

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received MAY 30 1984
date entered JUN 28 1984

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

1. Name

historic (Francis H. Holmes) House

and/or common Francis H. Holmes House

2. Location

street & number 349 Rocky Hill Avenue N/A not for publication

city, town New Britain N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Robert F. Douglass

street & number 27 Smith Court

city, town Noank N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New Britain City Clerk, City Hall

street & number 21 West Main Street

city, town New Britain state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Francis H. Holmes House is a two-story brick dwelling constructed from 1906 to 1908 in an eclectic style influenced by the Jacobethan Style and other contemporary architectural styles. It is located on a large lot at the intersection of Rocky Hill Avenue and South Street in New Britain, facing Rocky Hill Avenue. The surrounding neighborhood is residential in character, although most of the other homes are several decades later in date. The Holmes house is built of brick in the stretcher bond with mortar joints tinted to match the color of the brick. The foundation is slightly battered, with a water table of Portland brownstone. Molded brick is used for both window and door openings. The hipped roof is flared at the eaves and is covered with slate. Roof ridges are covered with red tile. The roof extends to form a large porch at the southeast corner of the house (Photograph 1). The central chimney is also of brick. Large gable-roofed dormers on each side of the house have parapets with brownstone coping. The parapets are corbelled slightly on either end.

The front of the house is dominated by the gable-roofed dormer, the outer face of which is continuous with the wall of the first floor (Photograph 2). The entrance is to the right of the central bay formed by the dormer and is reached by a short flight of steps leading to a raised platform. This platform continues around the south side of the house, forming the floor of the porch. The entrance steps are flanked by two brick piers capped with brownstone. The front door has two lower rectangular panels and a sixteen light window in the upper half (Photograph 3). The doorknob and plate are of bronze and were made locally by the Corbin Lock Company (Photograph 4). The door opening is segmentally arched and has a brownstone keystone. The sill is of brownstone. Two lanterns on either side of the door had colored art glass shades. One of these lanterns still survives.

In the center of the facade on the first floor is a triple window with leaded-glass upper sash. The lower sashes of each double-hung pair have one light apiece. The brownstone water table acts as the sill of this window. Its lintel is also of brownstone. A brick panel set between this first floor window and the second floor window contains brickwork set in a chevron pattern (Photograph 5). The second floor window is a triple window similar to the first floor window. Double-hung sash have leaded glass upper sash and a large, single light lower sash. The window is set in a segmentally arched opening with a brownstone keystone. Above this in the peak of the gable is a small attic window with a four-centered or Tudor arch featuring a brownstone keystone. The window sill is of brownstone. Leaded glass sash is used. The sides of the dormer are covered with slate and have a large leaded-glass sash set in each. To the left of the central bay, a one-story porch continues around to the south side of the house. A single window under the porch has double-hung sash similar to that in the triple central windows, with leaded-glass upper sash and a large single-light lower sash. The base of the porch is of brick with recessed cruciform patterns. The porch roof is supported by columns resting on brick piers. Plaster Ionic capitals were used originally, as evidenced by a photograph of the house taken about 1908 (Photograph 6). Due to deterioration, these were replaced with cushion capitals after the death of the original owner.

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On the south side of the Holmes house, the porch continues to a point about midway along the south side (Photograph 7). A side entrance onto the porch features features leaded-glass double doors in a segmentally arched surround. One of the original columns was removed to accomodate steps leading to the porch from this side. This was done early in the occupancy of the original owner, Francis H. Holmes. A one-story bay on the first floor below the gable dormer contains windows with double-hung sash similar to those described previously. To the left of this is a single window with the same sash arrangement, in a segmentally-arched opening with a brownstone keystone. Immediately below this is a recessed brick panel. The basement windows are also segmentally arched. The second floor has an arched window similar to that of the front gable, with a similar attic window above.

The rear of the Holmes house has an enclosed entry with a brick foundation extending to a brownstone course continuous with the water table of the main house (Photograph 8). Four light casement sash are used. To either side of this entry are single windows with double-hung sash of the type described previously. These windows are segmentally arched with brownstone keystones. Projecting from the dormer on the second floor is an oriel with one-over-one double-hung sash. The oriel is faced with slate. To the left of the oriel is a single window with one-over-one double-hung sash with arch and keystone similar to other window openings. A louvered opening is located near the gable peal. A brick chimney rises from the left side of the gable parapet.

