

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). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name OLIVER ELLSWORTH HOMESTEAD  
other names/site number "Elmwood"

### 2. Location

street & number 778 Palisade Avenue N/A  not for publication  
city, town Windsor N/A  vicinity  
state Connecticut code CT county Hartford code 003 zip code 06095

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	_____ objects
			<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
U.S. Constitution NHL Theme Study

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

### 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  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

State or Federal agency and bureau \_\_\_\_\_

In my opinion, the property  meets  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.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

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)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Museum

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL/Georgian

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls WOOD

roof WOOD: shingle

other BRICK

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Elmwood, the homestead of Oliver Ellsworth, is a ca. 18th-century 2 1/2-story clapboarded dwelling with a colonnaded wing added in the 1780s to the south side (Photographs 1 through 4). It is sited a short distance back from the road in a residential area of modern homes in the northern part of Windsor, Connecticut. The house faces west, with the ridgeline of its gable roof parallel to Palisado Avenue. The house is surrounded by open lawn, with a few large shade trees and several more recently planted trees spaced about the yard. It shares its large 12.6-acre lot with a meeting hall built in 1934, but the hall, associated garage and shed, and wooded acreage extending to the Connecticut River are not included in the designated property.

The facade or west elevation of the main part of the house follows the period's usual five-bay division, with the central entrance under a portico which was probably added at the same time as the wing (Photograph 5). The doorway has double raised-paneled doors (with glass panes at the tops of the doors) and a wide molded surround. The portico consists of Tuscan columns supporting a shallow gable roof which is treated as a pediment; the entablature is distinguished by a pulvinated frieze. Windows are fitted with twelve-over-twelve sash and are devoid of ornament. Two brick chimneys emerge near the gable ends of the wood-shingled roof. This part of the house measures 45' x 32' and appears as a unified dwelling built on the central-hall plan. However, separate cellars under the north and south halves suggest more than one construction episode; both cellars are formed from fieldstone walls, with cut brownstone blocks above grade. Records indicate that the first house on the site was built in 1740.

The wing continues the ridgeline of the roof to the south for about 19', with the front wall of the wing recessed behind the plane of the main house's west elevation by about 6' (Photograph 6). Sometime about 1810 the front slope of the wing's roof was extended and supported on the three two-story Tuscan columns which make up the present colonnade. Windows on the wing have molded frames and twelve-over-twelve sash. The wing has its own brick chimney centered on the east or rear wall. A nearby smaller exterior brick chimney is modern.

**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    NHL Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

LAW

1740-1807

1740, 1782,

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

1788

ARCHITECTURE

NHL: V: Political & Military Affairs, 1783-1860 Cultural Affiliation    N/A

B: The Constitution

C: Early Federal Period, 1789-1800

XXVIII: The Law

B: The Court System

Significant Person

Oliver Ellsworth

Architect/Builder

Samuel Denslow (1781)

Thomas Hayden (1788)

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

Summary

The Oliver Ellsworth Homestead in Windsor is significant for its associations with Oliver Ellsworth (1745-1807), a framer of the United States Constitution, author of the Judiciary Act of 1789 establishing the federal court system, and third Chief Justice of the United States. The property was Ellsworth's Connecticut home from 1782 until his death in 1807, the years of his greatest accomplishments. Ellsworth named the house Elmwood after the thirteen elm trees he planted to honor the original states. The house was an important part of his life: here he returned to his family after his numerous trips to the Constitutional Convention, for sessions of Congress, or on service abroad; here he was visited by Presidents Washington and Adams, who sought his advice; and here he retired in his last illness. Although he earned his living as a lawyer, Ellsworth maintained a lifelong interest in farming, publishing treatises on such topics as the value of gypsum as a soil conditioner. Elmwood allowed Ellsworth to maintain his ties to rural tranquility even while he served his country in its capital or in Europe. One of Connecticut's most cosmopolitan citizens, Ellsworth acknowledged the virtues of Elmwood upon his return from Paris in 1801:

I have visited several countries, and I like my own the best. I have been in all the States of the Union, and Connecticut is the best State; Windsor is the pleasantest town in the state of Connecticut, and I have the pleasantest place in Windsor.<sup>1</sup>

Career and Historical Significance of Oliver Ellsworth

Born in 1745 into a prosperous farming family, Oliver Ellsworth graduated from Princeton after having been dismissed from Yale. After a year of theological studies, he pursued legal training under the tutelage of

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

See Continuation Sheet

See continuation sheet

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Connecticut Historical Commission  
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford

CT 06106

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References

A     
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B     
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary is shown on the accompanying sketch map, scale 1" = 100', traced from the Windsor Assessor tax map. It follows the southern edge of the driveway, the east side of Palisado Avenue, the southern property line, and the first part of the eastern or rear property line.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The designated boundary includes all of the surrounding houselot which is directly related to the house itself. It excludes the noncontributing modern construction on the northern part of the property as well as a large wooded area to the rear, which is not immediately adjacent to the house.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Bruce Clouette  
 organization Historic Resource Consultants date 1/18/89  
 street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone 203-547-0268  
 city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

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Windsor, Connecticut

## Description (continued):

Attached to the north side of the rear elevation is a 2 1/2-story gable-roofed ell, 25' x 35' in plan, with a large chimney in the middle. An old grape arbor extends across the rear of the ell. Running off the ell to the north are small 1-story attached buildings which formerly accommodated the functions of milk house, wood shed, and privy. They now make up part of the modernized living quarters and office space for the site, which is operated as a historic house museum.

The plan of the house has four large rooms off the front-to-back hallway in the main house, a large room on either side of the center chimney in the ell to the rear, and one large room in the wing. The most elaborate interior woodwork is in the high-ceilinged parlor, the first-story room within the wing (Photograph 7). There, a modillioned cornice encircles the room, and the corner-post cases are in the form of columns with pulvinated friezes and high pedestals. Molded window and door surrounds have crossetted corners, and there is a pilastered Georgian mantel. The south rear room has dentils along the cornice and a somewhat formal mantel (Photograph 8), but the remaining first-floor rooms in the main house have simple raised-paneled fireplace walls, bolection moldings around the openings of the shallow brick and stone fireplaces, and plain post casings (Photographs 9 and 10). Over each fireplace is a large panel enframed by an applied molding. The north chimney accommodates diagonal fireplaces in both the front and rear rooms. The corner cupboard in the north rear room (Photograph 10) has a large arch-shaped glazed upper door and two smaller lower cupboard doors with arched panels.

The kitchen in the frontmost room of the ell is very plain, with a large cooking fireplace and a simple dado around the room (Photograph 11).

The stairway to the upper floor is enclosed in a small room on the north side of the spacious hallway; at its top is a simple railing of square balusters. The chambers correspond in plan to the rooms below and are plainly finished. Front rooms have folding interior shutters, and the house's widely flaring corner posts are clearly visible in these rooms. The chamber over the wing's parlor, reached by several steps because of the parlor's exceptional ceiling height, is the only one with a mantel; it is composed of a series of stepped moldings and has the suggestion of a frieze under the shelf. (Photograph 12). Living quarters for a museum staff member occupy the second-floor of the ell.

Throughout the house are rosewood-grained raised-paneled doors, molded doorway surrounds, wide-board floors, and plaster ceilings and walls, the latter covered with wallpaper from a variety of periods. Many of the furnishings of the house are believed to have been in use at the time of Oliver Ellsworth's occupancy.

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Significance (continued):

Matthew Griswold, then Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut, and other prominent and politically powerful attorneys. At the age of 28 he was elected to represent Windsor in Connecticut's General Assembly, and two years later became the State's Attorney for Hartford County. Although his law practice began faltering, it improved greatly as Ellsworth was admitted into the small circle of men which long dominated public life in Connecticut in the late 18th century.

