

John Pitkin Norton House  
52 Hillhouse Avenue  
(west side of Hillhouse  
at the north end)  
New Haven  
New Haven County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-287  
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PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
801 - 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

## JOHN PITKIN NORTON HOUSE

HABS  
CONN  
5-NEWHA  
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Location: 52 Hillhouse Avenue (west side of Hillhouse at the north end), New Haven, New Haven County, Connecticut.

Present Owner: Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.

Present Occupant: Yale University.

Present Use: Economic Growth Center offices.

Statement of Significance: Fine example of asymmetrical Italian Villa style house designed by Henry Austin.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the structure is built. Reference is to the Bulletin of Yale University, Series 61, Number 3.  
  
1849 Professor John Pitkin Norton  
1852 John A. Davenport  
1864 Miss Elizabeth Wheeler Davenport  
1895 Judge Lynde Harrison  
1908 John T. Manson  
1923 Purchased by Yale University
2. Date of erection: 1849
3. Architect: Henry Austin, 1804-1891.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Photocopies of architect's elevations included in this report, i.e., Front elevation; South side elevation, Principal floor Plan; Rear Elevation, chamber plan; North side Elevation, Basement plan.
5. Alterations and additions: South wing, rear wing and third story added at undetermined date. Main staircase and interior trim altered apparently between 1895 and 1908. No significant Austin detail remains in principal rooms, except newel post of main staircase.
6. Important old views: Two undated photographs not reproduced.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

None.

HABS  
CONN  
5-NEWHA  
36-

C. Sources of Information:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Dana, Arnold G. New Haven Old and New, unpublished scrapbooks in the archives of the New Haven Colony Historical Society, 114 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Connecticut.

2. Secondary and published sources:

The New Haven City Directory, 1840 to 1952. Copies in the Yale University Library, New Haven Public Library, Town Clerk's Office, and the library of the New Haven Colony Historical Society.

Bulletin of Yale University, The Buildings of Yale University, Series 61, Number 3, 1965.

Prepared by Jonathan B. Conant  
Research Assistant  
National Park Service  
August 1964

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Italian villa style residence of two and one-half stories. Original house consists of three asymmetrical units or bays. Center portion has an open three bay loggia, flanked by a tower on the south and pedimented wing on the north. Wings were added on the south and on the rear, west side, giving house an irregular shape.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Present house, including south and west rear wings measures 75'-10" across front by a total depth of 70'-8".
2. Foundations: Ashlar stone facing on exterior.
3. Wall construction: Brick with stucco finish scored and painted dark brown.

4. Framing: Undetermined.
5. Porches: Arcaded loggia on the east front with wooden ceiling and mosaic tile flooring with Greek key border design. Semi-circular arches spring from square columns with plain molded capitals.
6. Chimneys: Four chimneys in rear part of house only.
7. Openings:

HABS  
CONN  
S-NEWHA  
35-

- a. Doorways and doors: The original entrance door in the center bay of the loggia is now fixed. It is a two-paneled door; top panel is glazed, lower panel is completely filled with a carved pattern of shell motifs. There are three pintles embedded in door jambs indicating a pair of shutters had formerly been affixed thereto. The head of the door is trimmed with a horizontal transom bar with small-scaled ornament. Above door and flanking windows are single-paned fanlights. Present modern entrance door is in north bay.

- b. Windows and shutters:

First floor: South wing contains two narrow round headed windows of one-over-two lights. Tower has single double-hung window. Two windows in loggia are double-hung single-paned with single-paned fanlights. North wing has projecting bay with triple double-hung narrow windows, one-over-one lights.

Second floor: Windows in south wing not discernible in photo. Single oblong one-over-one double-hung window in tower. Center bay has three square one-over-one light double-hung windows. North wing has three narrow round-headed windows with three-over-one lights. Windows have flat, simple moldings.

Attic floor: South wing has three narrow windows. Tower has five arched arcade above continuous string course supported by shallow brackets. Three central arches are fenestrated. Terminal arches are blind. Extended attic dormer over center bay has three square one-over-one light windows separated by panels decorated with baluster design. There is a single lunette window in pediment capping north wing.

Fourth level in tower has paired round-head windows of one-over-one light with flat molding and sill. Note: Existing window details do not agree with architect's original elevations.