The north side of the house is distinguished by a covered entry formerly a porte cochere (Photograph 9). This is supported by columns similar to those of the porch. Cushion capitals replace the original Ionic capitals. The door on this side is similar to that of the main entrance. Single first floor windows to either side of the door are similar to those of the remainder of the house. The gable dormer is also similar to the rest: a triple segmentally arched window with a brownstone keystone dominates the gable. Above this is an arched window similar to those of the front and south sides.

A wooden one-bay garage in the rear of the house is in poor condition. A shed which once served as a blacksmith shop was removed after the death of the owner due to its advanced state of deterioration. More than a block away, and separated from the Holmes house by an intervening street, is a large brick barn which once served as a stable for both Francis H. Holmes and his father, John W. Holmes, who lived in a nearby house. This has been altered fairly extensively, with most of its window and door openings bricked in.

The first floor of the house is divided into five rooms: a hall, living room, dining room, den, and kitchen (see floor plan). Woodwork throughout the house is of white oak fumed with an ammonia compound to darken as if aged. Only in the kitchen is this woodwork varnished, probably to protect it from grease and kitchen odors. One-panelled doors are used throughout (Photograph 10).

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Astragal molding is used on door surrounds and other woodwork. Walls are plastered throughout the house.

From the entry hall, a landing leads to both the stairway to the second floor and to a hallway which leads back to the kitchen. The newel post has an attached lamp with an art glass shade. The living room has double, leaded-glass doors which lead onto the porch (Photograph 11). The living room fireplace is constructed of a buff-colored firebrick with a corbelled mantel (Photograph 12). An electric light fixture in the ceiling is of copper with a bronzed finish and is furnished with art glass shades (Photograph 13). The dining room is lighted by the bay window on the south side of the house and features a cupboard with leaded glass doors. The den walls are covered with a burlap fabric. A red brick mantelpiece and fireplace in one corner dominate the room. The corbelled mantel is similar to that in the living room. The brick of the chimney is exposed the full height of the room. A molded brick inset contains an oval mirror. Small corbelled brackets of brick above this act as shelves (Photograph 14).

The kitchen contains a refrigerator of early 20th-century date powered by an aircompressor in the basement. This may have been adapted from an icebox by the original owner, Francis H. Holmes. A large, porcelain kitchen sink is supported by metal brackets and has attached drainboards (Photograph 15). A walk-in pantry is located on the south side of the kitchen.

The second floor consists of three bedrooms and a bathroom, all utilizing space provided by the gable dormers. Bathroom fixtures are contemporary with the house. Closets are located in the spaces under the hipped roof. The basement contains a small but complete machine shop used by the original owner. Metal-working equipment present in the shop includes a small drill press, bolt shear, bending machine, vices, sheet metal snips, and other small hand tools. Woodworking equipment includes a lathe with an assortment of lathe chisels, a band saw, rip saw, and a jig saw ingeniously adapted from a Howe sewing machine. Machinery in the shop is all powered by individual electric motors. The shop was set up when the house was first occupied about 1908 and continuously modified during the lifetime of the owner, who died in 1964. Hand punches, awls, and other leather-working tools are also included, as well as some blacksmithing equipment salvaged from a separate shop formerly on the property. Also present in the basement is a partially disassembled model of a machine for transporting brick on pallets to drying sheds. This is powered by a small electric motor and is provided with hoists and conveyor belts.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check 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/
..... 1700-1799	..... art	..... engineering	..... music	..... humanitarian
..... 1800-1899	..... commerce	..... exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... theater
X 1900-	..... communications	X industry	..... politics/government	..... transportation
		X invention		..... other (specify)

Specific dates 1906-1908 Builder/Architect Walter P. Crabtree, Senior, Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

