

WHEELER HOUSE
28 Tinker Road
Merrimack
Hillshorough County
New Hampshire

HABS No. NH-228

HABS
NH
6-MERR,
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
Northeast Region
Philadelphia Support Office
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, P.A. 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

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HABS No. NH-228

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LOCATION: 28 Tinker Road, Merrimack, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire

USGS South Merrimack Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 19.4742530.293435

PRESENT OWNER: State of New Hampshire
New Hampshire Department of Transportation
P.O. Box 483
Concord, New Hampshire 03302-0483

PRESENT OCCUPANT: Vacant

SIGNIFICANCE: The Wheeler house is an example of vernacular domestic architecture illustrating the evolution of a southern New Hampshire farmhouse from a one-story, one-room dwelling in the later 18th century to a center-chimney I-house by the middle 19th century. Without intentional design, the house exhibits the employment of construction practices and materials available during the period to persons of relatively modest means.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date(s) of Construction: Not known. The house is reported to have originated as a one-story, one-room "half Cape" with gable-end chimney, perhaps in the middle or late 18th century, with enlargement to much its present form by the middle 19th century (Merrimack Town History Committee 1976:109; Monroe 1990).
2. Architect: Unknown. Given the character of the house, it is unlikely that an architect was involved at any point in the building's history.
3. Original and Subsequent Owners: The ownership of land on which the house stands is specifically traceable as far as 1825. References to the Chain of Title are filed at the Recorder of Deeds, Hillsborough County Courthouse, Nashua, New Hampshire, and at the Office of Probate, New Hampshire State Office Building, Nashua, New Hampshire.

1825	Partition of the Estate of William McCluer (III), Probate Docket O6430, 24 December 1825.
1838	Quit Claim Deed, 7 August 1838, recorded 24 May 1859, Book 327, Page 172. William McCluer (IV) to Jonathan Wheeler, Jr.
1868	Will of Polly Wheeler, Probate Docket 6301, proved 29 October 1868.
1869	Quit Claim Deed, 11 March 1869, recorded 11 March 1869, Book 382, Page 156. Rebecca W. Heath et al. to Sybel Wheeler.
1898	Will of Sybel Wheeler, Probate Docket 17776, proved 4 November 1898.
1917	Deed, 21 November 1917, recorded 2 July 1918, Book 760, Page 415. Inez E. Atkins to Harry Russell.
1928	Deed, 19 November 1928, recorded 20 November 1928. Edgar Lafontaine to Velma A. Lafontaine.
1953	Deed, 15 July 1953, recorded 17 July 1953, Book 1361, Page 200. Velma A. Lafontaine to James M. and Elizabeth Lindsay.

1992 Deed, 10 June 1992, recorded 10 June 1992. James M. Lindsay and James M. Lindsay, Jr. to State of New Hampshire.

4. Builder, Contractor, Suppliers: None known.
5. Original Plans and Construction: None known.
6. Alterations and Additions: As stated above, the house is believed to have originated in the middle to late 18th century as a one-story, side-gable "half Cape" containing one room, with a gable-end chimney and stair to the attic in front of the chimney just inside the main entrance (Merrimack Town History Committee 1976:109). The subsequent enlargement (addition of a room on the west side of the chimney and the full second floor) may have occurred over two construction episodes, although this is not possible to determine from available evidence. It is possible, however, that when the second floor was added, the stair was removed from in front of the chimney, and that the north wing also was built at that time, partly to provide space for a new stair to the upper rooms. The curious angle of the west wall of the entrance hall is probably associate with addition of the west room (parlor), its purpose being to provide more clearance between the doorway from the parlor into the hall and the front door. The date of the east wing is unknown. The stairs to the basement are contained within this wing, so it is possible that the wing, or a structure much like it, was present from an early date. The bathroom in the north half of this wing was probably installed in the 1920s.

B. Historical Information:

The land on which the Wheeler house is located was long in the possession of the McClure (or McCluer) family, William McClure (the first of that name) having purchased land in Merrimack on Tinker Road in 1741 (Merrimack Town History Committee 1976:44). The residence believed to have been the original McClure homestead (located at 16 Tinker Road) is believed to have passed to a son, also named William, who died intestate in 1808, leaving his widow "destitute" (Probate Docket O6287, Inventory of Estate of William McCleur, 28 November 1808). It subsequently came into the possession of William McClure (third of that name) who died in 1824. This William McClure also died intestate, and his estate, consisting of a number of tracts of land in Merrimack and in Dunstable (present-day Nashua, New Hampshire), was partitioned among his children: William McClure (fourth of that name), Polly Wheeler, Martha Spaulding, James McClure, and Betsy McClure (Probate Docket O6430, Inventory (13 December 1824) and Partition (24 December 1825) of the Estate of William McCluer).

