

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name \_\_\_\_\_

other names/site number Hattertown Historic District

2. Location

street & number See continuation sheet.  not for publication

city or town Newtown  vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06470

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*John W. Shannahan* 10/30/96  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission  
 State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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): \_\_\_\_\_

*Edson H. Beall* Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
12-6-96  
 Entered in the  
 National Register

Hattertown Historic District  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
28	5	buildings
1	0	sites
		structures
		objects
29	5	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure

AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility/  
outbuilding

INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure

DOMESTIC/secondary structure/storage

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL/Postmedieval English

EARLY REPUBLIC/Federal

MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls weatherboard

roof asphalt shingle

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**National Register of Historic Places  
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Hattertown Historic District, Newtown, Fairfield County, Connecticut

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**2. Location**

Aunt Park Lane: 52, 71.

Castle Meadow Road: 62, 101

Hattertown Road: 208, 214, 215, 219, 224.

Hi Barlow Road: 1, 3, 7, 8.

Hattertown Historic District  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
28	5	buildings
1	0	sites
		structures
		objects
29	5	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure  
AGRICULTURE/SUBSISTENCE/animal facility/  
outbuilding  
INDUSTRY/manufacturing facility

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling/secondary structure  
DOMESTIC/secondary structure/storage

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

COLONIAL/Postmedieval English  
EARLY REPUBLIC/Federal  
MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite  
walls weatherboard  
roof asphalt shingle  
other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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Hattertown Historic District, Newtown, Fairfield County, Connecticut

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Located in the southwest corner of the Town of Newtown, the Hattertown Historic District encompasses the nineteenth-century crossroads village of Hattertown. The nominated district includes all of the present local district of the same name but expands those boundaries to include resources to the west and south. (See attached district map for both boundaries and Item #10 for boundary justification.) Lewis Brook, one of the many small tributaries of the Pootatuck River to the east, flows through the district, creating small ponds on several properties and bisecting Hattertown Green, a small triangular-shaped parcel at the center (Inventory #26; Photograph #s 1, 2).<sup>1</sup> The four roads that meet at the green include three that come down into the village from the north and west: Hattertown Road, the main through street, Hi Barlow Road, and Aunt Park Lane. Below the green, Hattertown Road is joined by Castle Meadow Road, entering from the southeast.

The district contains 34 resources, of which 29 (85%) contribute to its historic rural residential character. All 11 houses and most of the associated outbuildings are contributing. The latter include four large nineteenth-century barns, four privies, and a former blacksmith shop. The non-contributing resources are all modern outbuildings. All of the houses utilize post-and-beam construction and are mainly sheathed with clapboard. With the exception of one made of brick (Inventory #5), foundations are cut granite block over rubblestone. Many of the houses are set off from the roadway by wood fences. They are constructed with pickets or horizontal boards, supported by square posts.

The majority of the nineteenth-century houses in the district have retained the ridge-to-street orientation, central chimney, and two-story rectangular five-bay form of the standard late colonial house. In fact, so many resemble the Colonial/Federal Gad Benedict House that was constructed by carpenter/builder Isaac Patchen, it is generally held that he was the village's primary builder (Inventory #10; Photograph #3).<sup>2</sup> Set well back from the corner of Hattertown and Hi Barlow roads, this house has a late Federal doorway with attenuated pilasters and a relatively high entablature, but like several other houses in the district, it displays rectangular gable windows that have a multipaned pattern, a feature more commonly associated with the later Greek Revival. The main block utilizes six-over-six sash, the common pattern in the district.

A similar doorway surround with a narrower frieze is found on the nearly identical William Taylor House at the foot of the district, also on Hattertown Road (Inventory 23; Photograph #4). Fanlights are displayed on the gables of the Elam Benedict House at the foot of the green (Inventory #14; Photograph #5). Its more elaborately detailed doorway has paired slim pilasters separated by five-pane sidelights. The unconventional location of the four-pane transom within its frieze suggests that the surround may be a remodeling of an earlier colonial doorway.