(Criterion C) The Francis H. Holmes house is an example of an eclectic architectural design deriving inspiration from a number of sources. The use of large gables and triple windows with leaded glass upper sash is apparently inspired by the Jacobethan Style. The hipped roof and flaring eaves are reminiscent of the Shingle Style, while the Ionic columns which supported the porch and porte cochere are classical in origin. These disparate elements have been well utilized in a pleasing design which, while symmetrical in massing, is asymmetrical in detail. Woodwork and other details reveal the influence of the Craftsman movement, which emphasized simplicity of design and natural finishes, in reaction to the Victorian era. Constructed of locally manufactured brick, the house also incorporates other locally available material, including Portland brownstone and hardware manufactured by the Corbin Lock Company of New Britain. The Holmes house displays exceptional quality of materials and workmanship, and reflects well the lifestyle of the upper middle class in the early years of the 20th-century. Built for Francis H. Holmes, a wealthy brick manufacturer, the Holmes house has important associations with the brick industry in central Connecticut. It was constructed as a showcase for its owner's product and reveals the range of brick shapes and types produced by his firm. The machine shop in the basement was used to develop improved machinery for brick production. Holmes himself was an important figure in the brick industry, managing the Central Connecticut Brick Company, a conglomeration of smaller brick companies formed about 1910.

The Francis H. Holmes house has affinities with several architectural styles in vogue in the early 20th century. (Photographs 1 and 6). The form of the hipped roof, with its flaring eaves, is similar to the Shingle Style. The large gable-roofed dormers, with triple windows and leaded glass upper sash, seem to reflect the influence of the Jacobethan Style. Ionic columns which supported the porch and porte cochere suggest the influence of classicism. The basic symmetry of the house is created by the similar dormers piercing the hipped roof on all four sides. The dormers are integrated into the rest of the structure through the technique of being continuous with the first floor wall of the house, creating a two-story central block for each elevation. The effect of this is to lend an impression of monumentality to a house which is relatively modest in scale. This basic symmetry is offset, however, by the large porch on the southeast corner of the house, and by various details such as the oriel on the second floor of the rear elevation, and the location of the front door. Rather than detract from the overall appearance of the building, these features lend a picturesque quality to the house reminiscent of late 19th century architectural design. The absence of the elaborate cut-brickwork typical of late 19th century buildings is a 20th century characteristic. The corbelling at either end of the parapets and the brick-

9. Major Bibliographical References

"Francis Holmes, Was City Official, Brick Co. Owner," The Herald, New Britain, July 19, 1964.

Laughlin, Gerald Francis, S.B., "The Clays and Clay Industries of Connecticut," State Geological and Natural History Survey, Bulletin No. 4, 1905. (State of Connecticut Public Document No. 47)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 1.03 acres

Quadrangle name New Britain

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	8	6	5	6	0	4	6	1	3	5	5	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

B

Zone	Easting						Northing							

C

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D

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E

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G

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H

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Verbal boundary description and justification

A description of the boundaries of the property may be found in Vol. 769, page 898 of the New Britain Land Records at the Office of the City Clerk, City Hall, 21 West Main St., New Britain, Connecticut.

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

N/A

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Dale S. Plummer, National Register Nominations Consultant edited by: John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization N/A date January 14, 1984

street & number 32 Starr Street telephone (203) 443-4751

city or town New London state Connecticut

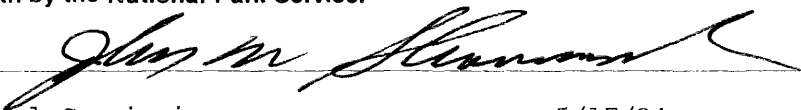
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

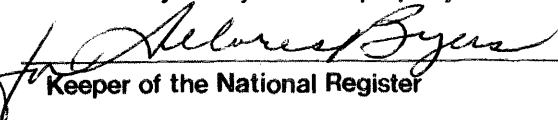


title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date 5/17/84

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 6/28/84

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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work panel in the front of the building between the first and second floor triple windows (Photograph 5) are the only immediately evident decorative brickwork features. A more subtle feature is the careful molding of window and door surrounds, giving rounded edges to all openings.

