

Noah Webster House
New Haven, Connecticut
New Haven Co.

HABS No. 3-16

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District #3

Historic American Buildings Survey
Harold H. Davis, District Officer
29 Whitney Avenue, New Haven, Conn.

Noah Webster House
New Haven, Connecticut

HABS No. 3-16

The house is situated on the south west corner of Temple and Grove Streets and was built in 1822, which was the date of Noah Webster's second residence in New Haven (1822-1843).

In this house he completed his work on the dictionary and died here in May 28, 1843. After his death the house was taken over by one of the Trowbridge family and has been considerably changed. It now belongs to Yale University and is used as a dormitory for first year men.

Additions have been built, the front door changed and several bay windows added to the north side, but the original outline of the building can be easily discerned.

Little of architectural interest remains either on the interior or exterior with the exception of the front or east elevation which is apparently original, except for the door and its architrave.

Approved:

Harold W. Davis

Sources: National Society of Colonial Dames: Connecticut Houses, a list of manuscript histories of early Connecticut Houses, compiled for the Connecticut State Library.

DATA NOT COLLECTED AND NOT GUARANTEED
BY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Reviewed 1936, H. C. F.

From the New Haven Register, New Haven, Connecticut

July 3, 1936

12 Old Yale Buildings To Be Razed For Economy

Demolition Will Eliminate Taxable Property Valued at \$108,275—Biggest Retrenchment Move Since 1931—Permits for Levelling Structures, Including Noah Webster House, Issued

Demolition of 12 buildings, all of them notable as old New Haven landmarks and among them the Noah Webster house at the southwest corner of Temple and Grove Streets, has been ordered by Yale University authorities. Permits for the razing of the buildings were obtained today from the city building department by the university. Charles Merberg will start razing the buildings soon.

Berzelius, later the house of Sigma Phi Society, and 324 Prospect Street, the former home of the Gedrey Dunscombs and before that the home of the Misses Collins, who were widely known in New Haven society.

New Building Proposed

Yale has no plans for new building projects as a result of this big sweeping off of non-revenue bearing houses it was said today, except for that at 97-101 Grove Street where a building for commercial use may be erected. This is on the northwest corner of Whitney Avenue and Grove Streets. While erection of a building for that corner that will run up on the west side of Whitney Avenue for a couple hundred feet is contemplated, no plans have yet developed for the project it was said today.

Yale, faced with a financial situation that forces rigid economy, is demolishing the buildings in order to cut its tax bills, it was learned from authoritative sources today. It will mean the elimination of taxable property valued at \$108,275.

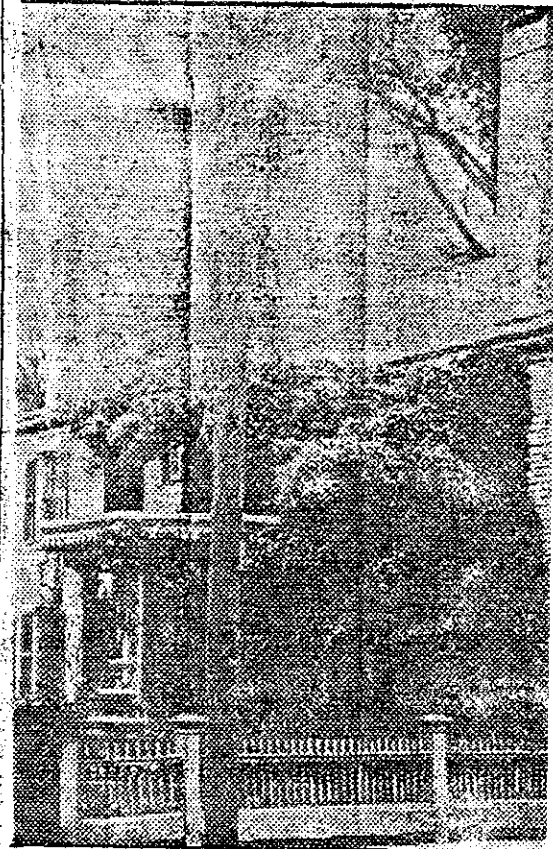
It is the biggest slash made by Yale since 1931 when many buildings were taken down in the High-new Yale buildings; it was said at the building department today.