Polly Wheeler, who received three tracts of land in Merrimack, was born in 1795, and in 1816 became the second wife of Jonathan Wheeler, Jr. The family was recorded in the 1820 Federal

population census for Merrimack, the household at that time consisting of Jonathan, Polly, and two children under 10 (Sybel, born 1817, and Rebecca, born 1819). The family also appears in the 1830 and 1840 Federal population census records, and it is probable that they were living on Tinker Road. The 1830 population schedule is arranged by household (not alphabetically, as were the 1820 and 1840 records). The neighbors nearest the Wheelers were then William McClure (Polly's brother, presumably dwelling in the old McClure homestead at present-day 16 Tinker Road), Mehitable McClure, and Samuel McKeen. These names appeared in the document which constitutes the earliest such record specific to the Wheeler house, a quit-claim deed from William McCluer to Jonathan Wheeler, Jr. dated 1838.

Jonathan Wheeler, Jr. died in 1849. The disposition of his estate is not known, as no probate records in his name are on file. By the following year, however, the newly-widowed Polly Wheeler, then aged 54, had moved to Nashua, where she lived with her children Sybel (33), Jonathan H. (28), William (27), and Roxanna (21), and apparently several boarders as well. Her second-oldest daughter, Rebecca, was at that time married to Daniel Heath and lived in Merrimack, quite near her uncle William McClure and perhaps on the property on Tinker Road formerly occupied by her parents (U.S. Bureau of Census 1850).

By 1858, Polly Wheeler appears to have returned to Merrimack and to the house on Tinker Road (Chace 1858). She was recorded in the 1860 Federal population census as living alone, with real estate valued at \$300 and personal property valued at \$75. Her daughter Rebecca, however, had by that year become a widow and had moved to Nashua, where she managed a boarding house in the city's fifth ward, an area which contained a number of textile mills. Rebecca (Wheeler) Heath's lodgers included 24 women ranging in age from 16 to 45, all listed as "factory" workers, among them her older sister, Sybel Wheeler (U.S. Bureau of Census 1860).

Polly Wheeler died in 1868. She willed all her real estate to her oldest daughter, Sybel, leaving to her other children (Jonathan H. Wheeler, William, Louisa Sanborn, Rebecca Heath and Roxanna Dorr) the sum of \$1 each. Her personal estate at the time of her death was valued at \$71.58, including provisions and produce valued at \$33.25, farm utensils at \$2.00, household furniture and books at \$26.82 and clothing at \$9.50 (Probate Docket 6301, Will (29 October 1868) and Inventory (4 November 1868), of Polly Wheeler).

In 1871, Sybel Wheeler commissioned a survey of the Tinker Road property she had inherited from her mother (Webster 1871). The 1880 Federal census recorded her in residence there, her household also including her sister, Rebecca, and a niece named Grace, aged 4. Sybel Wheeler died in 1898, at the age of 81. She left her "homestead" to a niece, Inez Estelle Atkins, of Charlestown, Massachusetts, with the proviso that Rebecca Heath "be entitled to a home at said homestead, to enjoy all the privileges she has enjoyed with [Sybel] in the past...during her natural life" (Probate Docket 17776, Will of Sybel Wheeler, 4 November 1898).

Inez Atkins held possession of the "Sybel Wheeler Homestead" until 1917, when it was sold to Harry Russell (Hillsborough County Deeds, Book 760, page 415). By a transaction so far untraced, the property subsequently was acquired by Edgar Lafontaine, perhaps as early as 1918 and assuredly by 1928 (Hillsborough County Deeds, Book 881, page 532). Lafontaine's widow, Velma, conveyed the property to James and Elizabeth Lindsay in 1953. It remained in the possession of the Lindsay family until 1992, when it was acquired by the State of New Hampshire.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural Character:** The Wheeler house as it presently exists is an example of vernacular domestic construction from the early-middle decades of the 19th century in Merrimack, illustrative of building practices and use of materials available to persons of relatively modest means at the time. Lacking overt stylistic attributes, the house exhibits the English-derived I-house form (two-stories-high, one-room-deep, two-rooms-wide), with the center chimney that commonly sets New England examples of the form apart from I-houses of the same period in states further south and west.
2. **Condition of Fabric:** The house appears to be structurally sound and generally in good condition.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. **Overall Dimensions:** The four-bay, two-story main block is about 34-feet-across the main elevation, and 17-feet-deep. The one-story east wing is 10-feet-wide and 17-feet-deep. The two-story north addition is about 11-feet-wide and 12-feet-deep.
2. **Foundations:** The house has a basement only under the east half of the main block (approximately 17-feet-square) and the front (south) portion of the east wing (about 10-feet-square). The basement walls are constructed of rubble fieldstone, surmounted by several courses of brick to provide a level surface for the sill. The remainder of the house is set on low brick foundations, enclosing an earthen crawl space, that have been sealed with concrete.
3. **Walls:** Exterior walls are clad with wooden weatherboard with a 4-inch exposure, painted dark brown. Asphalt shingles cover all roof surfaces. Flat planks form the cornerboards and the fascia at each gable end.

