

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED FEB 23 1982

DATE ENTERED MAR 25 1982

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

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Francis Gillette House

AND/OR COMMON

Francis Gillette House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 511 Bloomfield Avenue

NA NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Bloomfield NA VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

1st -

STATE

Connecticut CODE 09

COUNTY

Hartford

CODE

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

NA

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Connecticut General Insurance Company

STREET & NUMBER

900 Cottage Grove Road

CITY, TOWN

Bloomfield NA VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Bloomfield Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

800 Bloomfield Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Bloomfield

STATE

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1980

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

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 type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Francis Gillette House in Bloomfield is a large stone house built in 1833. Although located on a busy thoroughfare, Bloomfield Avenue, the house has almost an isolated air about it, as it is situated far back from the avenue and is approached by a long curving drive. Moreover, the house is not oriented toward the avenue, but rather faces south, overlooking the hills and fields which were once part of a large estate. The area between the house and street is a large lawn with numerous tall shade trees. There are some shrubs about the base of the house, particularly on the east end, but nothing can be seen of more formal plantings. To the south of the house formerly were barns and other outbuildings, but these have all disappeared. The house is now unused and boarded up. It is part of an extensive corporate headquarters property.

The house consists of a large central part, 36 x 32' in plan and two stories high, and a frame ell or wing to the west, originally one story but later raised to the height of the main house. The house has a low hipped roof and small shed-roofed dormers on the north and south slopes to light the garret within. Originally there were four brick corner chimneys, but now only two stacks emerge from the asphalt-shingled roof. The walls of the house are a rubble of locally quarried stone the color of which varies from yellow, tan, and brown to dark gray. The present raised rounded joint appears to be a repointing of the original mortar. Roughly shaped brownstone quoins are found at the corners of the building and also around window and door openings. Brownstone was also used for the sills and lintels and for a water table. The ell does not initially appear to be frame because the north wall was finished with similar stone and the south and west sides were stuccoed. The three-bay facade on south side of the house features a large entranceway on the left and one long window and a blank space (for the chimney) to the right. As all openings are boarded over, the details of the entranceway cannot be seen, but a transom, sidelights, and panelled jambs are visible from the interior. A flat roofed porch on replaced smooth round columns runs across the front of the house. A similar porch extended across the rear, to judge by the north parlor door and the long window on the north side.

The interior was considerably altered in the early years of this century, and the floors, ceilings, plaster walls, and neo-Georgian mantels in the three first-floor rooms all are of this period. The two parlors off to the right have been completely opened up into one large room, but they retain their original molded window trim and panelled jambs. The hallway is the least altered room: the inside of the entranceway has a fluted molding and corner block motif, and there is a wide, straight staircase with lightly turned newel and balusters and handrail ending in a spiral. The hallway is spacious, and like the other rooms, has a very high ceiling. Other original interior features include baseboard and door moldings in the main house, some panelled interior doors, and a Greek Revival pilastered mantel in the chamber at the head of the stairs. There is a full cellar. An interesting feature is the pair of unfinished, cramped rooms in the attic of the hipped roof, undoubtedly used as chambers for servants.

The nominated property includes the area in front of the east side, defined by the present drive and the visible outline of another circular segment, and a perimeter of 50' around the house itself. This boundary includes the house and all the land visible from the avenue, but excludes excessive acreage from the historic farm, since the destruction of the outbuildings has completely changed the appearance of the land.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1833 - built

BUILDER/ARCHITECT N/A

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Francis Gillette was an outstanding figure in the antislavery movement in Connecticut, and for this reason, his house in Bloomfield is an important historic resource (Criterion B). It was in this house he lived during the early years of the movement, and it was here that he sheltered runaway slaves making their way to freedom. Many sites in the state have by local tradition been associated with the underground railroad, but this house is one that has been recognized in histories at least since 1886 (Trumbull), and has been accepted by later scholars studying the Connecticut routes. The house also has architectural significance as an example of an affluent country home of the period.