Buildings to be Razed

Here is the list of buildings to be razed: 97 and 101 Grove Street near Whitney Avenue; 34 Hillhouse Avenue, formerly the home of Walter Camp, father of football and before the Camps, the home of the late Prof. Thomas D. Seymour; 352 Temple Street, now used as a dormitory, formerly the home of the late E. G. Stoddard; 360 Temple the Webster house built in 1822, last oc-

(Continued on Page Two)

Old Webster House



The old Noah Webster house at the corner of Temple and Grove Streets, where the photographer worked on his dictionary, is scheduled to be torn down this morning to tear down a dozen old

Webster House Saved

Mr. Ford's purchase of the Noah Webster house is a happy ending to a painful controversy. The old house in Temple street was unfortunate enough to lack intrinsic values for its antiquity. It did not date from colonial times, and while its construction was interesting, it had none of the rarity which makes some edifices treasure trove to the expert. What beauties it had, moreover, had been maimed by renovations directed more to utility than to art; so that it seemed for a long time the wrecker's axe was its necessary fate. A great American had lived there; but it takes means to set up historical shrines.

Mr. Ford, however, has means and he has the enthusiasms which make him one of America's first connoisseurs in old things. Perhaps more than any other single man he has altered the face of the continent and of the world, including its very social habits, what the sociologists call its mores; there is peculiar fitness, then, in the loyalty he shows that order to whose passing his great exploits in transportation have contributed so much. The Webster house is to advantage by this devotion; and taking its place in Dearborn village with other monuments of the past, come to happy and permanent anchor.

From The New Haven Register, New Haven, Conn. August 6, 1936

REPRIVE

When Yale's decision to demolish the Noah Webster house was announced, this paper ventured that the step would cause considerable regret here and suggested that some special consideration for the landmark would be appreciated publicly. That the thought was widely held was evidenced in editorials in the papers of numerous other cities, some of which have been reprinted on this page from time to time since the announcement was made. In that light, the announcement now that the end has been postponed until the last of September and intimations that the Webster home is being seriously considered as an addition to Henry Ford's village of historic buildings at Dearborn are causes for pleasure.

The Sheffield trustees, it is reported, found that the house had been so retrimmed and remodeled that its present condition is far from that as Webster knew it. Antiquarians' comments supported that attitude. Whether that will discourage Mr. Ford remains to be seen and the disposal of the building on the test of time.

In any event, so far as can be told now, New Haven stands to lose the structure. Many will hope, though, that its symbolic significance will be appreciated even though years may have altered its physical appearance. There can be restoration of the latter and through it permanent preservation of the former. A commemorative tablet will not be much of a local substitute, but it will be a better one if it shows that the old home still stands somewhere than if it is just a tablet alone, marking a site.

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From the Journal Courier, New Haven, Connecticut

August 4, 1936

Ford and the Webster House

New Haveners in and out of Yale will hope Mr. Henry Ford's reported eagerness to acquire the Noah Webster house can be gratified. The wreckers are standing by for the moment; they hold the contract to raze the old residence as part of a row owned by Yale but yielding too little income to justify continued maintenance. Mr. Ford's agents are reported to be pressing an offer which would enable America's number one collecting antiquarian to erect the Webster homestead in his American village at Dearborn.

The proposed demolition of the old house has been regretted all over the country. Yet Yale's fiscal status being what it apparently is, and local attempts at private rescue having failed there seemed no other way. Mr. Ford, however, reads the newspapers and reveres all that old America which he as much as any single individual has helped transcend. His purchase would take the house out of its setting, as the plan is understood; but it is better to have it moved than wrecked.