4. **Structural System:** The house is of wood frame construction. The only portion of the frame visible is at the northeast corner on the second floor, where framing members, including a braced corner post, are circular sawed. The main roof is framed with sawed, butt-joined rafters, without collars or purlins. The roof of the east wing has a sawed ridgepole and rafters, and purlins fashioned from sawed members, and several lengths of wood with the bark left on. The gable-end framing of the east wing has hewn members.
5. **Porches, etc.:** The house has no porches or bulkheads. A large rectangle of cut granite forms a stoop in front of the front door. A brick walk extends along the east side of the house to form a small patio at the rear.
6. **Chimneys:** The house features a center chimney. That portion of the chimney visible in the attic is of brick, rising through the roof ridge in a plain square stack surmounted by one course of corbelling. The stack appears to be relatively recent. A cinder block chimney is positioned outside the rear (north) wall.
7. **Openings:**
 - a. **Doorways and Doors:** The main entrance is roughly centered in the south elevation of the main block. A secondary entrance is located in the south elevation of the east wing. Both have plain board surrounds. The front door has four vertical panels (two above, two below) and a plain metal knob and plate. It is surmounted by a four-light transom. Opening outward from the same doorway is a thin door of rough planks, with a small square unglazed opening in the upper half. The side door is also of rough plank construction.
 - b. **Windows and Shutters:** All windows are set within rectangular surrounds constructed of unmolded planks. All are 6/6 double-hung sash, about 2 1/2-feet-wide, except for those of similar form but smaller dimensions at gable ends at attic level and in the rear (north) elevation. There are no shutters or decorative trim.
8. **Roof**
 - a. **Shape, Covering:** Both the main roof and that of the east wing are of side-gable form, clad with asphalt shingles. The shed roof of the north wing is similarly clad.
 - b. **Cornice, Eaves:** The roof is very slightly extended beyond the front and rear wall planes, with raked, undecorated eaves. Flat planks form simple

vergeboards at gable ends, and a narrow plank forms a frieze across the front and rear elevations. There is a metal gutter along the eave on the north elevation, but not on the south.

- c. Dormers, Cupolas, Towers: The house has no dormers, cupolas or towers.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: Refer to accompanying sketch floor plans for information. The plan is basically of the hall-parlor type, with two rooms on each floor of the main block. Within the main entrance is a small vestibule formed by the depth of the center chimney. The kitchen occupies the east end of the main block, with a stairway centered in the east wall providing access to the cellar. The east wing contains a small hall or "mud room" directly inside the doorway, a set of stairs to the second floor, and, at the rear, a full bath. The parlor occupies the west-half of the main block. One doorway in the north wall provides access to the rear wing. A second doorway in the same wall opens onto an enclosed stair to the second floor. The second floor contains three bedrooms: two in the main block, separated by the chimney, and one in the rear wing.
2. Stairways: The house contains four sets of stairs. Two (one above the other) contained within the east wing provide access to the basement and second floor, respectively. A second stair to the upper floor is contained within the north wing, accessed from the parlor. At the northeast corner of the second floor is the fourth stair, which provides access to the attic. All stairs are enclosed within stud walls, and only the attic stair is situated within the walls of the main block. All but the east stair to the basement features a short quarter-turn at the lower end. Plain wooden handrails are affixed to the walls. None of the stairs have balustrades or decorative trim of any kind.
3. Flooring: In the kitchen and front entrance hall, the flooring consists of rather worn planks between 13 and 14 inches wide. Tongue-in-groove flooring in the parlor varies between 9 and 10 inches in width. In the east wing (both the "mud room" and bathroom"), the flooring is also tongue-in-groove, uniformly 2 1/4-inches-wide. The first floor of the north wing features a composite floor cover. Both the second floor bedrooms in the main block feature random-width (7 to 10 inches) flooring, as does the small room off the west bedroom in the north wing. None of the flooring is painted.
4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: Ceilings are finished with cream-colored paint on plaster applied to sawed lath. Hewn timbers (to which some form of dark stain