Francis Gillette (1807-1879) was described as "one of the earliest abolitionists, a man of great earnestness and one of the most eloquent speakers of the time." He was the son of an evangelical lay preacher and was imbued with a strong Christian conscience. After his education at Yale, he retired almost immediately to the family farm, where he hoped his poor health would benefit from the country surroundings. He built this house in 1833 and married the following year. He turned his energies to various reform efforts, advocating temperance and improvements in rural schools. But it was slavery and the plight of free blacks that troubled him the most. As a member of the State legislature in 1838, he condemned Connecticut's "Canterbury Law" forbidding the education of blacks, and at the same session, he advocated that the state's black residents be given the vote.

In the years following, Gillette was in great demand as a speaker at abolitionist meetings. Practicing his social philosophy, Gillette opened his home to fugitive slaves, and many stopped and there related the stories of their escape to Gillette's family and friends. In the 1850s, he allowed his name to top the ballot of the Free Soil Party in Connecticut, though he was unsuccessful in his bid for governor. In 1854 he was chosen in a special election to fill out the term of one of Connecticut's U.S. Senators. While in the Senate, he voted against the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

Gillette's historical significance is that, though not a professional politician, he helped to form a bridge between abolitionism as an humanitarian reform and antislavery politics. Perhaps more important than his short but highly visible terms in public office was his work on the Hartford Press. One of the founders of that newspaper, he worked to overturn the influence of the Courant, a powerful paper catering to the xenophobic hysteria of the Know-Nothing Party. Partly through the impact of the Press, the Republican Party was able to turn political debate away from the anti-immigrant and Prohibitionist issues and center it strictly on the slavery question. No one person can be singled out as chiefly responsible for the emergence of the Republican Party in Connecticut, but certainly Francis Gillette was in the top rank of abolitionists who made it possible.

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Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 1

Significance (continued):

The house is not without architectural interest. The material itself is a characteristic of the vicinity. Although stone houses are rare in the state, a small number of houses built of this colorful stone are found in both Bloomfield and East Granby. The form of the house, a hipped-roof cube, is one of the types of upper-class houses favored in the Greek Revival period. Although the house has been considerably altered both within and without, important historical material remains, including the upstairs mantel, window trim and panelling, and the hall stairway. Moreover, the house reflects Gillette's upper-class standing: the elegant quoins, high ceilings, small servants' chambers and formal hallway are all indicative of affluence. In its day, the house was considered an architectural curiosity, probably because of the stone work, and people took carriage rides out to see it. Today the house is boarded up, but it retains something of its former grandeur. The lawns and tall shade trees heighten the effect, and Gillette himself was interested in creating a proper estate. Discussing his new outbuildings in 1840, he described his plan: "Should I live I intend to make a delightful spot of this, and throw around it all the attractions of a country residence in New England."

Gillette later moved to Hartford, where with his brother-in-law John Hooker he established Nook Farm, an upper-class enclave that became the home of some of Hartford's leading literati, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Mark Twain. Gillette's son William, the noted actor, also lived there. But even after coming to Hartford in the late 1850s, Gillette continued to maintain his farm in Bloomfield.

¹ John Hooker, Some Reminiscences of a Long Life (Hartford, 1899).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 2

Bibliography (continued):

Hooker, John. Some Reminiscences of a Long Life. Hartford: Belknap & Warfield, 1899. Gillette's brother-in-law.

Stowe-Day Foundation, Hartford. Francis Gillette Papers. Gillette Obituaries.

Strother, Horatio T. The Underground Railroad in Connecticut. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962.

Trumbull, J. Hammond (ed.). The Memorial History of Hartford County, Connecticut, 1633-1884. Boston, 1886.

"The Underground Railroad in Connecticut." Pamphlet, American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of Connecticut.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number _____ Page _____

Gillette, Francis, House Hartford County, CONNECTICUT

PROPOSED MOVE APPROVAL

Jr Keeper 01-29-90
Beta J. Savage

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 15 1989

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Move Page 1

It is proposed that the Francis Gillette House, Bloomfield, CT be relocated from 511 Bloomfield Avenue to 545 Bloomfield Avenue. This documentation is submitted for the purpose of supporting a request that the house continue to be listed in the National Register of Historic Places during and after the move.

Reason for the Move

Built in 1833, the Francis Gillette House has been vacant, boarded up, and unheated for many years, perhaps as long as two decades. It is, therefore, deteriorating. It is located next to a principal entrance off Bloomfield Avenue into the CIGNA office campus. (See map.) It is CIGNA's intent at some unspecified time in the future to develop this site. Rather than let the house continue to deteriorate and perhaps face eventual demolition, the proposal is to move it now (February 1990), rehabilitate it according to the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, and put it back into service as a group home. Under the proposal, the house will be returned to a state of good repair and to residential use after a long hiatus.