There are poignancies in the whole incident which should set us all to thinking. The Webster house was not quite old enough to be truly classical; yet it had historical and sentimental attractions that were bound to be noted. Now, in the centenary year of the state and almost the centenary year of the city, both state and city may lose a landmark and shrine. As the older America continues to recede perhaps our private antiquarians should have the active and formal aid of government in preserving what ought to be preserved. After all, public library donors have everywhere been aided by public funds.

From the New Haven Register, New Haven, Connecticut

July 31, 1936

NOAH WEBSTER'S HOUSE DOOMED?

The failure of a movement to raise funds to preserve the ancient house in New Haven where Noah Webster worked for many years on his dictionary is to be regretted. There is a marked tendency to save such historic landmarks from destruction all over the country. Even the federal government has a department for such matters. It is therefore surprising that the Connecticut unit of the Society for the Preservation of American Antiquities has found so little response to its appeal.

Other countries deal more kindly with the homes of their great men. A plaque on a little house not far from the Latin Quarter in Paris bears the name of Littré, the celebrated French lexicographer. But Noah Webster, while his fame rests chiefly on the monumental dictionary which he began in 1807 and finished in England in 1825, was during his lifetime a public servant in other fields.

Born in West Hartford, he was a descendant of a governor of Connecticut as well as Governor William Bradford of Plymouth. While living in New Haven he was a member of the Connecticut House of Representatives and held other public offices there and elsewhere. He also wrote political books and essays, notably the "Sketches of American Policy," published in 1785, which he claimed to be the first forthright proposal for a federal constitution.

The house in which the great lexicographer lived for so many years is owned by Yale University. There is a touch of irony in this fact, since Webster was a loyal alumnus of Yale, which now proposes to raze the building to save the expense of its maintenance. Perhaps a way will yet be found to save the old landmark, provided it

does not stand in the way of needed improvements on the university property.

Noah Webster House Doomed; Plan For Funds Meets Failure

Hopes of antiquarians that the old house at Temple and Grove Streets where Noah Webster resided and completed his work on the dictionary might be saved from the house wreckers' axes vanished today because necessary funds cannot be raised.

Arnold G. Dana of 300 Livingston Street, retired journalist, offered to contribute to a fund to preserve the Webster house as a memorial but as no other offer of funds came, the project died.

Burden on Yale

Yale University will have the house razed to relieve itself of part of its financial burden. Although the Webster house, is exempt from city taxation, Yale authorities explained it is nevertheless an expense for maintenance.

Interest shown by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities in the Webster house waned today after William Sumner Appleton, secretary of the society, was told by Yale authorities the Webster house has a fine facade, although somewhat altered, but it lacks other architectural interest. The interior has been made over in the Victorian style. Secretary Appleton said if anyone with money enough to afford a luxury should offer to save the house, it might be possible to make an interesting museum, but Mr. Appleton added that his society has no funds and he knows of no one who would supply the money.

Regret Expressed

J. Frederick Kelly of this city, a member of the Connecticut Unit of the society, expressed regret that the Webster house has been doomed. "The fact that Webster dwelt and

worked on his dictionary there gives this structure singular historic interest" said Mr. Kelly. "From the architectural standpoint, the fine proportion and delicate scale of the Temple Street facade mark it as one of unusual distinction. The design of the gable, which is treated as a pediment and contains a very handsome elliptical louvre set in matched boarding, is an outstanding feature that has no counterpart in Connecticut so far as I am aware."

"That all this must disappear shortly before the crowbars of the wreckers is a matter of genuine regret, for it will further deplete New Haven's fast vanishing heritage of ancient houses. At the present rate of destruction, another generation will look for them in vain. Progress must continue its march, of course, and to the average citizen, it is just a case of another old house being torn down, and nothing more."

Wrecking Project Starts

Charles Merberg & Sons, who have the contract for wrecking 12 Yale-owned houses in the center of the town today, started tearing down a brick house in the rear of Franklin Hall, 119 College Street. The house was one that occupied the site of Franklin Hall, but was moved to the rear when the fraternity house was built about 20 years ago.

