



**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival  
LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate  
\_\_\_\_\_

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Sandstone  
walls Brick  
roof Asphalt shingles  
other \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Alphonso Johnson House is a transitional building of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles. It was constructed in 1859 on a level corner lot at the intersection of Gilbert and Circular avenues in southwest Hamden (Photograph #1; Exhibit A). A two-story brick building, it has a small one-and-one-half-story wing on the east side and an attached c. 1940 wooden garage at the rear (Photograph #s 2, 3, 4, 5). The house displays pronounced cornice returns in the gable ends, a multi-paned rectangular gable window in the facade, and the shallow-pitched gable roof associated with the Greek Revival. The Italianate influence is most evident in the facade porch, which has arched spandrels, square posts, pilasters, and a balustrade with heavy turned balusters. The main door, which is glazed and panelled, is probably original. There is a tall round-arched window in the stairwell on the east elevation, also derived from the Italianate. The rest of the windows have one-over-one replacement sash, including the floor-length windows on the facade porch. The sash in the rear gable window is missing. Both the facade porch and the later porch of the wing, with its turned posts, have concrete platforms.

The construction materials and techniques used in the Johnson House are typical of mid-nineteenth century masonry buildings. The load-bearing brick walls are laid in a common running bond with a lime-sand mortar. The red medium-fired brick, which varies between 8 and 9 inches in length, was locally manufactured at the owner's brick factory. The walls are the standard two-wythe thickness, except for the area above the attic gable windows. There, the walls are only one brick thick with an inside infill of wood.<sup>1</sup> The materials used for the foundation, watertable, and stone trim vary according to the location. The facade and part of the east elevation, obviously considered to be the most visible, have a rubblestone foundation faced with ashlar ochre granite, a type found locally and used in other buildings in Hamden. This section also has dressed brownstone sills, lintels, and watertable; the latter feature also forms the lintels for the cellar windows. In the rest of the house all of these features are rough-quarried gray granite, including the foundation veneer, except for the west elevation where the watertable was omitted and cellar windows have individual granite lintels. In the attic, rafters rest on gains in heavy plates laid on top of the brick kneewalls and extend to support the overhang. Wide roofing boards support a wood-shingled roof, currently covered with asphalt shingles.

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The remaining interior detail is limited to the front parlor and the entrance hall. The heavy trim of the doors and windows in these rooms has a distinctive border of bolection molding. The parlor is distinguished by a fireplace with a white marble surround framing a round-arched opening inset with a metal grille (Photograph #6). The parlor ceiling displays enriched plasterwork, including a decorative border and a foliated cartouche at the center. The balustrade in the hall is typical of the mid-nineteenth century with slim turned balusters and a smooth railing that ends in a volute at the newel. The rest of the first floor and the second floor have modern finishes.

1. In the front gable, "Eda Johnson" is chalked in manuscript across the boards above the window.

**8. Statement of Significance**

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

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

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

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)  
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance  
1859

Significant Dates  
1859

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
unknown

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

The Alphonso Johnson House, a vernacular example of Greek Revival/Italianate style, derives significance from its unusual transitional design and the craftsmanship and good state of preservation of its masonry. One of the few brick residences built in Hamden in the nineteenth century, it was constructed of locally-made brick.

Historical Background

The Johnson family were among the first to settle in this part of southwest Hamden, a farming district then known as Highwood or East Plains. Hezekiah Johnson (1779-1845), the father of Alphonso Johnson, the builder of this house, lived diagonally across Circular Avenue to the south (house no longer extant). Only one other early-nineteenth-century house was built in this immediate neighborhood, the Jesse Gilbert II House, a wood-framed Greek Revival-style farmhouse on Gilbert Avenue to the west. The rest of the area was not developed until the early twentieth century and consists largely of Cape-style homes of the 1930s and 1940s.

It is presumed that the bricks for this house came from the Johnson brickyard, which was located on Wilmot Brook to the northwest. Bricks were made there until about 1865 from claypits along the brook. Although there was a pond on the property, indicating the use of waterpower, the pugmill that pulverized the clay was probably powered by oxen, as a number of these animals were listed in the probate inventory of Hezekiah's estate. Alphonso Johnson (1821-1883), the fourth of nine children, inherited the brickyard at his father's death.

Architectural Significance

The Johnson House is a locally unique example of mid-nineteenth-century vernacular residential masonry construction, at once both progressive and conservative in its design. In a period when residential design was still locally dominated by the Greek Revival, it anticipated the Italianate style, which did not become generally popular in Hamden until the 1870s. Yet it maintained the massing and orientation of a Greek Revival farmhouse, including the kitchen wing of that genre, a form built in

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Becker, Martha May and Sasche, Nancy Davis. Hamden: Our Architectural Heritage. Hamden, Connecticut: Whitney Press, 1986 (for the Hamden Historical Society).

Blake, William P. History of the Town of Hamden, Connecticut with an Account of the Centennial Celebration June 15th 1886. New Haven: Price, Lee & Co., 1888.

