgepole and the rafters appear not to be framed into one another at the ridge. (Photograph 9.) The rafters run down to plates that are more than one foot above the attic floor level. This section of wall and the end walls are plastered. About midway between the ridge and the plates the rafter have a mortise cavity set at such an angle that a timber if fitted into it would be at about 90 degrees to the rafter, i.e., headed for the floor. The roof is constructed of wide boards. Wood shingles are visible through the spaces between the boards. The east chimney, in front of the Palladian window, has a double slant, away from the window, perhaps to let in light, and toward the back of the house so that it will emerge from the roof centered on the ridge line.

There is a full cellar under the house. The three chimneys have large, stone bases. The hearths of the drawing room and kitchen fireplaces are supported by wood framing.

There are no outbuildings on the property. The present lot, one-third of an acre in size, presumably is much smaller than was the lot on which the house stood when it was built. At an earlier time the house no doubt had outbuildings, but what they were is not known.

PERIOD	AF	REAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CH	IECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW	
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION
1400-1499	_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	LAW	SCIENCE
1500-1599	AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE
1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	EDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
X _1700-1799	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	THEATER
X _1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION
1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	Xother (Specify) Associa-
		INVENTION	+ 17	tion with life of
				prominent man

SPECIFIC DATES 1790, 1804, 1826

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Criteria

The Sanford-Humphreys House is important to Seymour because of its elaborate—late Georgian architectural trim. The slender columns, wide frieze, balustrade and second-story porch are unexpected in a Connecticut country town in the early 19th century. (Criterion C.) The man for whom the large five-bay, front section of the house was built, General David Humphreys, was responsible for early industrial development at the nearby falls in the Naugatuck River, and the community was named after him for many years. (Criterion B.)

History

In the late 18th century, the high hilly land west of the river and falls, where the Sanford-Humphreys House is located, then part of the town of Derby, was known as Shrub Oak. The first physician to come to the Shrub Oak community was Dr. Samuel Sanford, of Bethany, who arrived about 1790 and died in 1803, at the age of 38. The doctor is credited with building the first structure on the site of the Sanford-Humphreys House. This analysis is sustained by the fact that the land records show purchase of land, only, by Sanford but do not show the purchase of land with buildings. Presumably, Sanford built that part of the house that has the massive chimney with large fireplace and bake oven, now the kitchen in the east wing.

During Sanford's ownership, on February 20, 1797, a group of people living within the bounds of a proposed new parish met at the house for the purpose of forming a Protestant Episcopal Society. Sanford was elected clerk. The name Trinity Church was adopted, and the church continues to the present time.

Sanford's estate sold the property to Colonel David Humphreys December 16, 18034.

Humphreys (1752-1818) had a distinquished career. After attending Yale, he was commissioned a captain and rose through several assignments in the Revolutionary War to become aide-de-camp to Washington in 1780. He accompanied Jefferson to Europe, as secretary, in 1784, and was elected to the Connecticut legislature in 1786. In addition to being talented in the fields of war, diplomacy and industry, Humphreys was also a poet. He was the author with Lemuel Hopkins, John Trumbull and Joel Barlow of a series of poems that appeared in the New Haven Gazette and Connecticut Magazine.

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Two volumes of poetry written by Humphreys were published in New York in 1790 and 1804. Having attained the rank of colonel in the Revolutionary War, Humphreys was known by this title until 1813, when he was made a brigadier general in the Connecticut militia.

During the years 1791-97 Humphreys was minister to Portugal, and in 1802 to Spain. While minister to Spain, he imported to the United States 100 merino sheep, which he sold to farmers at \$100 each. Due to the superiority of the wool, the price of the sheep went up to \$400 at which point Humphreys warned against the dangers of ruinous speculation in the animals. Thereafter, the price rose to \$3,000.

Simultaneously, Humphreys pursued the manufacture of woolen cloth. -On December 13, 1803 he purchased the mill dam at what was then known as Rimmon Falls, built a woolen mill there in 1806, brought a mill superintendent and workers from England, and operated one of the first successful woolen cloth factories in the country. The mill was at the foot of the hill from his house. In addition, he built a paper mill nearby in 1805.