After the start of the Revolution, Ellsworth served as a member of the Committee of the Pay Table, and he soon was elected a delegate to the Continental Congress, in which he served from 1777 to 1783. He then returned full-time to Connecticut, where the year before he had come into full possession of the family's homestead in Windsor. Ellsworth was in his third year in the state legislature's upper house when in 1783 he was appointed a Superior Court judge as well.

In 1787, Oliver Ellsworth was chosen one of three delegates from Connecticut to the convention in Philadelphia drafting a new constitution. Ellsworth played a major role in writing the document, serving on the Committee of Detail which prepared the first draft of the various articles. He is chiefly remembered as the principal advocate of two features: the compromise by which an equal number of delegates to the Senate was given both large states and small, and the formula by which slaves would be counted as three-fifths in determining taxation and representation. Ellsworth also participated in major decisions regarding the enumeration of powers and the abolition of slavery. He did not sign the Constitution, choosing instead to return early to Connecticut to prepare for the fight for ratification. His articles urging approval of the Constitution, written under the name "Landholder," were reprinted throughout the nation.

Chosen as one of Connecticut's first two senators, Ellsworth was the principal architect of the Judiciary Act of 1789. The Act implemented the Third Article of the Constitution, establishing the Supreme Court and a system of lower courts and creating procedures for appeals. It gave the Supreme Court the power to review state laws and to overturn them if in conflict with the Constitution.

In 1796 Ellsworth was appointed Chief Justice, a post he held for three and a half years. Although he was active as a circuit judge, his tenure was marked by few decisions of importance. While Chief Justice, he was sent as an envoy to France, where he helped negotiate a reconciliation

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Significance (continued):

with Napoleon. Ellsworth resigned from the judiciary in 1801 and returned to Connecticut. He retired in failing health to a quiet life at Elmwood, though he continued as one of twelve members of Connecticut's Upper House. In the last year of his life he was appointed Chief Justice of the newly established Connecticut Supreme Court, but his health prevented him from serving. He died in 1807 at the age of 62.

Architectural Significance of Elmwood

Both in its original and enlarged state, Elmwood has significance for illuminating the architecture of 18th-century Connecticut and thereby the lives of its early owner. The house today probably contains little if any of the dwelling built on the site by Oliver Ellsworth's father David in 1740. The central-hall plan, shallow fireplaces, and large single panels secured by applied moldings are all features associated with the 1760s and 1770s rather than 1740,<sup>2</sup> and an eminent scholar of Connecticut Valley material culture has recently found evidence showing that Oliver Ellsworth in 1781 contracted with Samuel Denslow, a local housewright, to have a new house erected on the site of his father's dwelling.<sup>3</sup> The following year was when Ellsworth moved to Elmwood with his family.

Nevertheless, the main house exhibits the characteristic features which dominated vernacular Connecticut housebuilding throughout the 18th century: five-bay facade, clapboarded exterior, and plain architectural woodwork employing simple moldings and paneled interior walls devoid of stylistic references. The plan itself, with the broad side and ridgeline of the gable roof parallel to the road, was superseded as the norm only in the middle 19th century.

The wing, added in 1788 by architect-builder Thomas Hayden, a Windsor craftsman who had worked with Asher Benjamin, offers a distinct contrast to the main house in its elaborate Georgian parlor, and was a fitting setting for Ellsworth to receive Washington the following year. The mantel, cornice, columns, and molded surrounds are comparable to the stylish work chosen by other members of Connecticut's elite in that period. Interestingly, the west wall of the wing (originally without the roof extension and columns) was taller than the front wall of the main house, an ungainly effect which was not uncommon in vernacular building and can still be found in place on a few 18th-century houses in eastern Connecticut. The columns were added later, sometime between Ralph Earl's portrait of Ellsworth in 1792 and Barber's 1836 engraving.<sup>4</sup>