appears to have been applied) are exposed across (oriented north-south) and around the perimeters of the kitchen and parlor ceilings; without destructive investigation, it is not clear whether they are in fact structural elements or simply salvaged timbers applied as decoration (the joining of members is not readily evident, a section of one of the ceiling beams in the parlor is missing, and there are gouges resembling mortises in odd places). Most of the walls are also plastered, now covered with a variety of modern wallpapers (both bedrooms, both rooms in the north wing, the north wall and part of the east wall of the kitchen, the bathroom, and the south and west walls of the east wing). The parlor walls are clad with a thin, painted composition wallboard. The south wall and the south part of the east wall of the kitchen in contrast, are clad with wide (approximately 14 inches), horizontal planks, a thin rectangular strip of wood about 2 1/2-feet above the floor giving the effect of a dado. Portions of the south wall above the "dado" are also papered over the planks. Unmolded baseboards, about 6" high, are present in the three second floor bedrooms, the parlor and small room off the parlor in the north wing.

5. Openings

- a. Doorways and Doors: Doorways are trimmed with plain, flat plank surrounds with unmitred corners. The machine-made doors found in most rooms have four vertical panels, the two upper panels substantially longer than those below, all devoid of moldings of any kind. The cellar door, and the door at the base of the east stair to the second floor, are of the batten type, with wide vertical planks. The two closet doors in the passage between the bedrooms on the second floor are constructed of battened 4 1/2-inch beadboard.
- b. Windows: Like doorways, window openings are trimmed with unmolded boards. All are fitted with 6/6 double-hung sash which lack counterweights, being held in open position by spring bolts inserted through the stiles into the frames.

6. Decorative Features and Trim

- a. Fireplaces: The center chimney serves back-to-back fireplaces in the kitchen and parlor, both with rather shallow, splayed hearths about 13-inches-deep and slightly over 2 1/2-feet-wide. In the kitchen, the chimney breast, framed with stained wood planks, displays exposed brick, to which a plain shelf with rounded corners is attached. The parlor mantelpiece is simply fashioned from unmolded elements, with a wide frieze board below a narrow shelf.

b. Cabinets and Cupboards: In the northeast corner of the bathroom is a full-height built-in cabinet with enclosed shelving above three ranks of drawers. Kitchen cabinetry, arranged along the north wall of that room, is of mid-20th century derivation, constructed of rough pine boards with reproduction strap hinges. Open shelving flanks the south side of the kitchen fireplace.

7. Hardware: The machine-manufactured hardware is simple and sparse. Doors feature white or brown ceramic knobs, installed without escutcheons, and plain butt hinges.

8. Mechanical Equipment

a. Heating: The house is equipped with an oil furnace manufactured by the Hall-Neal Furnace Company (last patent date listed is 1931). A thimble in the west wall of the east bedroom suggests that this room was once heated by a stove.

b. Lighting: Ceramic bulb sockets are present on the ceilings of the front entryway and in the west bedroom. The house appears to have been otherwise illuminated by fixtures plugged into wall or baseboard sockets.

c. Plumbing: The single bathroom contains a clawfoot tub and modern porcelain sink and toilet fixtures.

9. Furnishings: The house is vacant, and contains no historical furnishings.

D. Site

1. General Setting, Orientation and Landscape Features: The Wheeler house is situated on an irregularly-shaped, 3.2-acre parcel on the north side of Tinker Road, toward the middle of a sharp S-curve. It faces south-southeast. Remains of a curved dirt drive are still visible in front of the house, which is set back from the roadway about 50 feet. The ground immediately behind the house drops sharply into what is now a swamp. Two lilac bushes are positioned near the west end of the house, and an old mulberry tree occupies a position in the overgrown front yard, also toward the west. A large and very overgrown rosebush is located just to the right of the front door. The area immediately east of the house is currently being used as a staging area for nearby highway construction.

