

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

NATIONAL
REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wilcox, Josiah, House
other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 354 Riversville Road not for publication
city, town Greenwich vicinity
state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06830

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

[Signature] July 20, 1988
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

[Signature] 11-30-88
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure (carriage house)

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure conv. to apartment with garage below

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

walls weatherboard

roof asphalt

other wood columns

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Josiah Wilcox House is located in the western part of the town of Greenwich in a section known as Riversville, a community established along the Byram River in the mid-eighteenth century. Built in the Greek Revival style in 1838, this wood-framed, gable-roofed house occupies a commanding position on a rise above the west side of Riversville Road, approximately 300 yards northwest of the Merritt Parkway (Route 15) (Photographs #1, 2, 3). A sloping driveway, approximately 200 feet long, extends along the south side of the property from a semi-circular turn-off on Riversville Road (probably part of the original roadway). The house itself is set off from the driveway by a wooden fence with flat, shovel-shaped pickets. A nineteenth-century carriage house, now used as a garage with living quarters above, is located directly northwest of the house (Photograph #4).

From historic photographs it appears that the nominated property and its surroundings have changed very little since the nineteenth century with the exception of the size of the trees. Stone walls and mature trees run along its borders. Several large specimen trees on the front and side (north) lawn include a black spruce reputed to pre-date the house. The surrounding area is more heavily wooded today, but the area remains rural-residential with widely-spaced eighteenth- and nineteenth century houses integrated with some modern residences. The nearest house, an 1852 Italianate built by Josiah for his son George Wilcox, is located to the southeast closer to the road. A factory built by Josiah Wilcox operated on the west branch of the Byram River to the northwest (outside the boundaries of the nominated property). The buildings are no longer standing but the stone dam and the Wilcox millpond remain.

The Wilcox House consists of a high two-story main block, appended by a lower two story gable-roofed rear ell set on the same axis, rather than at 90 degrees as is more typical of a rural Greek Revival building (Photograph #5). This ell was extended about ten feet to the rear, probably in the late nineteenth century. A second smaller addition, located at the rear, dates from the twentieth century. The typical three-bay temple-form main block has a monumental colonnaded portico across the facade (east elevation) (Photograph #6). Four fluted wooden Ionic columns resting on Attic bases support the full pediment. The hand-carved Ionic capitals are embellished with egg-and-dart molding between the volutes. Both the pediment and the facade wall are sheathed with flush boarding, with plain board pilasters behind the portico. The remaining walls of the main block and its extended rear ell are clapboarded. Applied architectural details include the dentil course of the cornice of the main block and the use of bead-and-reel molding around the recessed tympanum of the pediment. The main entrance on the right (north) side of the facade displays a two panel-door (Photograph #7). The panels are recessed, with hand-carved acanthus

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Josiah Wilcox House, Greenwich, Connecticut

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leaf borders with bead-and-reel molding. The surround has sidelights, a transom, with an outsized Greek fret pattern on the corner blocks.

Most of the windows have simple flat board surrounds and contain the original six-over-six, double-hung sash, many with original glazing. The treatment of the facade windows differs slightly. They display incised, panelled lintels and blinds. Where the former recessed porch of the ell has been enclosed, new sash has been installed in the outside wall. The multi-paned, round-arched, double-hung window in the pediment is a later nineteenth-century addition. There is no physical evidence of earlier fenestration in the tympanum.

The construction of the house is typical for the period. Standard post-and-beam construction is used throughout with intermediate studded walls, which are lathed and plastered. The main block has higher ceilings than the kitchen ell, where the corner posts are exposed and cased. Roof framing consists of sawn rafters carried on two continuous, longitudinal hewn purlins. The rafter pairs meet at a narrow ridge board rather than being half-lapped, or butted and pegged. Collar beams bolted to the rafters have been added but all the rest of the exposed framing, as well as the roof boards, appear to be original. Those boards display vertical saw marks from a waterpowered up-and-down saw.