There was a shift to a more fully developed Greek Revival style in three more houses of this type in the district. Their boldly executed doorways have wider pilasters and high entablatures, like that of the Morgan House, the most detailed of this group, which faces the green from the northeast (Inventory #2; Photograph #6). Pilasters frame the slightly recessed doorway, the external ones decorated with molding in a modified Greek fret pattern, a design also found on the broad corner pilasters of the main block. The Morgan House is also the only house of this style in the district that has flushboarded gable pediments, in which the characteristic multipaned window is displayed. Because of the slope of the property away from adjoining roads, the southeast end elevation has a full-height granite foundation, where the original kitchen was located at grade. An extended rear ell incorporates a former hatshop, which may be the one that once stood just below the house next to the road. At the end of an open grassed field southeast of the house is an associated cow barn and the Gregory Orchard's District School (Inventory #s 3, 4; Photograph #7). Although it has several later shed-roofed additions, the main part of

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the barn is believed to be contemporary with the house. The school, which has the typical two-door facade and belfry, was moved about 1975 from its earlier location at the corner of Aunt Park Lane and Hattertown Road.

The Charles Benedict House to the south, set well back from Hattertown Road with two small ponds in the frontyard, is a simpler version of the Greek Revival (Inventory #18; Photograph #8). The doorway, flanked by pilasters and sidelights, is its major style feature. The rectangular window in the north gable has three small panes instead of the more common multipaned type; the one on the other end has been replaced by a full-size window surmounted by a fanlight. The barn to the north, also shown in the photograph (Inventory #19), is a late nineteenth-century type, resembling others here in its fenestration pattern and detailing, especially the one associated with the Taylor House farther down the road (Inventory #24). They both have vertical board siding, with a sawtooth pattern at the overlapping base of the gable, and trim boards over the windows have a slight pediment.

The last of these district house types influenced by the Greek Revival is the Ralph Benedict House on Castle Meadow Road (Inventory #5; Photograph #9). Except for its Greek Revival doorway, it resembles the earlier Federal-style Benedict houses. Changes made in the present remodeling (still in process) include the addition of a large two-story rear ell. Rectangular three-pane windows in the gable ends, which have cornice returns instead of a full pediment, have been replaced with double-hung windows capped by fanlights that extend into the joining of the rakeboards at the peak. The barn to the south, which is markedly different from others in the district, may be contemporaneous with the house (Inventory #6). Built into a slope, it has the features of a bank barn with the main doors on the long north side to what would have been the threshing floor at the second level. The gable end facing the road has a shed-roofed extension with plain garage doors. The Benedict blacksmith shop that once stood north of the house next to the road has been moved to the rear of the property, also the location of a privy, which has a plastered interior (Inventory #s 8, 9).

The Greek Revival style is more conventionally interpreted in the district by a single example of the gable-to-street temple form (Inventory #28; Photograph #s 2, 10). Its Doric-order portico, which faces the green, shelters a six-panel door with sidelights, but pronounced cornice returns substitute for a full pediment. Again the rectangular multipaned window appears in the gable. Like some other rural farmhouses of this style in the region, it has one-bay shed-roofed wings recessed on both side elevations. It is said that an outbuilding to the rear, now serving as a garage, was a former Hattertown button factory (Inventory #30).