2. Outbuildings: Outbuildings formerly associated with the house were situated on the opposite side of Tinker Road, and are no longer extant.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- Chace, J., Jr.
1858 *Map of Hillsboro County, New Hampshire, from Actual Surveys.* Smith, Mason & Company, Philadelphia.
- Dudley & Greenough, comp.
1869 *The Nashua Directory.* Dudley & Greenough, Boston.
- Greenough, W. A., Jr.
1870 *Greenough's Directory of the City of Nashua.* W. A. Greenough, Jr., Boston.
- Hillsborough County
various Deeds. On file at Hillsborough County Courthouse, Nashua, New Hampshire.
- Hurd, D.H.
1885 *History of Hillsborough County, New Hampshire.* J.W. Lewis & Co., Philadelphia.
- 1892 *Town and County Atlas of the State of New Hampshire.* D.H. Hurd & Company, Boston.
- Merrimack Town History Committee
1976 *History of Merrimack, Vol. I.* Merrimack Historical Society, Merrimack, New Hampshire.
- Monroe, Lynn Emerson
1990 William McClure/Jonathan Wheeler, Jr. House. New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources-Inventory Form. On file at New Hampshire Division of Historical Resources, Concord, New Hampshire.
- New Hampshire, State of
various Probate Dockets. Filed at New Hampshire State Office Building, Nashua, New Hampshire.
- United States, Bureau of Census
1820 Fourth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.

- 1830 Fifth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 1840 Sixth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 1850 Seventh Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack and Nashua, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 1860 Eighth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack and Nashua, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 1870 Ninth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack and Nashua, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.
- 1880 Tenth Census of the United States. Population Schedules, Merrimack, Hillsborough County, New Hampshire. Microfilm filed at National Archives and Records Administration, Waltham, Massachusetts.

Webster, K.

- 1871 Plan of Land in Merrimack Belonging to Miss Sybil [sic] Wheeler, Surveyed April 29, 1871. Traced from the original July 13, 1953, by G.R. Hyde, Surveyor. Plan No. 929, Recorder of Deeds, Hillsborough County Courthouse, Nashua, New Hampshire.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Wheeler House was recorded for the Historic American Buildings Survey under provisions of a project permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and to comply with a No Adverse Effect Agreement between the New Hampshire Department of Transportation and the New Hampshire State Historic Preservation Office. The documentation was prepared July-August 1994 by the Cultural Resource Group of Louis Berger & Associates, Inc., of East Orange, New Jersey and Needham, Massachusetts, for the New Hampshire Department of Transportation.

Prepared by: M.H. Bowers
Title: Senior Architectural Historian
Affiliation: Louis Berger & Associates, Inc.
Date: August 1994