Impact on Significance

In the nomination to the National Register, three areas of significance are identified: 1) politics/government, 2) social/humanitarian, and 3) architecture. Citing Criterion A (history), three-quarters of the discussion under Item 9, Significance, is devoted to an account of the outstanding career and advanced social philosophy of Francis Gillette. Thus, the chief reason advanced for the significance of the structure is that it was Francis Gillette's house. This consideration will not be affected by the move.

Turning to Criterion C (architecture), the final paragraph of the Significance statement starts out, "The house is not without architectural interest," and goes on to describe its relative elegance for its day (1833), but notes that the interior was the subject of an extensive program throughout of Colonial Revival alterations in the early-20th century. Since the house will be moved intact (see below), its structure and components will continue without change.

Overall, the present condition of the house, interior and exterior, is about as described in the nomination, with the exception that the railing of the front stairway has been vandalized. The railing is gone.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 15 1989

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Move Page 2

Site

The nomination delineates the nominated property to include the drive and an area within a 50-foot perimeter around the house. Earlier, there had been a group of outbuildings southwest of the house, but they had all disappeared before the nomination was written. The house is shaded by fine trees on the north and east and along the drive. (Photographs 1 - 4)

The proposed new location is on the same side of the same street, about 500 yards to the north, also in a setting of trees. (Photographs 5, 6) In its new location the house will be at approximately the same compass setting as it is now. It will continue to be well set back from the road, about 125 feet, further back than its neighbors to give it a sense of distinction. The new location is in the same neighborhood of middle-class homes. (Photograph 7)

The Move

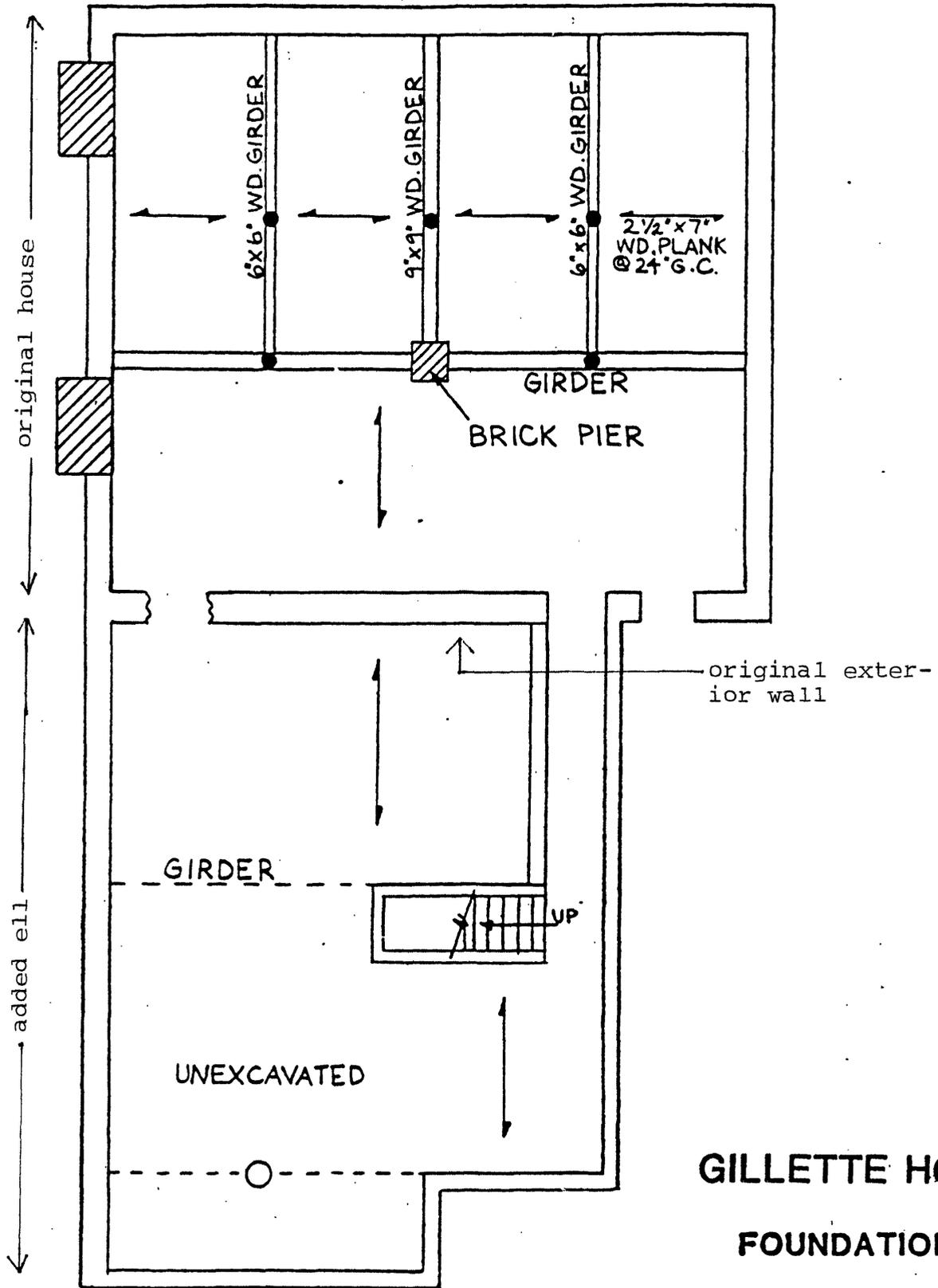
The house will be raised from its foundations and moved in one piece downhill to a CIGNA roadway, follow that roadway west and north, then make a 90 degree turn to the east to the new location. (See map.)