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## Significance (continued):

In both its earlier paneling and later Georgian woodwork, the house reflects Ellsworth's social standing. He was comfortably well off, but hardly as wealthy (at least in his early career<sup>5</sup>) as many of Connecticut's merchants. Yet by his education, profession, and political activity, he became a member of the state and national elite. The building of the Georgian parlor came just at the time when Ellsworth was beginning his long years of national political activity. Neither rural nor totally sophisticated, this embellishment of the house also parallels Ellsworth's political outlook, in which he sought to balance regional interests (including his own attachment to Connecticut) with a nationalist program. Thus the Ellsworth house accords with its owner, a man both at home in provincial Connecticut society and aware of the larger world around him.

## NOTES:

1. Windsor Historical Society News 5 (April 1987): 1.
2. J. Frederick Kelly, Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut (New Haven, 1924), 14-17, 151-52.
3. William Hosley, "Oliver Ellsworth: Portrait of a Founder," unpublished manuscript, Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford, 1987; communication from Hosley, February 13, 1989.
4. Evidence that the columns and front part of the roof were added, in addition to the Earl painting, includes the continuous vertical break in the clapboarding on the south side of the porch and the fact that the roof rafters stop at the heavy plate at the top of the wing's west wall, with separate rafters for the extension. Stylistically, Tuscan columns became common in Connecticut architecture about 1810.
5. His estate of \$126,674, most of it stock in the Hartford Bank, chartered in 1792, was an extraordinary amount in 1807; see Hosley manuscript.



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Major Bibliographical References:

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- Brown, William. G. The Life of Oliver Ellsworth. New York: Macmillan Co., 1905.
- Collier, Christopher, and James L. Collier. Decision in Philadelphia: The Constitutional Convention of 1787. New York: Random House/Reader's Digest Press, 1986.
- The Ellsworth Homestead Past and Present. New Haven: Tuttle, Morehouse & Taylor [Connecticut Daughters of the American Revolution], 1907.
- Flanders, Harry. The Life and Times of the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. 2nd Series. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1859. Pp. 53-276.
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- Porter, D. L. "Elmwood. The Residence in Windsor, Connecticut of Oliver Ellsworth, Third Chief Justice of the United States." Manuscript, c.1905, Colonial Dames Collection, Connecticut State Library.
- Santvoord, George Van. Sketches of the Lives and Judicial Service of the Chief Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States. New York: Charles Scribner, 1854. Pp. 193-292.