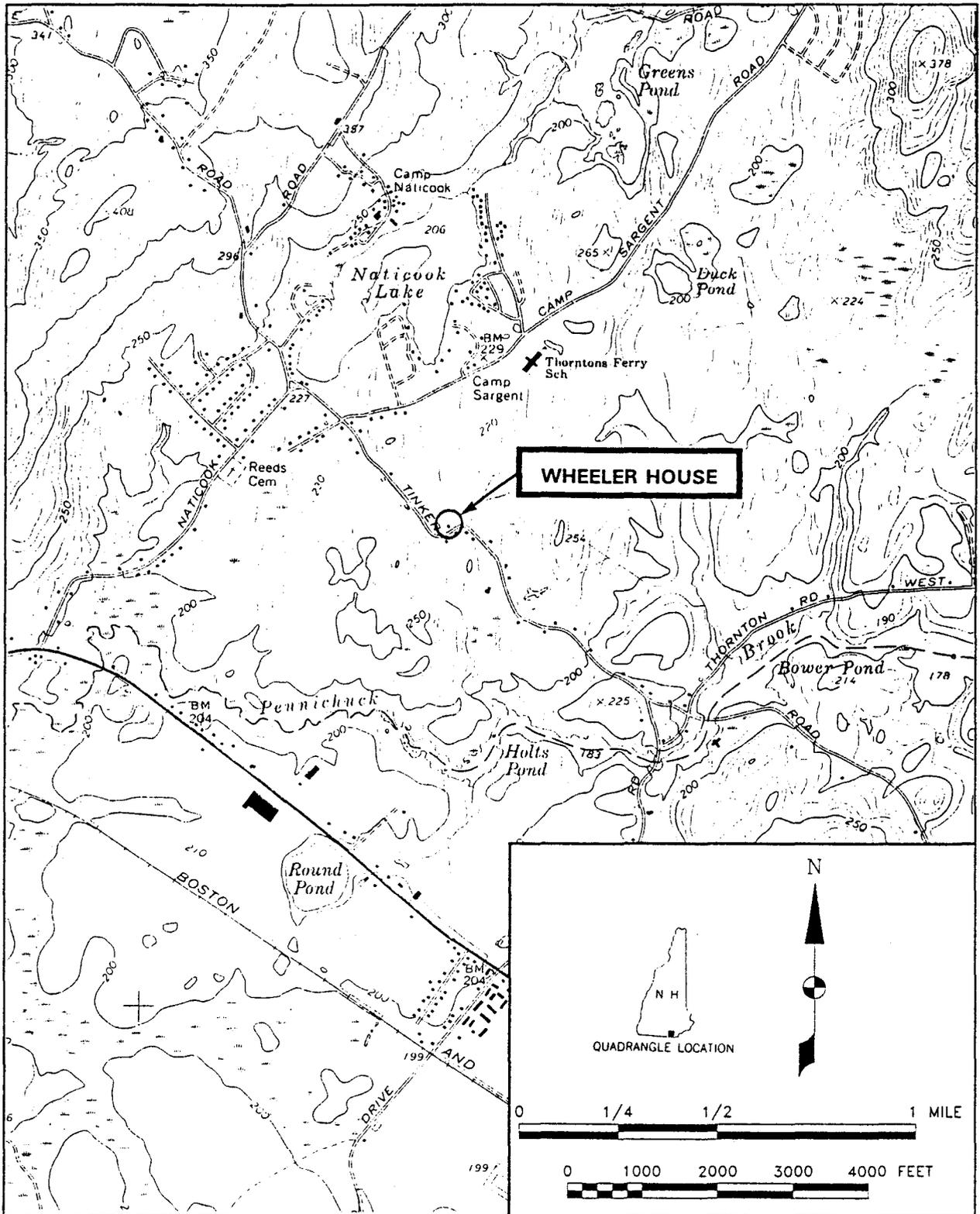


FIGURE 1: Location Map

SOURCE: USGS 7.5 Minute Quadrangle, South