Among the rest of the houses in the district, which are generally smaller with fewer stylistic details, is the Levi Taylor House, possibly the oldest in the village (Inventory #26; Photograph #11). Its unbalanced four-bay facade suggests that the left side of this Cape may be older and date from about 1750. It too has an attached rear ell that once was a hatshop. Other additions include a shed dormer across the rear slope of the main roof and an added rear leanto on the north end of the main block, which gives that elevation a saltbox appearance. A simple two-story farmhouse on Hi Barlow Road was owned or occupied by the Briscoe family in 1856. Set high above the road and barely visible, it has a four-bay facade, with a rectangular Greek Revival window in the left end gable (Inventory #31; Photograph #12). An accompanying modern horse barn to the west and rear presents its gable end to the road (Inventory #32). Across the street, an unusual two-story gable-to-street building is set into a steep slope (Inventory #33; Photograph #13). Because of its siting and more vertical massing, as well as the high exposed rubblestone foundation on the east side, all more consistent with industrial use, this house may have been the hatshop shown on or near this site on mid-nineteenth-century maps. The shed-roofed addition on the south end has a small porch at the southeast

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corner, supported by turned posts, probably all constructed when the building became a residence. The last house to be built here is also a Cape. It overlooks the district from the hill between Aunt Park Lane and Hattertown Road (Inventory #1; Photograph #14). Constructed about 1855, it has a later Victorian-period porch with turned posts across the facade gable end that faces generally northwest.

In the full inventory list of district resources that follows, estimated (circa) dates of construction for houses may differ from those given in the Historic District Study Committee Report of 1971. In some cases, a later date seemed more consistent with the architectural evidence and/or Hattertown family histories.

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Inv. #	Address	Name/Style/Type/Date	C/NC	Ph.#
1.	52 Aunt Park Lane	Cape, c. 1850	C	14
2.	71 Aunt Park Lane	MORGAN HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1840; rear ell former hatshop	C	6
3.	"	early 19th-century barn with additions	C	7
4.	"	schoolhouse, c. 1780 (moved to site)	C	7
5.	62 Castle Meadow Rd.	RALPH BENEDICT HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1840	C	9
6.	"	mid-19th-century barn	C	
7.	"	poolhouse, c. 1995	NC	
8.	"	19th-century shed (former blacksmith shop)	C	
9.	"	privy	C	
	101 Castle Meadow Rd.	vacant lot 33/6/9		
10.	208 Hattertown Road	GAD BENEDICT HOUSE, Colonial/Federal, c. 1820	C	3
11.	"	garage, c. 1960	NC	
12.	"	19th-century shed converted to guesthouse	C	
13.	"	guesthouse, c. 1960	NC	
14.	214 Hattertown Road	ELAM BENEDICT HOUSE, Colonial/Federal, c. 1800	C	5
15.	"	early 20th-century barn/shed	C	
16.	"	early 20th-century shed	C	
17.	215 Hattertown Road	19th-century small barn associated with #214	C	
18.	219 Hattertown Road	CHARLES BENEDICT HOUSE, Greek Revival, c. 1840	C	8
19.	"	late 19th-century barn	C	8
20.	"	early 20th-century shed	C	
21.	"	c. 1950 garage with attached former coop	NC	
22.	"	privy (now associated pool structure)	C	
23.	224 Hattertown Road	WILLIAM TAYLOR HOUSE, Federal, c. 1820	C	4
24.	"	late 19th-century barn across street on lot 33/6/10	C	
25.	--	HATTERTOWN GREEN, late 19th-century	C	1, 2

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26.	1 Hi Barlow Road	LEVI TAYLOR HOUSE, Cape, possibly c. 1750; present form, c. 1820; former hatshop attached at rear	C	11
27.	"	privy	C	
28.	3 Hi Barlow Road	Greek Revival, c., 1845	C	10
29.	"	19th-century garage/shed (former factory)	C	
30.	"	early 20th-century shed	C	
31.	7 Hi Barlow Road	BRISCOE-MORGAN HOUSE, 19th-century domestic, c. 1840	C	12
32.	"	horse barn, 1968	NC	
33.	8 Hi Barlow Road	19th-century domestic, c. 1840 (possibly former hatshop)	C	13
34.	"	privy	C	

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location. Inventory #4
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

INDUSTRY

**Period of Significance**

c. 1800 - c. 1940

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Isaac Patchen

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**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

Name of repository:

\_\_\_\_\_

Hattertown Historic District  
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** approx. 55