Ford Buys Noah Webster House; To Preserve Home At Dearborn

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Henry Ford, Detroit automobile magnate and foremost collector of Americana, has purchased the historic Noah Webster House, corner of Grove and Temple Streets for about \$1,000, and will transplant the entire building to his village of old American homes in Dearborn, Michigan, The Register learned in an exclusive disclosure today.

This action on the part of one of the nation's wealthiest men is the culmination of a long campaign to save the doomed building, which was started by The Register early in July when Yale University was granted permission to raze the home of this country's foremost lexicographer.

Bought From Wreckers

Ford, through his agent Ralph J.

project died when no offers of funds appeared.

Metropolitan newspapers in New York and other large cities became interested in the attempt to save the building and editorials appeared on the subject for several weeks. It is thought that Henry Ford was attracted to the project of saving the famous home through the columns of some newspaper and immediately investigated the possibility of adding it to his Dearborn collection.

Partly Torn Down

On Aug. the wreckers' axes went to work on the famous old building, and the Merbergs had already removed the windows and several minor portions of the Noah Webster home when Henry Ford's agent loomed on the scene at the dramatic moment to preserve the building from destruction. On August 2 the Register announced the news that Ford had paid a deposit of \$100 on the building to prevent the destruction of it.

Three days later, Yale University granted permission to the wreckers to delay the razing of the building, and Ford was given until September 15 to make his final decision. Windows were replaced in the building and it was given a temporary lease on existence.

Lewis Merberg, in commenting on Mr. Ford's final decision to purchase the building, said to a Register reporter that the actual antiquity of the interior or exterior of the building did not influence the Detroit automobile manufacturer as much as the historical significance attached to it. Several New Haven antique dealers, who examined the house, expressed disappointment that it had been renovated during the Civil War.

East Strong and his orchestra will be the attraction at the Roger Sherman Ballroom

DANCE TONIGHT AT

the Range. Friday-Bing Crosby in "Rhythm on special feature on Thursday and selected short subjects. Father" with the Jones family; also "G.I."; and as co-feature, "Educating Tomorrow's Success," "Poor Little Rich in the picture that proved such a double feature bill: Shirley Temple Theater, Allingtown, West Haven, has for today and Monday, the Park

SHOWING AT PARK SHIRLEY TEMPLE FILM

out this program. and Paramount Sound News round The ever popular Pop-Eye Cartoon dancer. Panama City's most gorgeous blonde attempting to gain the attention of and then is forced to demonstrate by gains a reputation as a woman-killer, with a shy sailor who accidentally Mary Carlisle and Benny Baker, the companion feature. The story deals "Lady Be Careful," with Lew Ayres, Past fun, variety and hilarious ac-

From the Journal Courier, New Haven, Connecticut September 11, 1936

Noah Webster Home Examined By Henry Ford

**May Save House From Raz-
ing for Spot in Dearborn
Colonial Village.**

Henry Ford, auto magnate, spent two hours here yesterday inspecting the historic house at the corner of Grove and Temple streets where Noah Webster lived while working on his dictionary, adding further strength to the hopes of antiquarians that he may save the Webster house from demolition by purchasing it for his Colonial village at Dearborn, Mich.

Calls Building "Fine"

"I think the Noah Webster building is fine," was Ford's only comment. Frederick B. Johnson, bursar of Yale university, which sold the building to Charles Merberg & Sons, wreckers, early in the summer, said Mr. Ford planned to have architects make drawings of the building, but gave no other indication that he would buy it. Johnson added that the multi-millionaire manufacturer seemed "very much interested" in the house.

The windows of the Webster house had already been removed by the wreckers when a representative of Ford indicated his interest and asked that the razing be delayed. Both partners of the wrecking firm were out of town during Ford's visit, which was unexpected.

Antique experts and amateurs who made a thorough search shortly before the demolition was to begin were disappointed to find that none of the furnishings or removable parts of the interior were of colonial vintage. They concluded that the building must have been remodeled sometime during the Civil War period, as much of it was in early Victorian style.