It may be that because of the large size of the house (36' x 67') and its stone construction it will be advantageous to divide it in two. With cradle of steel beams and timbers, the weight to be moved will approximate 625 tons. The house was built in two sections, the original main block and an added ell. (See Drawing 1.) If the house is separated into its original two components for the move, it will be re-joined at the new location with the stonework toothed in again, repeating the procedure carried out when the ell was first added.

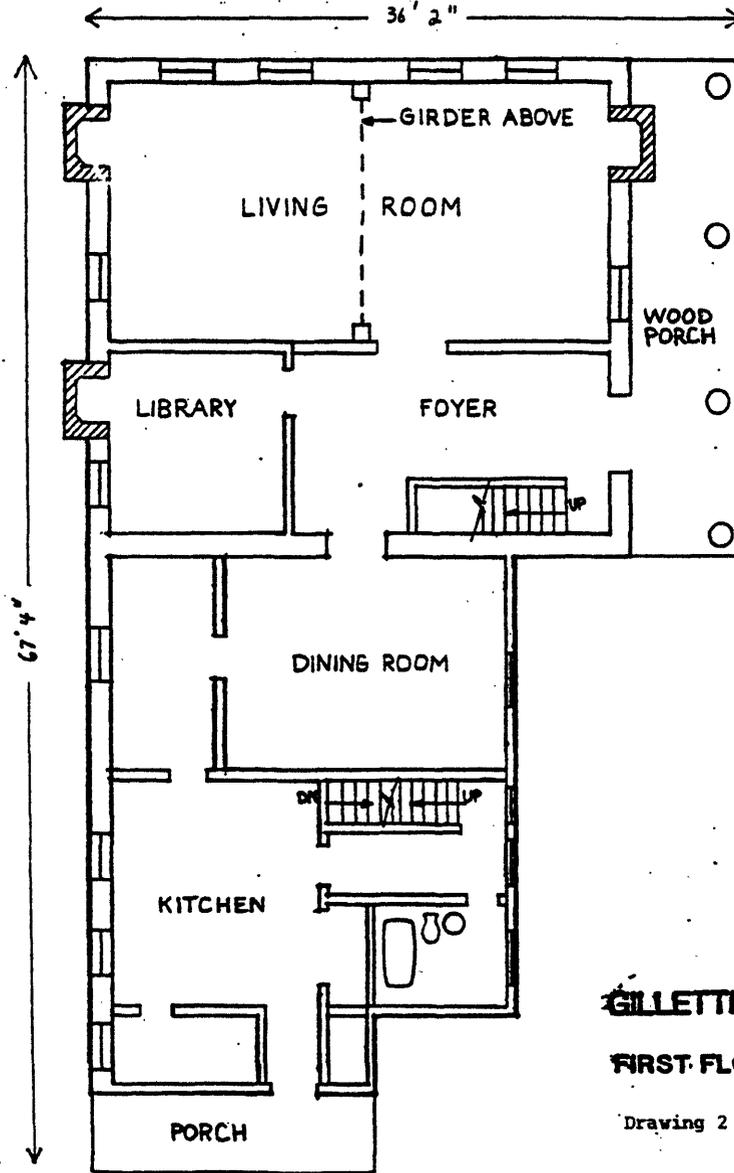
The wooden front porch will be disassembled, the parts numbered and re-assembled. The concrete floor of the front porch will not be moved. The concrete terrace on the north elevation will not be moved. The relationship of the belt-course water table to grade will be approximately reproduced. The stone and stucco wall surfaces below the water table will be continued.