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 | 1 | 8 | | 6 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 0 | 0 |  
Zone Easting Northing  
2 | 1 | 8 | | 6 | 4 | 1 | 5 | 0 | 0 | | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 9 | 4 | 0 |  
5 1 8 6 4 1 3 8 0 4 5 7 7 4 1 0

3 | 1 | 8 | | 6 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 2 | 0 | | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 0 |  
Zone Easting Northing  
4 | 1 | 8 | | 6 | 4 | 1 | 7 | 4 | 0 | | 4 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 0 |  
 See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a 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 5/15/96  
street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (860) 347 4072  
city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_  
street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Statement of Significance**

The Hattertown Historic District is an exceptionally well-preserved early nineteenth-century crossroads village, one which was devoted almost exclusively to the hatting trade, a specialized cottage industry closely identified with Connecticut's Western Uplands. These historical associations are especially significant since so little remains elsewhere in the region to mark the evolutionary period of this industry prior to its consolidation in Danbury. The district also achieves considerable distinction as a cohesive body of rural vernacular architecture, in which stylistic interpretations of traditional colonial forms include fine well-crafted examples of the major styles of the period, the Federal and the Greek Revival. Added significance is derived from the integrity of the historic setting, which is enhanced by a collection of well-preserved period outbuildings, and visually integrated by its appropriate-to-period fencing.

**Historical Background and Significance**

In the early nineteenth century conditions in the Western Uplands favored development of a widely dispersed hatting trade, providing both raw materials and means of production. Hatting originated in Danbury about 1780 and by the 1820s at least one family was devoting itself to this cottage industry in almost every uplands town. From fabricating the fur felt to forming the product, hatting involved a series of labor-intensive processes which required an abundant water supply and depended on the availability of small fur-bearing animals, such as beaver, muskrat, and fox. Much of the hatting process was dirty and hazardous, the first steps being washing and drying of the animal pelts. Mercury was used to remove the fur from the skins and workers were often poisoned, giving rise to the expression "mad as a hatter." Bonding of the cut fur, sometimes mixed with wool, into felt required pressure and heat, usually with hand-operated presses, and hat forming was done by hand. Since, unlike most other early industries, none of these processes really required waterpower or specially designed buildings, hatmaking could take place almost anywhere in the region that was near a brook or stream, literally in cottages, or in hatshops, small free-standing outbuildings. Primarily due to the relatively ephemeral nature of hatshops and the short duration of rural hatting, these artifacts generally disappeared from the landscape by the late nineteenth century.

The dispersal of the hat trade followed a definite sequence, seemingly predicated on the availability of local fur. By 1800 hat production in Danbury had reached 20,000 hats a year, requiring a large supply of felt. To meet the demand, fur pelts began to be imported from foreign countries and domestic rabbit hair and wool were used to supplement the local supply. Some Danbury hatters elected to set up shops in neighboring towns such as Bethel, where local and cheaper fur was more readily available. Their sons, in turn, moved on to more distant hamlets, such as Hattertown in Newtown, and there were others in Roxbury and New Milford, a migration that generally took place in the early 1820s. Individual sites and houses associated with hatting families in the region have been identified, such as the Sanfords of Bridgewater, but Hattertown became one of the few places where an entire village was so directly involved in the trade.<sup>3</sup>

The Taylors and the Benedicts came to the village in 1821. Like most in the business, their families had been engaged in the regional hatting trade. There were several advantages to this location. In addition to brooks and ponds in the area, a natural habitat for muskrat and beaver, there was a nucleus of a village already in place. It was just one of many small farming settlements in the riverine valleys of Newtown, a community fragmented by rolling terrain and north-south ridgelines. Except for the town center along a ridgeline to the north established at the end of the seventeenth century, most of Newtown's population was so scattered that 21 school districts were formed in 1788, an unusually large number. Though remote, the village that became Hattertown was not isolated from the outside world, but connected by the Monroe-Newtown Turnpike

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(present-day Hattertown Road). Access to this highway was important, since the Benedicts and the Taylors would not be independent producers or local retailers. Instead, their hatshops were outposts of a regional trade network. They supplied rough-formed hats, which were either sold to wholesalers in Danbury or shipped directly to New York "front shops" for finishing. It is likely that the Danbury middlemen were essential because they had already developed a strong market in the Deep South.