The advent of the mills brought a marked increase in the size of the population for which the local community was not prepared. Humphreys had to provide community facilities for his new employees, which he did by building model tenements with gardens. He also secured the passage of laws by the Legislature providing for public inspection of factories to insure the use of safeguards for the health and morals of the employees, and to guarantee their receiving some education. The work force included 73 boy apprentices from a New York almshouse. "It was always a great event in Humphreysville," a writer recalled, "when, in his later years, dressed in Revolutionary costume, the General drove into town with his carriage and four horses, quite frequently accompanied by some distinguished visitor who desired to see the model factory town." The name of the community was changed, in his honor, to Humphreysville in 1804, and was so known until Seymour was set off from Derby and incorporated as a separate town in 1850.

General Humphreys increased the size of the Sanford place by building on "the large square house in front."9

It is questionable whether the General lived in the house very much. Although he was born in Derby, at the time he bought the house he was said to be "of Boston." In addition, he often stopped at Butler's Tavern in New Haven. His will suggests that he may have lived very little in the house. The General's will, drawn in 1806 in New Haven, reads, "I give and devise to my nephew John Humphreys Junr. Esq....the dwelling-house land and appurtenances purchased by me from the estate of the late Doctor Sanford, in and on which my said nephew now resides." The General and his wife had no children. relatives were employed in the mill, including John, Jr., who was singled out to live in the new, big house, and to come into possession of it upon the General's death.

John Humphreys, Jr., died in 1826, but his widow, Sarah, did not sell the house until 1835. It was during her period of ownership, that the house was "adorned by A.M. Bassett with the present style of architecture," in the years

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1826-1830.¹² Unfortunately, no information is given on who was A. M. Bassett, although Bassetts did live in Humphreysville at the time, or why a span of four years is mentioned for the work, and other pertinent details. The 1835 purchaser promptly re-sold the house to John C. Wheeler whose widow owned the property until 1886. The 1886 deed trefers to land with two dwelling houses, suggesting that by 1886 the structure had been divided into a double house. The etched and colored glass in the front doors, which appear to have been installed when the house was divided, are consistent with that period. The present owner recalls that his parents purchased the property, as a double house, shortly after World War I.

Architecture

The multiplicity of changes that have taken place in the Sanford-Humphreys House make it difficult to determine with any certainty exactly when and how they occurred. Nevertheless, the general outline of the development of the house seems to be clear. The massive chimney with large fireplace and bake oven undoubtedly was built by Sanford, but it is difficult to imagine the configuration of the original house. If this was the original kitchen fireplace, then according to the customary floor plan of the times, it was the back of the house, and the house faced south. On the other hand, the early land and probate records mention the corner location and it seems unlikely the house would face away from the corner. The matter remains unresolved. The foundations indicate that the entire east wing (kitchen and dining room) was built at one time. If so, the massive chimney was an end-wall chimney, and is a rare survival of the genre. The presence of only two corner posts in the kitchen and the fact that the dining room portion of the wing obviously has been altered, at least with respect to interior trim and perhaps more fundamentally, add to the obfuscation.

General Humphreys' purchase of the desirable corner lot location and his construction of the large, five-bay, front section of the house are consistent with his prominent position in the community. His house was built in the doublechimney, central-hall, Georgian plan then in vogue. The intriguing question arises as to how much of the facade trim was part of the original construction and how much was added in 1826-1830 when "the house was adorned by A.M. Bassett with the present style of architecture." In view of Humphreys cosmopolitan background and wide range of interests, it is tempting to speculate that while serving as secretary to Jefferson in Paris, Humphreys accompanied Jefferson on his architectural investigations and absorbed some of Jefferson's interest in architecture. Under this postulate, Humphreys may have outlined to Connecticut country craftsmen what he wanted in his house, but in the absence of detailed plans for the Jeffersonian classicism they produced the exagerated proportions of the facade frieze and pilasters. The retardataire nature of the work is explained on the grounds that Humphreys' architectural education at the hands of Jefferson had occurred 20 years earlier.

One of the problems associated with whatever work was done by A.M. Bassett is the unreliability of the source of the information. The book than mentions his work is said to have many errors. Consequently, the statement that

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Bassett established the present style of architecture is suspect. On stylistic grounds, it is highly unlikely that such work was carried out as late as 1826-1830. The Greek Revival pilasters flanking the side door seem a far more likely subject for work at this date. The existing front door transom also is in the Greek Revival style. The width of the opening suggests that there may have been side lights similar to the transom on either side of the single front, flanked by pilasters similar to those at the side door.

