

Oliver H. Perry House
750 Harbor Road
Southport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-302

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-302

OLIVER H. PERRY HOUSE

Location: 750 Harbor Road (north side of street), Southport,
Fairfield County, Connecticut

USGS Westport Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse
Mercator Coordinates: 18.643960.4554690

Present Owner
and Occupant: John Lawrence Hughes

Present Use: Residence

Statement of
Significance: The Oliver Perry residence was constructed circa 1841-
45 and is the finest Greek Revival temple style design
in Southport and the surrounding area. In symmetry,
balance and proportion this structure's classical out-
lines are unsurpassed. The three-bayed facade, the two-
story portico supported by Roman Doric columns and Greek? ✓
entablature, and the flanking wings with correctly pro-
portioned classical details echoing those of the main
section are characteristic of early nineteenth-century
American high-style Greek temple architecture. Erected
upon a flat, open site, the bold proportions of the
wooden temple stand out against the relatively small-
scaled buildings of the immediate environment. Oliver
Perry was a resident of Southport throughout his life.
In addition to his prosperous commercial and financial
enterprises, he was an active and prominent member of
the Connecticut General Assembly. Perry's residence
possessed great personal value and remained in his imme-
diate family for more than a century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: circa 1841-45. Oliver acquired the land
from his brother Gurdon in 1838. In 1838-41 he was enrolled
at Yale Law School in New Haven. Since he was admitted to
the bar in 1841, returning to Southport, and married in 1846,
Oliver probably built his residence during the five-year
interim.

2. Original and subsequent owners: The land upon which the structure stands was originally a part of the common lands within the Town of Fairfield. Peter Perry, Oliver H. Perry's grandfather, acquired the land in the 1760s. Reference to the chain of title subsequent to the 1760s transaction is in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

- 1798 Deed, October 1, 1798, recorded in Volume 28, page 275. Peter Perry to Walter Perry.
- 1838 Deed, October 22, 1838, recorded in Volume 45, page 511. Gurdon Perry to Oliver H. Perry.
- 1882 Will, March 26, 1882, Oliver H. Perry to his son John H. Perry.
- 1898 Deed, June 28, 1898, recorded in Volume 69, page 64. John H. Perry to Winthrop H. Perry, son.
- 1898 Deed, October 24, 1898, recorded in Volume 70, page 182. Winthrop H. Perry to J. H. Perry.
- 1929 Deed, December 6, 1929, recorded in Book 140, page 345. Estate of J. H. Perry to Virginia B. Perry.
- 1959 Deed, November 13, 1959, recorded in Volume 258, page 51. Virginia B. Perry to Hoyt O. Perry.
- 1960 Deed, December 10, 1960, recorded in Volume 417, page 352. Hoyt O. Perry to Charlotte L. R. Perry.
- 1961 Deed, September 4, 1961, recorded in Book 442, page 16. Charlotte L. R. Perry to John Lawrence Hughes.

3. Alterations and additions: The enclosed porch on the south-east wing is of recent construction.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

Oliver H. Perry was born in Southport on February 21, 1815, the son of Walter Perry. He was educated at the Fairfield Academy and went on to study at Yale College in 1830 at the age of fifteen. Due to ill-health, Oliver did not return the following year. In 1838, however, he did return to study at Yale Law School, and was admitted to the bar in 1841. Though he was a certified attorney, he did not practice law but rather used his legal expertise in business and financial matters.

In his public role, he held many governmental positions at the state level. He was a member of the Connecticut General Assembly in 1847-49, 1853, 1857, 1860 and 1864, and was elected Connecticut's Secretary of State in 1854 and Speaker of the House in 1859-60. On the local level, Oliver was an active member of the committee for the design and construction of the new public school building.

As a private entrepreneur, Perry was principally occupied as a shipping merchant and financier. In 1854, he procured the charter for the Southport Savings Bank and was central to the construction of the new bank building on Main Street in 1864-65. Perry was also one of the original trustees of the Oak Lawn Cemetery Association and was involved in the plan and building of the Congregational Church in 1875. Oliver Perry died in Southport on March 27, 1882, sixty-seven years after his birth in the small village.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: None.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Fairfield County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder,
Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

Fairfield Probate Records, Probate Court, Fairfield
Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Fairfield Historic District Commission. Final Report,
Establishment of Historic Districts in Greenfield
Hill and Southport. Fairfield, 1966.

Hurd, D. Hamilton, compiler. History of Fairfield County
Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1881.

Prepared by Jan E. Cigliano
Staff Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
December 1978

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Perry residence was constructed circa 1841-45 and is the finest Greek Revival temple style design in Southport and the surrounding area. In symmetry, balance and proportion this structure's classical outlines are unsurpassed. The three-bayed facade, the two-story front portico, and the flanking wings with correctly proportioned classical details echoing those of the main section are characteristic of early nineteenth-century American high-style Greek temple architecture.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: This temple-plan structure is two-and-a-half stories. The central section measures 40' (three-bay front) x 40', and each wing is 30' x 30'.
2. Foundations: Rubble masonry faced with finely cut ashlar sandstone blocks.
3. Wall construction, finish and color: Horizontal butt-boarding on front facade of central section. Clapboard siding is on all other facades.
4. Structural system, framing: Timber mortise-and-tenon frame construction.
5. Porches, porticos: Two-story portico on front (south) facade with plain classical entablature supported by four fluted Doric columns. Facade is framed on each end with engaged square antae. Front gable pediment is trimmed with simply molded Greek cornice. Two one-story porticos with identical detailing and proportioned to scale flank the central section. The portico at the southeast elevation is now enclosed. Wooden steps with cut sandstone balustrades are at the base of each of the three porticos.
6. Chimneys: There are two chimneys on the ridge of the main ridge. End chimneys pierce the roof ridge of each flanking wing.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Front (south) in antis doorway is framed by square engaged columns and classical entablature. The four-paneled door is flanked by three-paned side-lights and glass transom. The doors at the rear (north) are frame doors of recent date.
- b. Windows: Full-length double-hung sash windows on first level of main block. All window openings of front facade are topped by a Doric cornice which is proportioned according to the window height. The second-floor windows of the west wing cut into the main cornice, extending up to the eaves, and have no cornice. The slender cornice of the east wings' second floor windows meet the main cornice at the bottom.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Gable roof on main section with north-south ridge and front gable pediment. Gable ridge on wings runs east-west. All roof surfaces are covered with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: Central section is articulated by Doric entablature and gable pediment. The flanking one-story wings have similar cornice and entablature, proportioned to scale.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The main block is laid out in a side-hall plan. A stairhall is entered through the main doorway. To the right is a double parlor which extends the full length of the house. A sliding wooden screen separates the space into two rooms. Flanking the main block on both sides are two wing sections originally of equal area. The east wing's original portico has been enclosed, and now functions as a sitting room. Additions to the structure's first level include a small room at the rear of the east wing, an octagonal bay at the west end of the main block, and a three-room rectangular section at the rear of the west wing.

Prepared by David T. VanZanten
Team Architect
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September 1966

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky), and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. VanZanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in December 1978 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.