The foundation is quarry-faced granite with a full cellar under the main block, the kitchen ell, and its rear extension. The latter area (behind the kitchen stack) was originally a crawl space and has been excavated to full depth, presumably when the cement slab floor of the cellar was poured. An intermediate soft-fired or air-dried brick wall separates the main block from the ell. The brick in the foundations of the perimeter wall chimney stacks is harder. These foundations appear to have been rebuilt, as does the foundation for the original kitchen fireplace. Its open, hollow square type of construction may be original but the materials used in the three lateral brick supporting walls and the short carrying beams appear to be new work. The hearth itself is supported by short planks running at an angle up from the chimney foundation to the adjoining joist. The lime-sand mortar between these planks indicates original construction. The rest of the first-floor framing is covered with gypsum board, and is, as a result, not visible from the cellar.

The interior plan of the house is largely intact (see Exhibit A for a schematic diagram) (Photographs #8, 9). The only changes were the removal of the partition wall between the front and rear parlors of the main block and the aforementioned enclosure of the kitchen ell porch. Modern conveniences such as bathrooms have been carefully located so as not to disturb the original layout. An unusual feature of the first floor is a small room behind the entrance hall with its own outside entrance, originally used as an office by the first owner/builder (Photograph #10). The main staircase runs along the north wall in a double run. It has a simply executed balustrade with the bannister ending in a hand-carved spiral volute at the newel (Photograph #11). The full second story of the ell is also somewhat unusual.

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These rooms, presumably occupied by servants or apprentices, are accessed by a secondary enclosed staircase from the kitchen below.

The house has seven fireplaces, four on the first floor and three on the second. All have relatively shallow brick fireboxes with dressed granite surrounds. With the exception of the parlor fireplaces which have reeded pilasters, all have simple board surrounds with built up moldings. A metal firebox has been installed in the front upper chamber. All the rest of the wood trim remains. Wide molded surrounds with circular corner blocks are used on the first floor of the main block for door and window casings. Plain boards with built-up edge moldings are found elsewhere. Moderately wide pine floor boards are used throughout the main block and the ell. They are face-nailed with hand-headed, slit work nails and appear to be original.

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

1838

Significant Dates

N/A

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 Josiah Wilcox House is an exceptionally well-preserved Greek Revival-style house of significant architectural merit and superior integrity (Criterion C). Josiah Wilcox, a manufacturer and civic leader in West Greenwich, had a major impact on the development of Riversville in the nineteenth century.

Architectural Significance

A rare example of the temple form in Connecticut, the Josiah Wilcox House is one of the best Greek Revival-style houses in Greenwich. Great care was used to site the house to its best advantage on its sloping site and to subordinate the kitchen ell and carriage house. When viewed from below, the temple-fronted facade assumes almost monumental proportions. In marked contrast to the simple treatment of the interior, no expense was spared on the architectural detailing of the bold colonnaded portico. This impression is reinforced by the fact that even though rural Greek Revival-style houses are rarely ornate, few display such an imposing facade.

As might be expected, the Wilcox House appears to be the work of a master carpenter builder interpreting the Greek Revival style by assembling the components from a pattern book. Much of the force and vigor of his design is in the freely interpreted classicism of the portico; both the columns and the capitals are slightly more massive in their proportions than is typical.¹ The Ionic capitals are exceptionally well-crafted, displaying a deep relief in the volutes not often found in the vernacular Greek Revival. It is more common to find this type of capital articulated in low relief with, as William E. Pierson, Jr., suggests, "the linearity betraying their origins in the sharp line engravings of a book."² The design of the main entrance is not a pattern book derivative but, with its outsize corner blocks, is consistent with the scale of the portico. It is possible that the corner blocks, with their large frets, and the frieze board are a twentieth-century alteration or replacement for the original details. The method of construction used here does not match the rest of the surround.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Congregationalists on Quaker Ridge. North Greenwich Congregational Church, 1977.
Feltus, Louise Celestia. Our Two Centuries in North Greenwich, Connecticut: 1728-1924., 1945.
Greenwich: 90 Years in Pictures. Greenwich, Connecticut: The Greenwich Mail, 1968.
Pierson, William H., Jr. American Buildings and Their Architects. Vol. 1. Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1976.
Wilcox, Charles H. "Josiah Wilcox of Greenwich, CT." Typescript of biographical and genealogical material to be used in a published genealogy of the Wilcox family, c. 1900. In possession of current owners of the Josiah Wilcox House, Charles H. and Leslie S. Rousell.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