Hartley, Rachel M. The History of Hamden, Connecticut, 1786-1936. Hamden, 1943.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

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

**Specify repository:**

Miller Memorial Library, Hamden

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreeage of property less than 1

**UTM References**

A 

1	8
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6	7	2	5	2	0
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4	5	8	0	2	6	0
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Zone Easting Northing

B 

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Zone Easting Northing

C 

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D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The nominated property is described in the Hamden Land Records, Vol. 687, page 683, Exhibit A, located in the Town Clerk's Office of the Hamden Town Hall.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated property includes the remaining land and buildings associated with Alphonso Johnson.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By** Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant  
organization Cunningham Associates Ltd. date May 15, 1991  
street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (203) 347-4072  
city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

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Hamden starting in the 1820s. It also retained the rectangular multi-paned gable window, commonly used in Hamden for this style, but abandoned the customary full pediment cornice. Of particular interest is the substitution of extended cornice returns, a major feature of the facade. Their prominence is accentuated by the contrasting brick and the wide overhangs, the latter more Italianate than Greek Revival in feeling. Although the construction techniques required for an extended wood cornice of this depth on a masonry building are technically rather difficult, surprisingly, this same feature is found on the few later brick buildings of the nineteenth century in town.<sup>1</sup> A residential example built in 1895 is located nearby at 150 Church Street. Extended returns also were used on Hamden's only nineteenth-century commercial block, the James Ives Building, constructed in 1877 at 2977 Whitney Avenue.

Further significance is derived from the relative rarity in Hamden of the building material. Brick was commonly used in residential construction in this period in more urban centers such as New Haven, but only three other houses were built entirely of brick in town prior to the construction of the Alphonso Johnson House; only two of these are still extant. The two brickyards in town, the Johnson brickyard and one other yard in the Spring Glen section, supplied material mainly for foundations and chimneys in the nineteenth century.

The stylistic importance of this house is enhanced by the remaining interior spaces that have retained their relatively ornate finishes and details. These rooms may be indicative of the former level of detailing in the rest of the house which has been lost in the recent remodeling.

1. A possible influence may be the work of Henry Austin in New Haven. His designs often utilized similarly exaggerated features.

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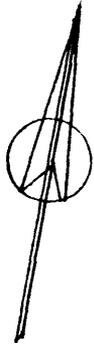
Section number Photos Page 1

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List of Photographs

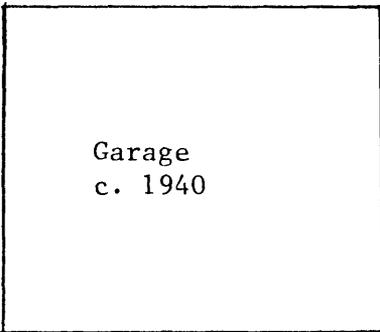
Property: Alphonso Johnson House  
New Haven County, Hamden, Connecticut  
Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd.  
Date: 4/91  
Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. General view of house & site<br>Facing: NW | 2. Facade<br>Facing: NW                   |
| 3. Facade and west elevations<br>Facing: NE   | 4. Rear and east elevations<br>Facing: SW |
| 5. Rear elevation<br>Facing: SE               | 6. Parlor<br>Facing: N                    |

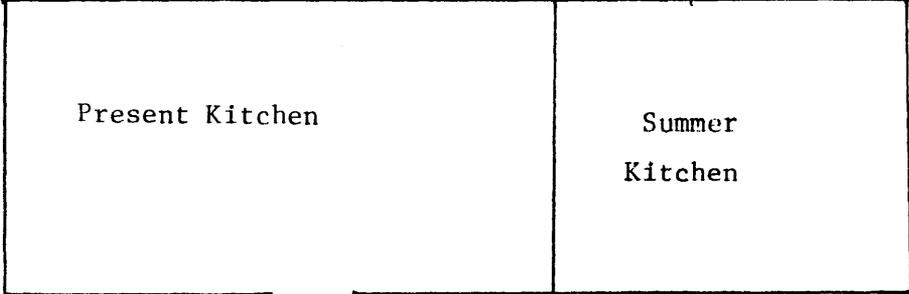


5

4

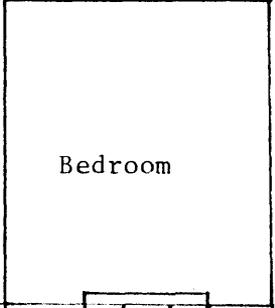


Garage  
c. 1940



Present Kitchen

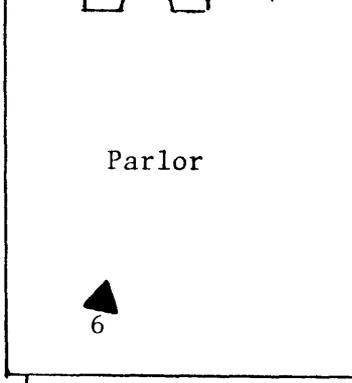
Summer  
Kitchen



Bedroom

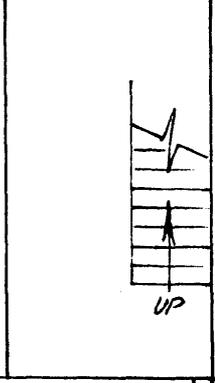


Bedroom



Parlor

6



UP



Exhibit A  
Alphonso Johnson House  
Hamden, Connecticut  
Schematic Design of first floor  
Photograph views numbered  
Cunningham Associates Ltd.

Scale  
Approx. 1/8" = 1'

2

3

1