Archeological Considerations

In the course of moving the house a trench will be excavated around it to allow insertion of beams underneath the framework. A ramp will be dug to the west, up which the house will be drawn. The procedure will be reversed at destination. The Connecticut Historical Commission staff archeologist has been asked to outline an archeological program needed in the light of these plans. Such program will be followed.



GILLETTE HOUSE FOUNDATION PLAN



GILLETTE HOUSE
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

Drawing 2



Photo key



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DEC 15 1989

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Move Page 3

Photographs

Photographs were taken by David F. Ransom, September 1989.

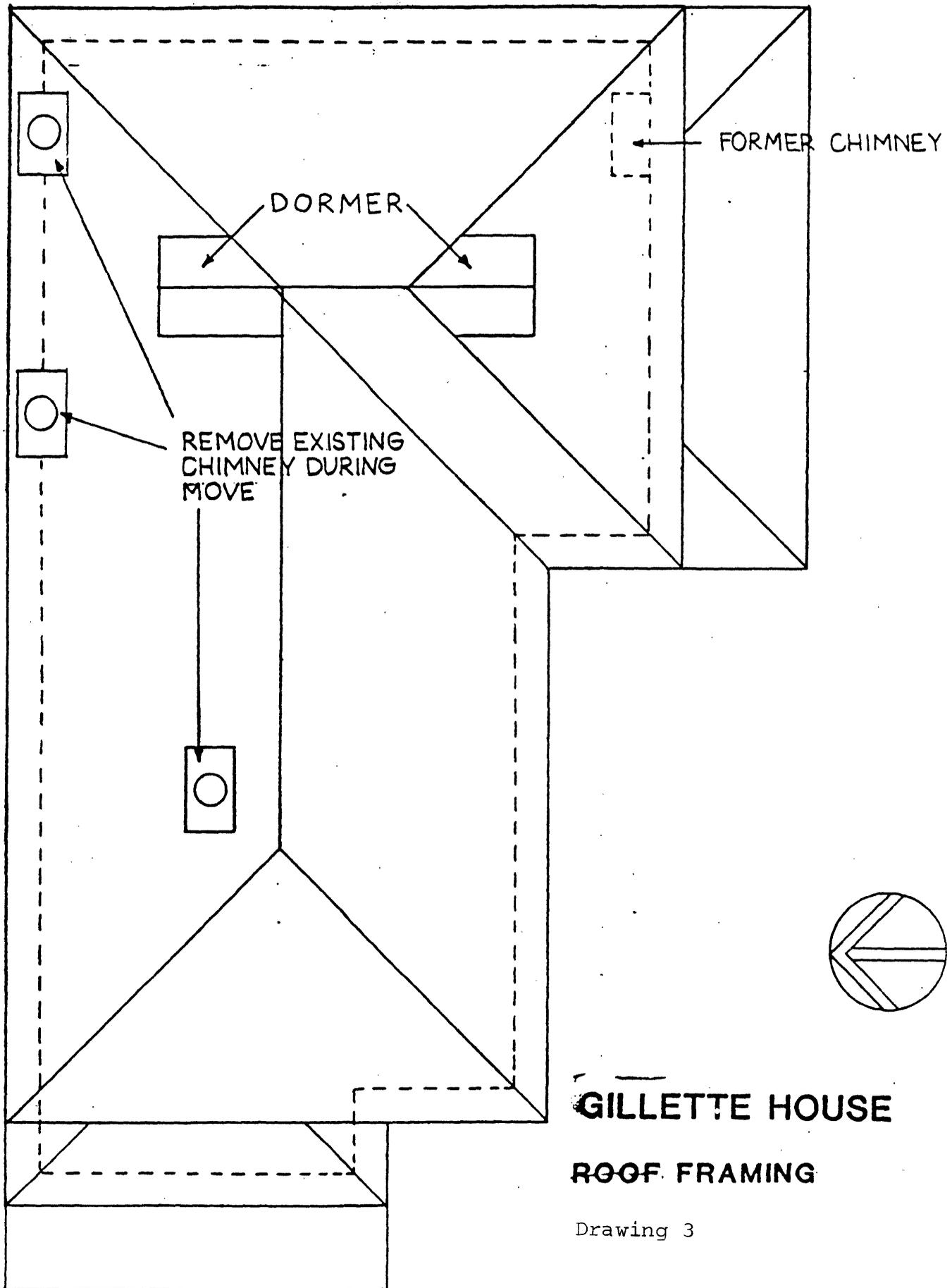
Captions:

1. South (front) elevation, view northwest
2. West and south elevations, view northeast
3. North and west elevations, view southeast
4. East and north elevations, view southwest
5. New site, view southwest
6. New site, view southeast
7. Typical neighboring house, view northwest

Prepared by:

David F. Ransom
33 Sunrise Hill Dr.
West Hartford, CT 06107
October 14, 1989
203 521-2518

DEC 15 1989

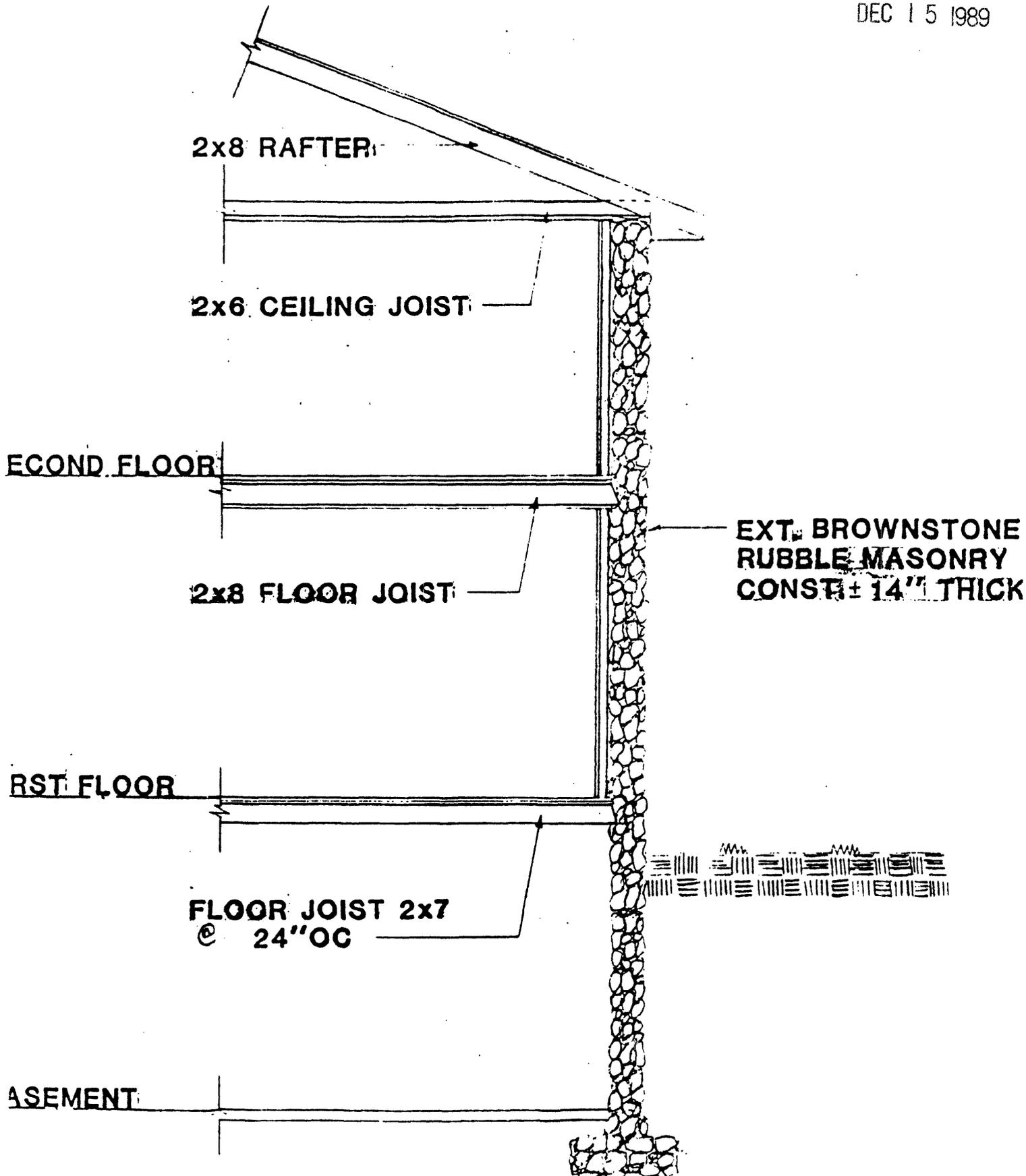


GILLETTE HOUSE

ROOF FRAMING

Drawing 3

DEC 15 1989



Drawing 4

TYPICAL EXTERIOR WALL SECTION

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

8/19/91

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number _____ Page _____

Gillette, Francis, House Hartford County, CONNECTICUT

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION

Robert J. Sarge 9/30/91

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Amend. Page 1

2. LOCATION;

545 Bloomfield Avenue
Bloomfield
Connecticut CT Hartford County 003 06002

3. CLASSIFICATION:

Ownership - private
Present use - DOMESTIC/institutional housing

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY:

Connecticut General Life Insurance Company
Hartford, CT 06512

7. DESCRIPTION:

In the period October 1989 - July 1991 the house was moved (see Photo 1) from 511 Bloomfield Avenue 500 yards north on the same side of the street to 545 Bloomfield Avenue, and rehabilitated to the Secretary of Interior's Standards. Historic Preservation Certification Application (Part 3), Request for Certification of Completed Work, is concurrently being filed with the State Historic Preservation Officer.

After the move, the house is oriented with respect to the compass as it was before the move. A grove of trees surrounds the house after the move, as was the case before.