Levi Taylor (1790-1833) came here soon after his son, William (1819-1862), was born in Bethel. They were descendants of Joshua Taylor, a Danbury hatter. Levi moved into the small Cape facing the green and probably enlarged it at that time to accommodate his family of seven children (Inventory #26; Photograph #11). Both William and his father died in their early 40s.<sup>3</sup> At the time of Levi's death, William was only 14. He may have moved into his Colonial/Federal, a house built in the 1820s at the south end of the district, at the time of his marriage to Polly Durand in 1846 (Inventory #23; Photograph #4). By 1856 he is also identified as the owner of the Taylor Cape. It is said that his brother, Charles, also followed the family trade, but apparently not in Hattertown.

Elam Benedict, who was the first of his family to live here, bought the house next door to Levi Taylor, a Colonial/Federal dating from about 1800 (Inventory #14; Photograph #5). He and his wife had 11 children, including Charles, who later owned the Greek Revival house south of the green between Hattertown and Castle Meadow roads (Inventory #18; Photograph #8). Another son, George, was a partner in his father's hatshop that once was one of two on the Morgan property (Inventory #2). His nephew, Gad Benedict, probably the first of the family to build in Hattertown, hired Isaac Patchen to construct his Colonial/Federal at the head of the district (Inventory #10; Photograph #3). Another son, Ralph, elected to become a blacksmith with a forge and shop next to his house (Inventory #s 5, 8; Photograph #9). After his death the shop was moved to the rear of the property near the existing privy (Inventory #9).

By the 1840s changes in the industry sounded the death knell for local hatting. Some, like the new technologies of the Industrial Revolution and distance from markets, affected all rural industries. Others were more trade-specific, such as the fact that with the depletion of the region's fur-bearing animals, all fur had to be imported. More importantly, all the stages of fur processing and hat forming were becoming fully mechanized, especially in Danbury. Local hatshops could not compete with urban hat factories that had sophisticated water- and steampowered systems and a large skilled workforce. Though hatting persisted in Hattertown at least through 1856, with two of the original five hatshops still operating as shown by historic maps at that time, soon after the Civil War hatting was fully reconsolidated in Danbury, which had become a major railroad junction with a ready supply of immigrant labor. Danbury supplied international markets by the 1920s and became known as the "Hat Capital of the World." By the 1950s, faced with increased foreign competition and declining popularity of hats for men, the city's single-industry economy faltered. Although hats continue to be made there, today the economy has been diversified by an influx of high-precision technology industries.

Though 40 prosperous years in the hatting trade produced Hattertown, it was the village's later history that preserved its resources. When hatting died out, the same families lingered on here in the same houses, keeping them and their outbuildings in good repair. In frugal Yankee fashion, several attached obsolete hatshops to enlarge their houses, so even those artifacts have survived. Farming remained the underlying basis of the local economy, a village history that is as similar and unremarkable as most were in Connecticut in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the twentieth century newcomers gradually replaced old families as caretakers of this special heritage and established a local historic district to assure its continued protection and preservation.

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According to the map of 1905, three of the Benedict houses and one Taylor house were still owned by their respective families at that time. As was so often the case in New England villages, the surviving heirs were unmarried women. Among them was Celiste A. Benedict, a physician in the village. Although she reportedly moved her practice to Bridgeport after 1883, the Elam Benedict House remained in her name (Inventory #14; Photograph #5). A Miss. P. Taylor lived in the Levi Taylor House, later owned by two more generations of the related Briscoe family; her neighbor in the Greek Revival next door was Miss. E. Crandall (Inventory #s 26, 28; Photograph #s 11, 10). As late as 1971, the Charles Benedict House was still owned by a granddaughter and her husband, Handley Tipton. Their property was probably the last working farm in the district (Inventory #18; Photograph #8).