Merrimack, NH, 1968

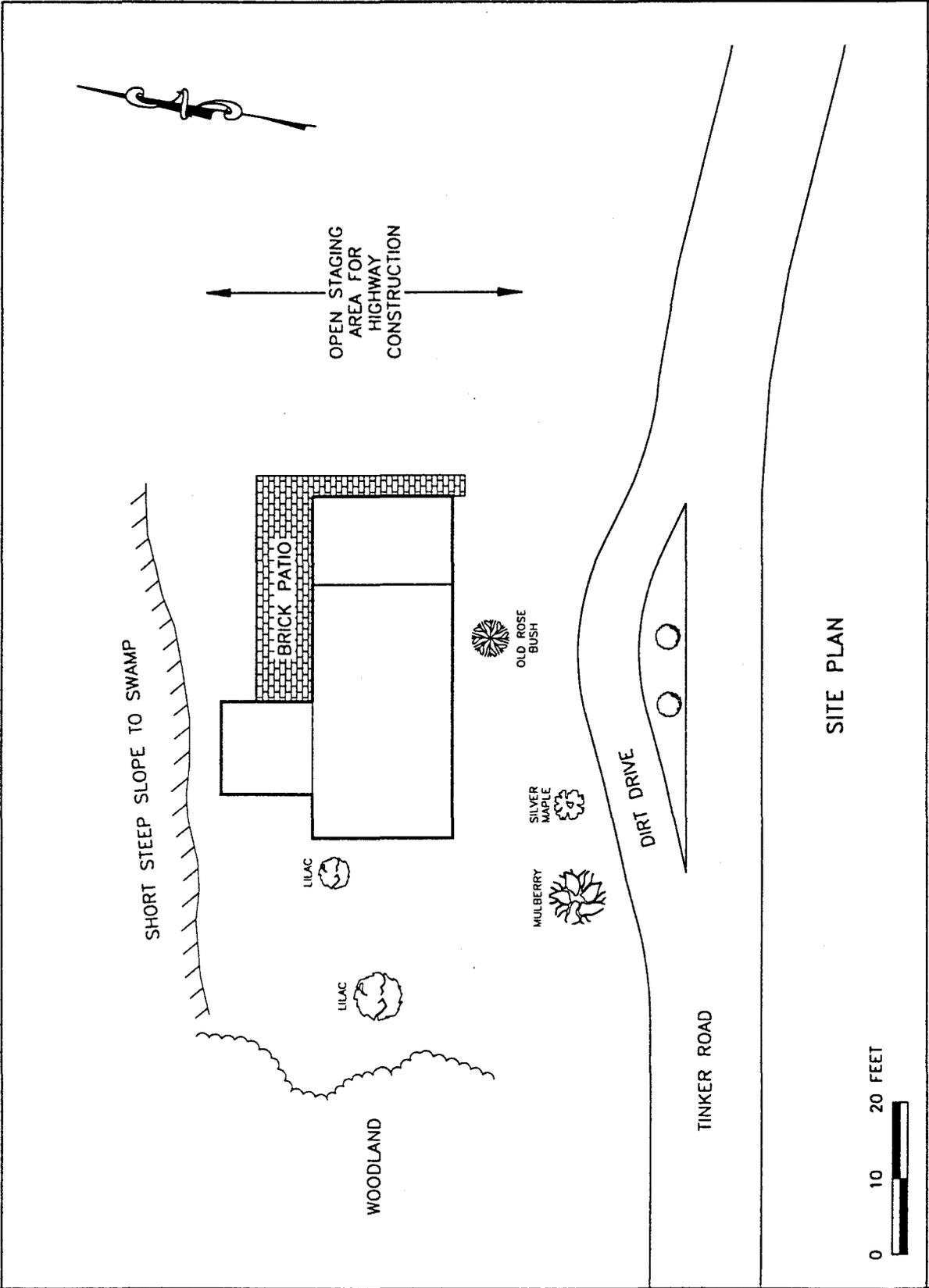
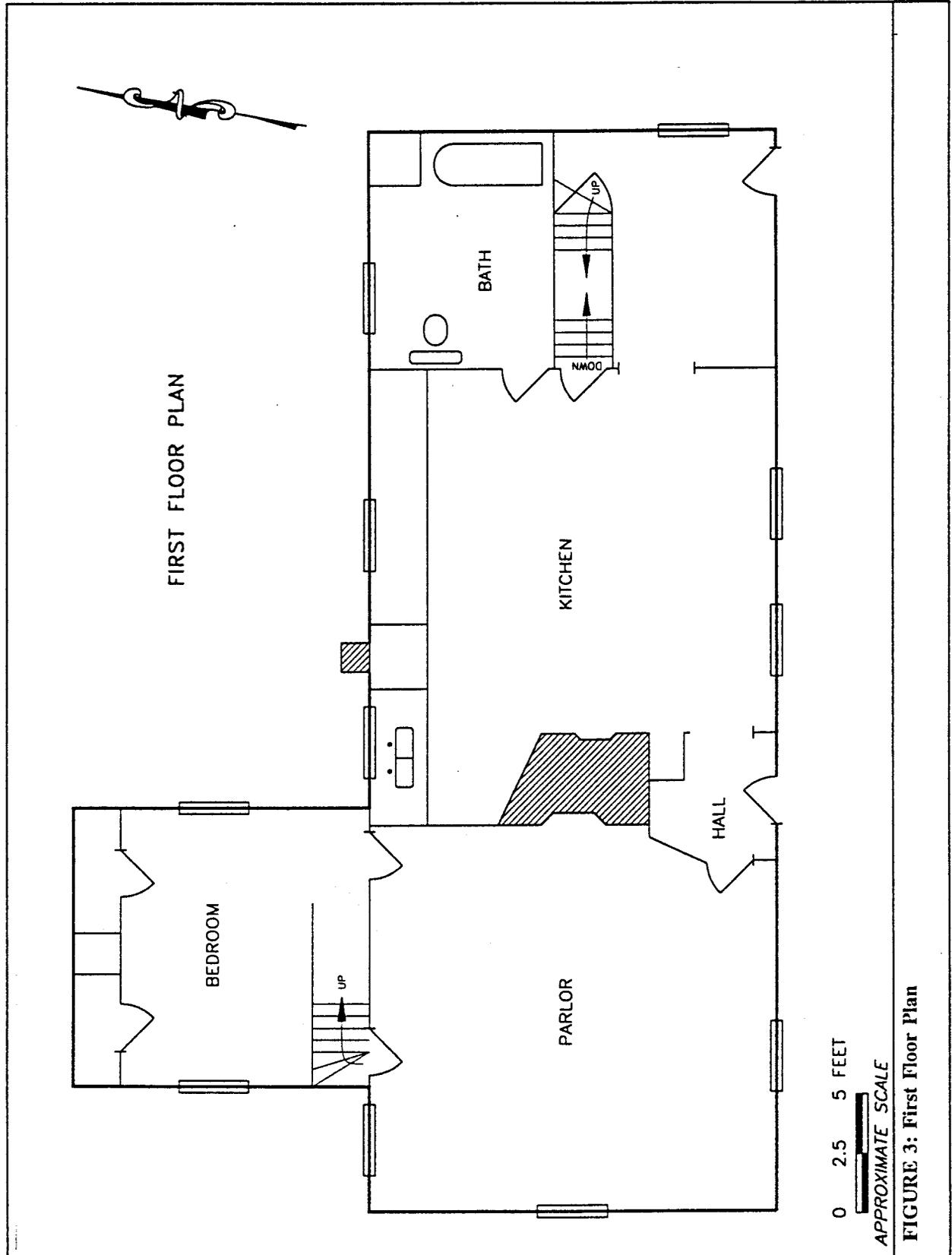