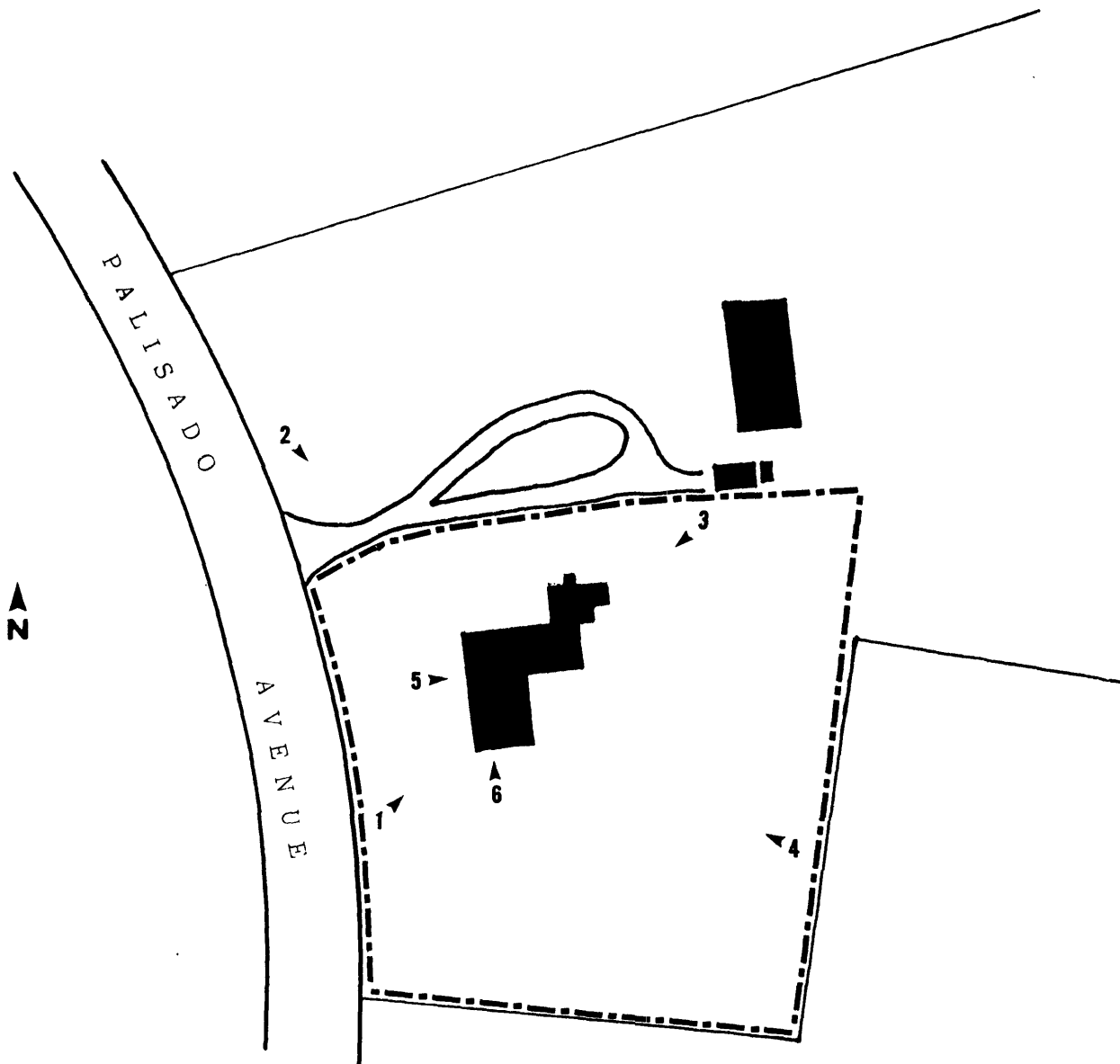
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SKETCH MAP

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Oliver Ellsworth Homestead  
Windsor, CT



- Boundary
- ▲ Photo Positions
- Property Line

SCALE: 1" = 100'

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PHOTOGRAPHS

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Oliver Ellsworth Homestead  
Windsor, CT

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All Photographs:

1. Name: OLIVER ELLSWORTH HOMESTEAD (Elmwood)
2. Location: Windsor, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. Date: February, 1989
5. Negative location: Connecticut Historical Commission  
Hartford, CT

West elevation, view northeast  
Photograph 1 of 12

North and west elevations, view southeast  
Photograph 2 of 12

Additions at north rear of house, view southwest  
Photograph 3 of 12

East (rear) elevation, view northwest  
Photograph 4 of 12

Detail of main entrance, view east  
Photograph 5 of 12

Detail of colonnaded porch on wing, view north  
Photograph 6 of 12

Parlor, first floor of wing, view northeast  
Photograph 7 of 12

Paneling, first-floor south room, main house, view east  
Photograph 8 of 12

Paneling, rear south room, first floor, view west  
Photograph 9 of 12

Diagonal fireplace and corner cupboard, rear north room, first  
floor, view northwest  
Photograph 10 of 12

Kitchen fireplace, front room of ell, view east  
Photograph 11 of 12

Chamber above parlor in wing, view southeast  
Photograph 12 of 12