The survival of so many well-maintained barns confirms that farming remained a way of life into the twentieth century. Some descendants of hatting families turned to farming as their primary occupation, accounting for the large barns of the late 1800s in the district (Inventory #s 19, 24). The remaining earlier barn types indicate that at least the Ralph Benedicts and the Morgans had always been dairy or cattle farmers (Inventory #s 6, 3; Photograph #7). O. E. Morgan, possibly a grandson, had a farm on the hill overlooking the village, which earlier had been the farmstead of the Briscoes (Inventory #31; Photograph #12).

**Architectural Significance**

With its gleaming white houses and red barns, the Hattertown Historic District is the quintessential Connecticut village, so often imagined but rarely found. Though the sights, sounds, and odors of the bustling hat trade are long gone, a picturesque historic landscape of exceptional integrity remains. Little has changed since the nineteenth century. The same period houses still cluster about the pocket green, while their properties fan out behind them, most still complete with their historic barns and other outbuildings, giving the district a remarkably high percentage of contributing resources. The few more recent outbuildings are unobtrusive and hardly visible from the road.

For architectural historians, the Hattertown Historic District presents a rare opportunity to closely observe the craftsmanship and skill of a country builder in a contiguous setting. While it has been generally held that cultural conservatism produced the rural domestic vernacular of the early nineteenth century, this demonstration of the stylistic development of a single form through a period of at least 30 years is quite significant. Its attribution to a single builder, Isaac Patchen, is a long-held local tradition, but one that seems to be borne out by the architectural evidence in at least five and possibly six of the houses.<sup>4</sup> Although updating older colonial houses in this period was quite common, examples of such treatment abounding right through the Greek Revival period, it is most unusual to find colonial design constraints operating so generally on residential construction in one locality.

Whether Patchen embellished his houses with Federal or Greek Revival details, there is little or no variation in their basic colonial form right down to the central chimney floor plan. Of particular interest is the fact that in addition to more up-to-date detailing, the Patchen houses made another concession to progress. The roof plates are generally studded higher, though other colonial proportions remained the same, giving a subtle verticality to his facades. This change is particularly obvious in the Morgan House (Inventory #2; Photograph #6), where the height is accentuated by the broad corner pilasters, but all but one of these houses in the district have the greater distance between the second-story windows and the roof. Only the Elam Benedict House, probably the earliest of these structures, has windows closer to the eaves. Together with the

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surviving transom over the door, it is more truly late colonial in form and massing and may be the work of another builder.

There is a charming rural simplicity in the detailing of these houses, especially the well-crafted doorways. Composed of plain boards with simple moldings, they reveal the builder's understanding of the essential elements of proportion and style. The only real change that took place over time was in the width of the applied material, as seen in a comparison of the basic Federal doorway surround, which was perfected in the Gad Benedict and William Taylor houses (Inventory #s 10, 23; Photograph #s 3, 4), with the doorways of two later Benedict houses (Inventory #s 5, 18; Photograph #s 9, 8). The Morgan House, however, was a departure (Inventory #2; Photograph 6). Here the applied detail of the molded pilasters, a Greek fret design that may have been taken from a carpenter's pattern book of the period, and its full pediment make this Greek Revival the most stylish in the district. Only the house on the opposite side of the green, with its more "modern" orientation and Greek Revival portico, is comparable (Inventory #28; Photograph #12).

The other houses in the district extend its architectural range and add variety to the streetscapes. Typically the Cape is well-represented, a common type favored in rural areas for more than a century. Like many such small houses, they often were extended and enlarged over the years, as demonstrated by the Levi Taylor House (Inventory # 26; Photograph #11). The many well-preserved barns also play an important supporting role, clearly establishing the temporal range of the district. From the Morgan and Benedict barns of the mid-nineteenth century (Inventory #s 2, 5; Photograph #6) to the later examples built by Benedict and Taylor descendants (Inventory #s 9, 23; Photograph #8), they are an exceptionally representative demonstration of the changing functional form of these agricultural resources over time.