The subtle nature of the decoration of the Holmes house exterior, the use of leaded glass upper sash, and the harmony of its design, are indicative of the influence of the Craftsman movement. An early 20th century reaction to the opulence of Victorian design, the Craftsman movement emphasized simplicity and harmony of design and the use of natural finishes and hand-craft production techniques. The Craftsman influence is particularly strong in the interior of the Holmes house. Interior woodwork is of oak fumed with ammonia to give an aged appearance. It has darkened somewhat due to natural aging. The surface may have been lightly oiled, but has not been varnished save in the kitchen, where practical necessity demanded a varnish treatment. Cabinets and bookcases are furnished with leaded glass doors, another hallmark of the Craftsman approach. Lighting fixtures are all of copper with a bronze finish, and of relatively simple design (Photograph 13). Although the original wallpaper has been removed throughout the house, the den retains its wall coverings of burlap fabric, a treatment in keeping with Craftsman principles.

In quality of materials and workmanship, the Holmes house is exceptional. The quality of the brick and the skill with which it has been laid is very high, as would be expected in the home of brickmaker. The mortar joints are all carefully tinted to match the color of the brick itself. The bricks used in the construction of the house came from a brickyard only a few blocks to the south. Portland brownstone for the water table, keystones, and parapet copings was obtained from quarries owned by the Holmes family. Door hardware was manufactured by the Corbin Lock Company of New Britain, one of the leading hardware manufacturers of the time (Photograph 4). According to family tradition,¹ the interior cabinetwork was executed by an employee of the brickyard.

The architect of the Holmes house, Walter P. Crabtree, Senior (1873-1962), was a native of Rochester, New York. He received architectural training at Holyoke, Massachusetts, later moving to New Britain, where he was employed in the office of W.H. Cadwell, a well-known local architect, from 1901 to 1904. In 1905, he opened his own office on Main Street in New Britain. Crabtree worked in New Britain until 1928, when he moved to Hartford. He retired in 1942. His son and two grandsons also followed the profession. Notable buildings he designed in New Britain included the Masonic Temple and the B. P. O. Elks Lodge, built somewhat later than the Holmes house and in the Neo-Classical style. Crabtree also designed many other business blocks in New Britain and Hartford, and private residences, particularly in the growing suburban areas. In the Holmes house, his mastery of architectural vocabulary and form is evident.²

Francis H. Holmes (1876-1964), the brick manufacturer for whom the house was constructed in 1906-1908, was an important figure in the brick industry of

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Central Connecticut. Large deposits of clay suitable for brickmaking occur in the central valley of Connecticut. These were exploited commercially during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Holmes' father, John W. Holmes, was a partner in the Holmes and Dennis Brick Company. This yard was located only a few blocks south of the house in Berlin, Connecticut, just over the New Britain town line. Francis H. Holmes was superintendent of the yard at the time he had his house constructed. He later took over complete operation of the brickyard.

Holmes was an innovative man in an industry known for its conservatism. He developed, for example, a conveyor system for handling pallets of brick automatically. A working scale model of the machine was built by him in his basement machine shop prior to construction of the full-scale device at the brickyard. A partially disassembled model of this machinery remains in the house. Holmes also experimented with a device for the removal of small stones from the clay used in brickmaking. Unfortunately, no model of this remains.³

In 1910, the Holmes', father and son, were instrumental in the creation of the Central Connecticut Brick Company. A dozen individuals and firms are listed in the company's first stock book, including the C.P. Merwin Brick Company, the Richard Murray Brick Company, the Donnelly Brick Company, the New Britain Brick Company, Park Brick Company, King MacDonnell Brick Company, and the Charter Oak Brick Company.⁴ This was apparently a logical extension of an earlier brick exchange where large orders for bricks from urban centers such as New York would be met by pooling the resources of a number of brickyards. The stationery of the Central Connecticut Brick Company listed brickyards at Berlin, Clayton, Elmwood, Hartford, Middletown, New Britain, and Westfield, with an annual capacity of seventy-five million bricks. Holmes managed the Central Connecticut Brick Company until its demise in the late 1930s. Later, he managed the Stiles and Reynolds Brick Company in Berlin and the Tuttle Brick Company in Newfield.⁵

The Holmes house represents the lifestyle of a prosperous brick manufacturer of the early 20th century. It illustrates a transitional phase between the earlier 19th century home with extensive servant's quarters and the servantless modern home. The Holmes house has only one room for a servant. The presence of many labor-saving devices in the home is certainly a factor. Since the house has remained in the possession of the Holmes family to the present, and the original owner occupied it until his death in 1964, few changes have been made to the fabric of the building. The most noticeable is the replacement of Ionic capitals with cushion capitals, and the alteration of the porch for steps on the south side. Otherwise, the house is in a remarkably good state of preservation, as a comparison of Photograph 5, taken about 1908, with Photograph 1, taken in 1983, will reveal. The interior of the house, which retains original lighting fixtures, doors, hardware, mantelpieces, built-in cupboards and bookshelves, etc., is also remarkably well-preserved. Even the material of which the house is constructed reveals the variety of forms of brick and the quality of material being produced by the

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Holmes and Dennis Brick Company in the first decade of this century.