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

Specify repository:

Greenwich Historical Society

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 1.5

UTM References

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Zone Easting Northing

C

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B

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Zone Easting Northing

D

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See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

The property is described in Volume #1527, Page 59 of the Greenwich Land Records, Town Clerk's Office, Greenwich, Connecticut.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes all of the buildings and the majority of the remaining land associated with the Josiah Wilcox House.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

Edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

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city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

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Few temple-fronted houses from this period in Connecticut have retained such a degree of architectural integrity. Modifications to the house have been minor, confined mostly to structural repair or the installation of modern conveniences. The removal of the parlor wall is unfortunate but the proportions of the double room thus created are pleasing. Most of the original exterior historic fabric remains intact and displays superior nineteenth-century craftsmanship. Recent owners have maintained and preserved this integrity. For example, the pine floors have not been subjected to power sanding, a common practice that destroys the patina of age.

Historical Background

Josiah Wilcox (1804-1883) was the son of Joseph Russell Wilcox and Lina Bacon of Middletown. Born in West Cromwell, then part of the "Upper Houses" of Middletown, Josiah was a direct descendant of John Wilcox, an original proprietor of Hartford who settled there with Thomas Hooker. Josiah, the fifth of seven children and the third son, was apprenticed at age 16 in the tinware business in East Berlin. He became a journeyman tinner, employed for a time in Southington by Seth Peck, one of the first in the state to mechanize the production of tinware.

Josiah Wilcox came to the Riversville section of Greenwich in 1828, the year he married Celestia Wilcox (1806-1873), his second cousin. He dammed the West Branch of the Byram River just below the gorge and built a factory, specializing in tinner's tools and hardware. Ten years later the firm expanded, adding carriage hardware to the product line, and Josiah built his Greek Revival-style house south of the factory. Prior to that time he and his family occupied an old house north of the factory site. From one small wooden building (30' x 35'), the factory was enlarged several times to include specialized shops for water-powered forges and trip-hammers. Until the plant was converted to steam power, as many as five water wheels were in use at one time. A major employer in Riversville, "Boss Wilcox," as he was known, built a number of "little houses to accommodate his men."³ So successful was the Riversville company that Wilcox became a major investor in other businesses, most notably Peck, Stow, & Wilcox of Southington, capitalized at one million dollars and later to become the largest bolt manufacturing company in the country.

A lifelong Congregationalist, Wilcox was a deacon of the North Greenwich church and also mainly responsible for the building of the "Riversville Chapel," a Sunday School for the community, to the south of his house, where he served as superintendent until his death. Between 1849 and 1854 he represented Greenwich five times in the state legislature. He was a director of the National Savings Bank in Port Chester, New York, a community where the family had personal and financial connections for many years.