End Notes:

1. Originally just a wide place in the road, this pocket green was landscaped in the twentieth century. The land is still part of adjacent privately owned parcels.
2. The builder's name is inscribed in the attic of this house.
3. Glover Sanford and his son, Frederick S. Sanford, owners of an Italianate villa on Hat Shop Hill in Bridgewater (listed on the National Register in 1988), ran a hatting business called Sanford & Sons across the road from the house. It was established in 1823 by Glover Sanford, who previously had apprenticed to his brother, John, a hatmaker in Salisbury, and later in Brookfield. The Sanfords were more successful than most in the trade. Their business, which employed 125 men and produced \$300,000 worth of hats per year, was moved to Bridgeport in 1870 to be closer to major rail and shipping routes.
4. The causes of their deaths are not known and might have been genetic, but they may have succumbed to mercury poisoning. It was not until the end of the nineteenth century that mercury was banned, largely due to the efforts of unions in Danbury to improve labor conditions industry-wide.
5. A comparison of other possible Patchen houses in Newtown with those in the district could be fruitful. However, such an analysis must await the results of the ongoing architectural survey of Newtown, which may identify and locate other work by this builder.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

*Commemorative Biographical Record of Fairfield County, Connecticut.* Chicago: J. H. Beers & Co., 1899.

Cunningham, Janice P. "Frederick S. Sanford House." National Register nomination, 1988.

Gilchrist, Alison. "P. Robinson Fur Cutting Company." National Register nomination, 1982.

"Historic District Study Committee Report," Town of Newtown, 1969.

Historic Maps of Newtown, 1854, 1856, 1905 (Newtown Public Library).

*Newtown, Connecticut: Directions and Images.* Newtown: Eastern Press, Inc., 1989.

*Newtown Connecticut: Past and Present.* New Haven: Walker-Rackliff Co., 1955.

**10. Geographical Data**

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundaries are shown on the attached map drawn to scale for Newtown Tax Assessor's Maps 32 and 33 (superimposed on aerial surveys).

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundaries were selected to encompass the maximum number of historic contributing resources associated with Hattertown's period of significance. To be in conformance with National Register criteria and practice, the boundaries of the nominated district differ from those of the local district. Additional contributing contiguous properties not presently represented in the local district were added, and in general, the National Register district boundaries follow property lines rather than a set distance from the roadways.