Features Original

Aside from the historical interest attached to the building, however, the basic features of its architecture remain in the original style. The walls are entirely lined with brack, as this was the method used to insulate the more elaborate colonial structures.

Ford's Dearborn village is one of the country's finest collection of Americana. Old buildings such as the Webster house, of historical or architectural interest, have been gathered from all parts of the country and re-assembled at Dearborn. If the automobile magnate decides to buy the Webster house, it will probably be restored to something approximating its original appearance when it is re-constructed on its new site.

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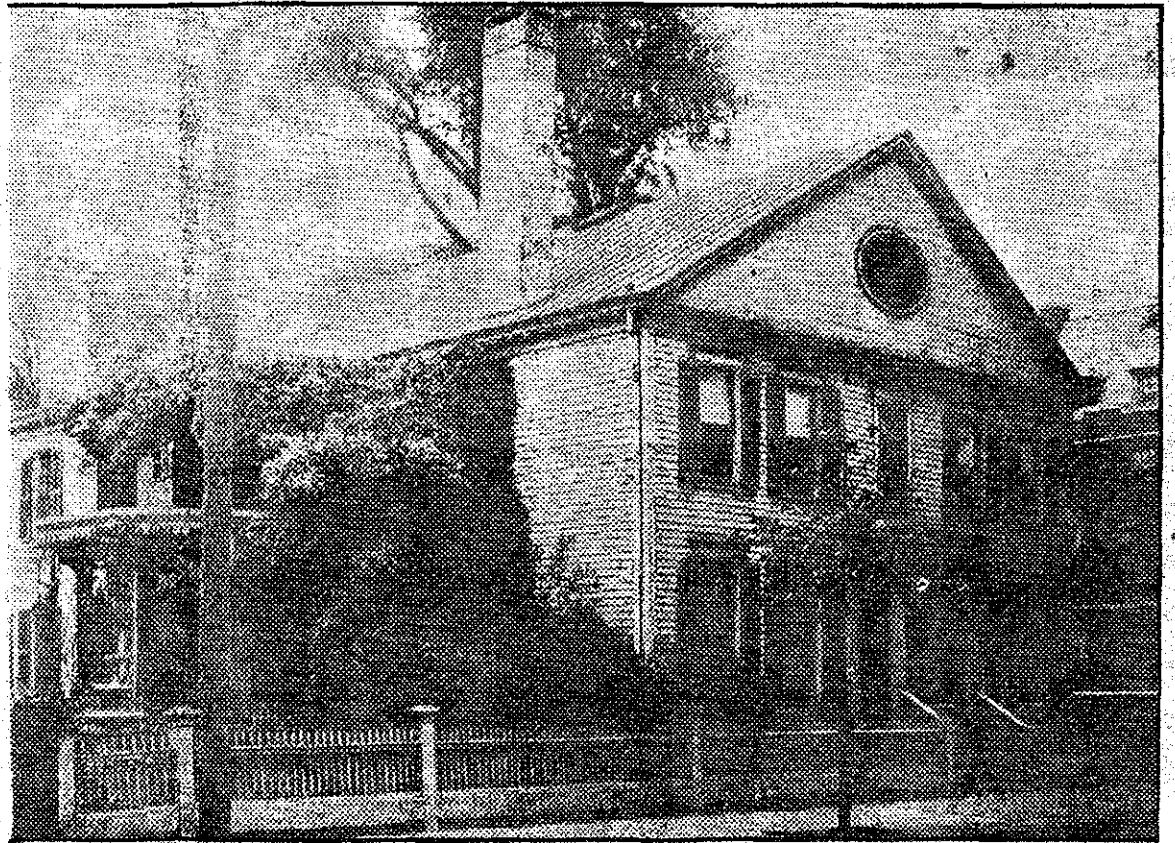
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Old Webster House Doomed To Wreckers



The old Noah Webster house at the corner of Grove and Temple Streets, in which the famous lexicographer worked on his dictionary, is scheduled to succumb to the wrecker's bars soon. Permits were granted to Yale this morning to tear down a dozen old houses in the neighborhood of the Sheff campus.