FIGURE 2: Site Plan



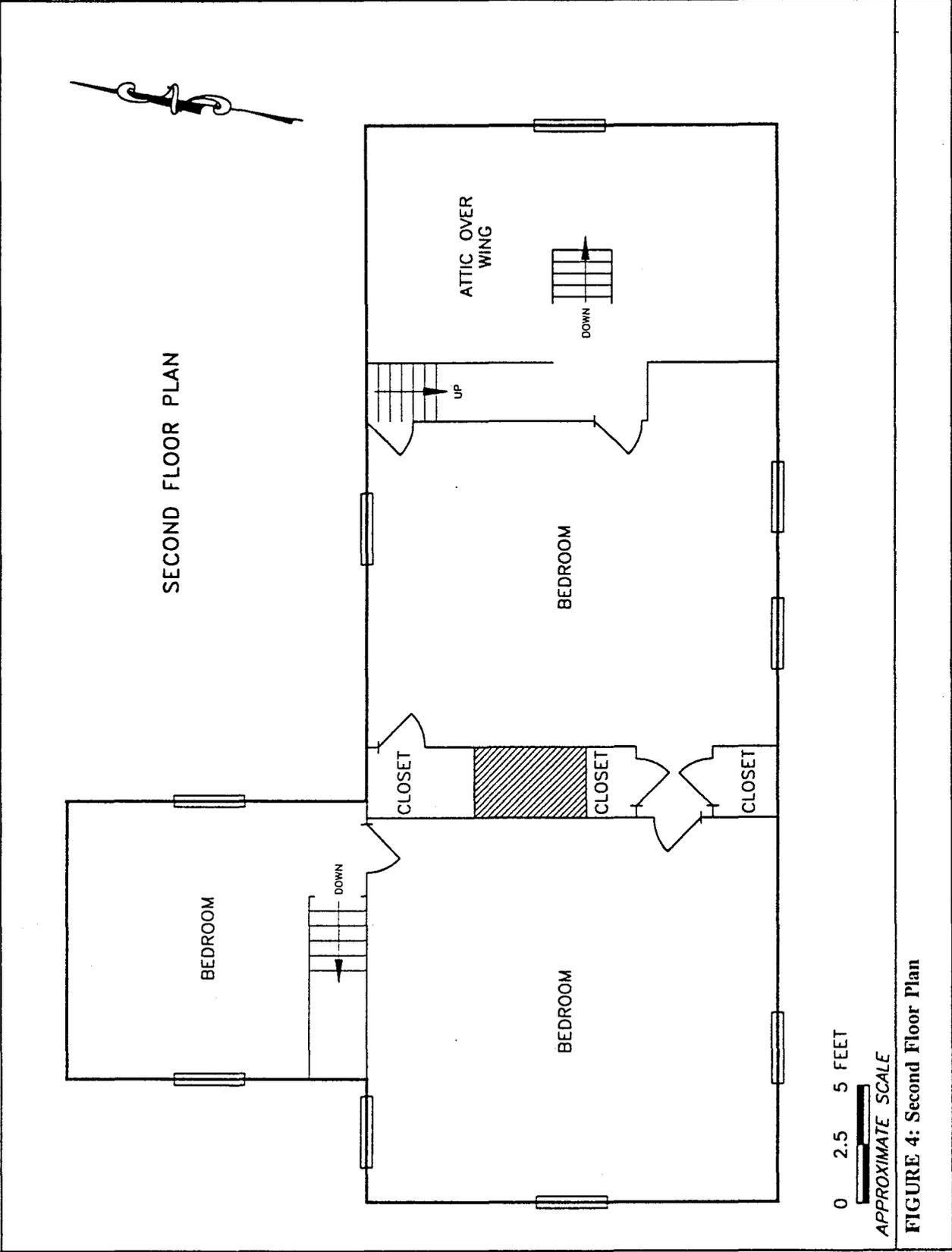


FIGURE 4: Second Floor Plan