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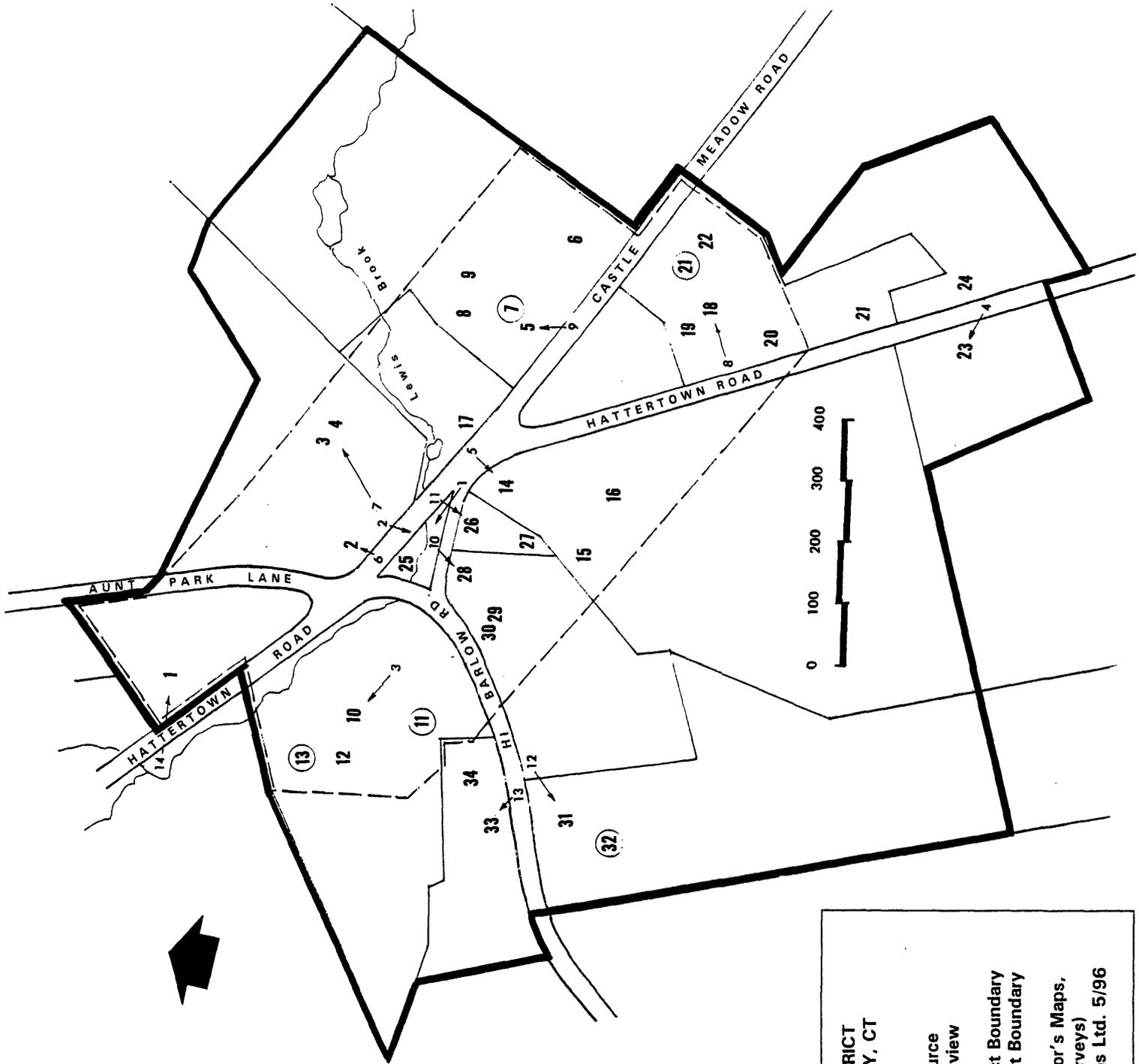
List of Photographs

Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd.

Date: 5/96

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

1. HATTERTOWN GREEN, facing NW
2. HATTERTOWN GREEN (LEVI TAYLOR HOUSE & 3 Hi Barlow Road  
in background; l-r), facing S
3. GAD BENEDICT HOUSE, facing NW
4. WILLIAM TAYLOR HOUSE, facing NW
5. ELAM BENEDICT HOUSE, facing SW
6. MORGAN HOUSE, facing NE
7. MORGAN BARN & DISTRICT SCHOOL, facing NE
8. CHARLES BENEDICT HOUSE AND BARN (r-l), facing NE
9. RALPH BENEDICT HOUSE, facing N
10. 3 Hi Barlow Road, facing SW
11. LEVI TAYLOR HOUSE, facing SW
12. BRISCOE-MORGAN HOUSE, facing SW
13. 8 Hi Barlow Road, facing NW
14. 52 Aunt Park Lane, facing E



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# Contributing resource  
 (#) Non-contributing resource  
 # with arrow: photograph view

**Bold Line: National Register District Boundary  
 Dashed Line: Local Historic District Boundary**

**Base Maps: Newtown Tax Assessor's Maps,  
 #s 32 and 33 (from Aerial Surveys)  
 Compiled by Cunningham Associates Ltd. 5/96**