HABS  
CONN  
S-NEWHA  
35-

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A combination of gables and hipped roofs covered with copper batten roofing.
- b. Cornice: Simple molded cornice supported by wooden brackets surrounds tower at eave line, center bay below dormer, and north bay at base of pediment.
- c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Present extended dormer at attic level over central bay of original house does not agree with architect's original elevation. The tower placed on left front also differs from original in fenestration in the omission of bracketed balcony with awning-like roof. Two undated photographs, not reproduced, show that balcony and roof were built on both east and south sides of tower.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The main floor remains basically the same, except for additions, as architect's original drawings indicate, but upper floors and basement have been altered extensively to provide offices.

First floor entrance hall extends full width across loggia, although a temporary glass partition has been installed for a receptionist. The boudoir and small lobby on the south are intact. At the north end of the hall there is a large library with smaller room behind it. The relative sizes of these two rooms are reversed in original plan. The original partition between them may have been removed to enlarge the front room at a later date. The decorative paneled ceilings in each of the rooms are not original. The original main stairway also has been altered, though location to right and rear of entrance hall is the same. Dining room remains intact, though south wall has been removed to connect it to a large room which was added. The wing which was added to the west contains offices and is connected with the stair hall on both floors.

2. Stairways: The main stairway was altered. The only original remaining fragment of original staircase is the newel post, baluster rail and panel which date from extensive alterations sometime between 1895-1908. The original winders across the top of the "U" were replaced with a platform landing which extends across the complete width of stair hall. This landing is now quite deep, with a doorway at the rear leading to landing of rear stairs. Contrary to the original plan of the stairs, the existing lower treads flare out as winders. The heavy turned mahogany balusters and handrail meet the plastic-shaped

newel in a smooth transition. Sweeping palmlike fronds encircle newel post; base is row of water leaves. Mahogany stair string is paneled.

HABS  
CONN  
S-NEWHA  
35-

3. Flooring: Parquet wood.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster with wooden paneling in former dining room. Entrance hall walls and ceiling are a distinctive feature of the house. Every square inch of surface including door trim and beams, is covered with a decorative relief which has the effect of rich Islamic carvings. In the two rooms on the north the ceilings have inset oval panels bordered with a heavy rope-like molding. The rectangular framework of the remainder of the ceiling is ornamented with delicate low-relief vines. Intersections of ceilings and walls are coved. All this work is apparently not original.
5. Doorways and doors: The doorways in the former dining room have heavy bracketed cornices in mahogany. One of the doors contains two panels, the upper panel is leaded stained glass. The interior of the original entrance door has circular single-paned fanlight with applied frame in the shape of a scalloped Islamic arch; solid portion is covered with the same low-relief molding as walls and ceiling.
6. Decorative features and trim: Richly ornamented cornices which vary from room to room, use the classical vocabulary of dentils, egg and dart, and reel and bead motifs.
7. Notable hardware: Cast brass doorknobs and escutcheon plates on first floor interior doors.
8. Lighting: Modern fluorescent fixtures.
9. Heating: Central heat. There are two elaborate mantel-pieces in the present reading room, one of which was the former dining room mantel. This latter is large-scaled natural finish mahogany and marble, framed by two full-sized Ionic columns supporting an entablature which ends just below the ceiling. There is an inset mirror panel over the fireplace. Fireplace in south wing reading room is also wooden but much smaller in scale and detail. These apparently date from circa 1895-1908.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: House is on west side of Hillhouse Avenue, facing east, in a neighborhood of large mansions.

2. Enclosures: Rear yard, cinder paved for parking, is enclosed by a chain-link fence and hedge.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Landscaping: Grassy lawn slopes from street to the west.

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36-

Prepared by Woodrow W. Wilkins  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1964

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of the Summer, 1964 New Haven Project, jointly undertaken by the HABS and the New Haven Preservation Trust, and financed by "Mission 66" funds of the National Park Service with assistance from the NHPT, following a 1963 HABS inventory survey of old New Haven carried out by the NHPT under the direction of Professor Christopher Tunnard of Yale University, President.

The project was under the direction of the Eastern Office of Design and Construction, James C. Massey, HABS Supervisory Architect, and was supervised by Architect Woodrow W. Wilkins, Professor of Architecture at the University of Kentucky, assisted by Ned Goode, Photographer, Frazier, Pennsylvania; Annette H. M. Gottschalk, William P. Hersey, and Charles R. Tichy, Student Assistant Architects and students at Carnegie Institute of Technology, Yale University, and Iowa State University, respectively; and Jonathan B. Conant, Research Assistant and student at Yale University.