Since the house had been vacant for 15 years, it was in disrepair. The rehabilitation consisted of repairing the building and adding an extension to the ell. Existing windows, floors, partitions, finishes, etc., were retained. The railing of the front stairway had been destroyed by vandals, and was replaced with a replication based on photo appearing in the National Register nomination.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Amend. Page 2

8. SIGNIFICANCE:

The nomination ascribes significance to the house primarily because of its association with Senator Francis Gillette, a prominent abolitionist. The primary element of significance was not affected by the move. The present setting is nearby, and similar to, the original setting, where the farm outbuildings already had been destroyed. Architecture, the secondary element of significance, was protected by the fact that the rehabilitation is on track of being designated a Certified Rehabilitation.

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA:

Acreage: approx. one acre

Quadrangle name: Hartford North

UTM Reference 18/687960/4631880

Verbal boundary description: The nominated property is bounded by the dotted line shown on the enclosed site plan dated February 20, 1990, Smith Edwards Architects.

Amendment prepared by:
David F. Ransom
August 6, 1991

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Francis Gillette House
Bloomfield, CT

Section number Amend. Page 3

All photographs taken by David F. Ransom, Photograph 1, summer, 1989, others July 1990.

Negatives on file with David F. Ransom., 33 Sunrise Hill Dr., West Hartford, CT 06117.

Photograph 1
Move in progress
View north

Photograph 11
Northeast bedroom
View northeast

Photograph 2
View northwest

Photograph 12
Southeast bedroom
View southeast

Photograph 3
View southwest

Photograph 4
View northeast

Photograph 5
Front door
View south

Photograph 6
Living room
View north

Photograph 7
Dining room
View southwest

Photograph 8
Pantry
View east

Photograph 9
Second floor
View southeast

Photograph 10
Second-floor hall
View southeast