Endnotes.

1. Interview with Robert F. Douglass, 27 Smith Court, Noank, Connecticut, January 8, 1984. Mr. Douglass is the grandson of the original owner.
2. Interview with Walter P. Crabtree, III, of West Hartford, Connecticut, grandson of Water P. Crabtree, Senior, January 12, 1984. Also, file material in the New Britain Public Library, and Crabtree's obituary in the Hartford Courant, October 10, 1962.
3. Interview with Robert F. Douglass.
4. Stock Book No. 1 of the Central Connecticut Brick Company, in possession of Mr. Robert F. Douglass, 27 Smith Court, Noank, Connecticut.
5. "Francis Holmes, Was City Official, Brick Co. Owner," The Herald, July 19, 1964. Also, on the brick exchange, interview with Mrs. Joan Teske, 1401 Farmington Avenue, Berlin, Connecticut. Mrs. Teske's grandfather was a brickyard owner in Berlin.

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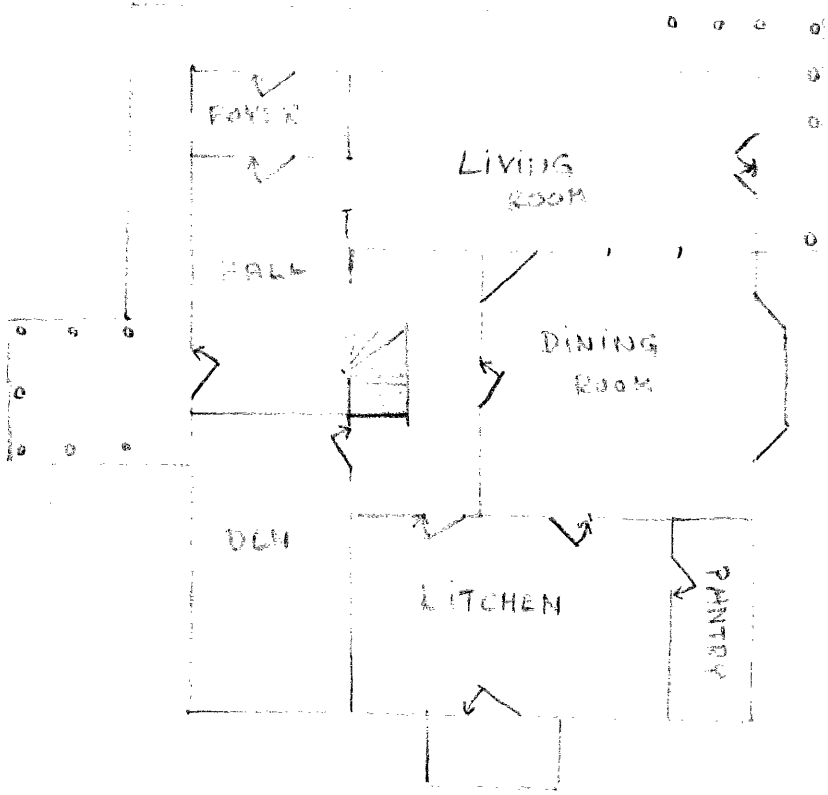
Major Bibliographical References (continued)

Interviews

Crabtree, Walter P. III, Telephone Interview January 12, 1984.

Douglass, Robert F. and Mrs. Edgar Douglass, Interview January 11, 1983
at 347 Rocky Hill Avenue, New Britain. Subjects are the grandson and
daughter, respectively, of Francis H. Holmes.

Teske, Mrs. Joan, Interview, December 6, 1983, over telephone to her home,
1401 Farmington Avenue, Berlin, Connecticut.



FLOOR PLAN
FRANCIS H. HOLMES HOUSE
NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT
• NOT TO SCALE •