State of Connecticut

Connecticut Historical Commission
South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
203) 566-3005

For Buildings and Structures

Identification

1. Building Name: Common: Winchester House
   Historic: C.G.R. Vinal House
2. Town/City: Middletown
3. Street & Number (and/or Location): 281 High Street
4. Owner(s): Wesleyan University
5. Use: Present: Anthro Department Offices
   Historic: Residence
   Accessibility to Public: Exterior visible from public road: yes
   Interior accessible: yes, explain with University's permission

Description

1. Style of Building: Victorian Italianate Villa
2. Date of Construction: 1875-1876
3. Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):
   - clapboard
   - wood shingle
   - board & batten
   - aluminum siding
   - asbestos siding
   - asphalt siding
   - stucco
   - concrete: type:
   - brick
   - fieldstone
   - cobblestone
   - cut stone: type:
   - brownstone
   - foundation
4. Structural System:
   - wood frame
   - post and beam
   - balloon
   - load bearing masonry
   - structural iron or steel
   - other:
5. Roof: type:
   - gable
   - gambrel
   - shed
   - mansard
   - flat
   - monitor
   - sawtooth
   - round
   - other:
   - material:
   - wood shingle
   - roll asphalt
   - asphalt shingle
6. Number of Stories: 2
7. Approximate Dimensions: 28' x 56' (rear 22' x 24')
8. Condition: Structural: excellent
   Exterior: excellent
   x good
   fair
   deteriorated
   - fair
   - deteriorated
9. Integrity: Location: yes, original site moved, when:
   Alterations: no
10. Related Outbuildings or Landscape Features:
    - barn
    - shed
    - carriage house
    - garage
    - garden
    - 4 other landscape features or buildings: Wooden fence
    - Wyllis Avenue side
11. Surrounding Environment:
    - open land
    - woodland
    - residential
    - scattered buildings visible from site
    - commercial
    - industrial
    - rural
    - high building density
12. Interrelationship of Building and Surroundings: This house faces east to the Connecticut River from the northwest corner of High Street and Wyllis Avenue. On the opposite corner is the Italianate Coote-Hubbard House (269 High Street). High Street during the 19th century was the most prestigious residential area in Middletown. The corner site and the high elevation of the street add to the imposing architectural qualities of this house.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

Elaborately carved entrance doors
Original overmantel mirror in dining room

SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: possibly Henry Austin
Builder: 

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This house was built c. 1875 by Charles Green Rich Vinal and his wife Minnie Amelia (Hotchkiss) Vinal on land given to them by Mrs. Vinal's mother. C.G.R. Vinal was one of Middletown's most prominent citizens. A lawyer, Vinal was chosen Mayor in 1894, State Senator in 1896, and Connecticut Secretary of State in 1900. The Vinals occupied the house until 1934 (Charles died in 1926) when Wesleyan acquired it from the estate of Minnie A. Vinal for use as offices and renamed it "Winchester House" in honor of English Professor Caleb Winchester.

This house is an Italianate villa of asymmetrical plan without the characteristic tower (campanile). The south and east street elevations have similar bay projections. Triangular pediments at the roofline over these bays emphasize their projection, and well integrated design elements, such as the second floor balconies with canopies, draw attention to theIrregularity of the plan. The asymmetrical arrangement sets this house apart from the nearby Coite-Hubbard and Starr Houses of a slightly earlier period.

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Elizabeth Loomis
date: 11/77 view: southeast
negative on file: Roll 2, #25

COMPILED BY:

name: John E. Reynolds
date: 4/78
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20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:


21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

X none known ___ highways ___ vandalism ___ developers ___ other: _______
___ renewal ___ private ___ deterioration ___ zoning ___ explanation: _______
This house is nearly identical in the treatment of its facades to the Oliver B. North House on Wooster Square in New Haven (ca. 1865) designed by Henry Austin. The Vinal House continued the tradition of high style architecture already established on High Street by the mid-nineteenth century.