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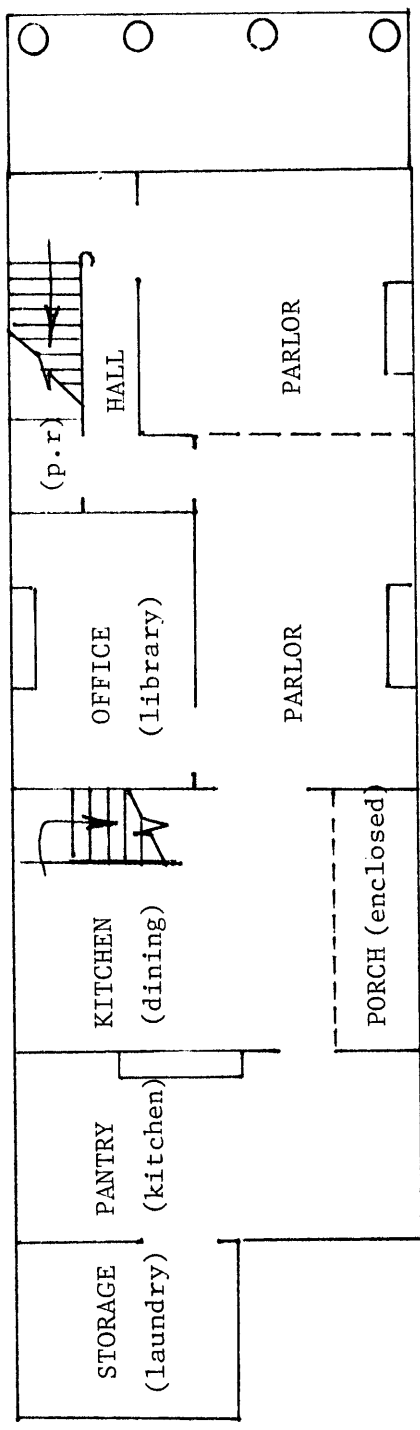
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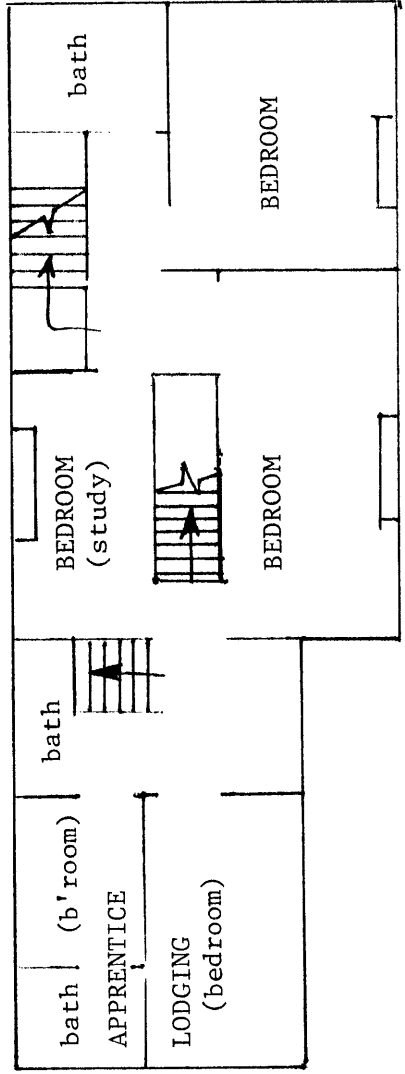
Josiah and Celestia had seven children; five lived to adulthood. Two of their sons joined Josiah in the business and carried it on after his death, George (1832-1903) and Willis (1841-n.d.). Willis joined the firm after serving for three years in the Civil War as a corporal under General Ambrose Burnside. Josiah built houses for both his sons; the Italianate in 1852 for George and a Victorian house for Willis further south on Riversville Road a few years later. The business closed with George's death. The factory buildings stood vacant for many years and finally collapsed in the late 1920s. The Josiah Wilcox House remained in the family until 1943. It has had several owners since that time.

Notes:

1. In more formal architect-designed buildings, these proportions are more precisely observed, commonly derived from Vitruvius. A comparison of these columns to the Greek ideal indicates that they are too wide for their height (approximately seven rather than nine diameters). Similarly, the proportions are freely interpreted, rather than developed from classical architectural geometry.
2. William E. Pierson, Jr., American Buildings and Their Architects, Vol.1. (Garden City, New York: Amber Books, 1976), page 448.
3. Greenwich: 90 Years in Pictures (Greenwich, CT: The Greenwich Mail, 1968), page 29.



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

Present use ()
 Dashed line - removed