Bassett may have added the front porch, if one had not been built by Humphreys, but not the present porch. Several elements of the present porch indicate that it is a late-19th-century addition, probably a part of the alterations made at the time the structure was converted into a double house. These elements include the use of wire nails in the porch's construction, the ceiling of narrow, beaded boards characteristic of the late 19th century, and the crude triglyphs which are quite different from those on the facade. A complicating element is the good quality of the porch columns. Perhaps they were re-used, either from an earlier porch on this house, or another. The fact that they are out of scale with the facade may be yet another indication of the lack of purity in the original work. The foundations of the porch, while granite, are awkward and out of character with the 1808 granite foundations of the main block.

It was at this time, c. 1886, that the single front door and side lights were removed and the present doors were installed. The Greek Revival pilasters from Bassett's work may have been removed from the front entrance at this time. The present heavily reeded jambs and corner blocks with incised rings probably were added to the doorway at this time, and to the interior of the bouse.

The alternative to the foregoing postulate is that all the facade embellishment, not just the porch, is Colonial Revival work from the late 19th century. According to this theory, the awkward proportions are more likely to be found in the revival than in the earlier time frame. There are two difficulties with this alternative. First, as the Campbell book (1902) does comment on the architectural development of the house and prints a picture of it, it seems likely that the authors would have known of a major change in its appearance, if any, that might have occurred in the late 19th century. The authors are clear that the house assumed its present character early in the 19th century. Second, usually when a large house is converted to a multiple residence a downgrading in status is inferred. It seems unlikely that the expense of the elaborate trim would have been undertaken at such time.

The porch balustrade, the eaves balustrade shown in the turn-of-the-century picture and the Palladian window are not necessarily accounted for in the foregoing discussion. They are of good quality and therefore may date from 1804 or 1826, but there is no proof.

Part of the fascination of the Sanford-Humphreys House is the conjectural nature of its development. Definitive answers are not at hand to the questions raised here and to many others. These uncertainties, however, do not detract from the significance of the house, both architecturally and in the history of Humphreysville.

The sanford-H8mphreys House is not to be confused with the David Humphreys

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in Ansonia. The David Humphreys House is the General's birthplace. It now serves as the headquarters of the Derby Historical Society. Both Ansonia and Seymour once were part of the Town of Derby.

- 1. Campbell, p. 73.
- 2. Derby Land Records, volume 12, pp. 245, 6, 7.
- 3. Campbell, p. 74.
- 4. DLR 17/32.
- 5. The account of Humphreys' career is taken from Campbell, p. 233 ff.
- 6. Molloy, p. 345.
- 7. Molloy, p. 347.
- 8. The governor of Connecticut at that time was Thomas H. Seymour, of Hartford. It was thought that using his name for the new town would help get the needed legislation through the General Assembly.
 - 9. Campbell, p. 74.
 - 10. DLR 17/32.
 - 11. DLR 27/72.
 - 12. Campbell, p. 74.
 - 13. DLR 27/73.
 - 14. Seymour Land Records 12/529.
 - 15. SLR 27/620.
- 16. Letter from Seymour Historical Society dated January 28, 1981, to author.
 - 17. Campbell, p. 74.

9. Major Bibliographical References

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Leo T. Molloy, comp., <u>Tercentenary Pictorial and History of the Lower Naugatuck Valley</u>, Ansonia: <u>Emerson Bros.</u>, Inc., 1935.

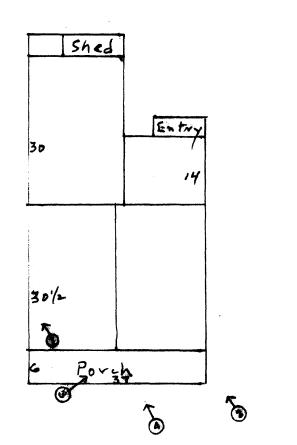
Probate records of Samuel Sanford, David Humphreys and John Humphreys. Jr.

Sanford-Humphreys House Seymour New Haven County, CT

Sketch Plan Photo Key

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