

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY  
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DATE ENTERED

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC  
"Mt. Hygeia"  
AND/OR COMMON  
Solomon Drown House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER  
Mt. Hygeia Road  
CITY, TOWN  
Foster  
STATE  
Rhode Island 02825  
VICINITY OF  
(Fernand J. St. Germain)  
COUNTY  
Providence  
CODE  
44  
007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME  
James Baird  
STREET & NUMBER  
Mt. Hygeia Road  
CITY, TOWN  
Foster  
STATE  
Rhode Island

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.  
Town Clerk's Office  
STREET & NUMBER  
South Killingly Road  
CITY, TOWN  
Foster  
STATE  
Rhode Island

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE  
HABS RI-38 (see also continuation sheet 1)  
DATE  
1958  
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS  
Library of Congress  
CITY, TOWN  
Washington  
STATE  
District of Columbia

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

1

ITEM NUMBER

6

PAGE

2

Foster, Rhode Island Statewide Survey P-F-1

1976 State

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

150 Benefit Street Providence, Rhode Island

## 7 DESCRIPTION

### CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

### CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

### CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE.

"Mt. Hygeia," built for Solomon Drown in 1808 and named by him for the Greek goddess of Health, is a two-and-a-half-story, gable-roofed, frame dwelling with paired interior brick chimneys and a symmetrical five-bay facade. The house faces west, with clapboards on the front facade and natural wood shingles elsewhere. Set far back from the road, it combines the refined detail and symmetry typical of Federal period architecture with the "rustic simplicity" and idyllic seclusion Dr. Drown was seeking when he chose to settle in the small agricultural community of Foster, some seventeen miles west of Providence.

The exterior treatment is rather plain, with detail focused at the dentilled cornice and pedimented front door. An applied semi-circular wooden fan surmounts the door, replacing the original semi-elliptical fanlight which was plastered over sometime in the late 1800's. The five-panel door was probably altered at the same time by the cutting of three lights in its top panels. The south, or side, door is set in a flat, pegged frame with a four-pane transom and a flared lintel.

The interior of "Mt. Hygeia" features well proportioned mantels throughout and beaded horizontal wainscoting in the kitchen and, surprisingly, in the south parlor. The north parlor features running cornice blocks of modified console form and a pedimented overmantel composed of reversed curves, said to have been inspired by a visit Dr. Drown paid to Mount Vernon, in Virginia, in 1792.\*

The house follows a four-room plan defined by two axes: one runs west to east and includes the central stairhall and the pantry and back staircase behind it; the other axis runs south to north and includes the space occupied by the side entry hall, the two chimney stacks, and a short corridor opening onto the keeping room, pantry, central hall, and both northern chambers. Solomon Drown's original floor plan, preserved in the manuscript collections of the John Hay Library at Brown University, matches, with few exceptions, the house as it stands today and indicates how little the house has been structurally altered. The addition of a one-story kitchen ell to the east in the mid 1800's (to house the wood-burning stove which Drown's three daughters refused to have in the house); the theft and destruction by vandals of a number of the hearthstones, the front staircase railing, and the original window sash; and the blocking in of the fanlight are the major significant changes which time has wrought on this country house.

(See cont. sheet 12)

\*Both the cornice and the overmantel are fine examples of free carpenter detailing -- the handling of formal elaborate designs in a provincial and free manner -- which was typical of country homes.

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

2

ITEM NUMBER

7

PAGE

2

Of the estate's original two hundred acres, thirteen, now heavily wooded, remain with the house. Some of the many species of trees planted by Solomon Drown in his extensive botanical gardens still edge the clearing around the house; but the progress of time and undergrowth has obscured, if not totally destroyed, the doctor's famed herbaceous and medical gardens. Also gone are the orchards in which, according to local legend, the Rhode Island Greening apple was rescued from extinction by Drown's knowledgeable ministrations to an ancient and dying tree.

Behind the house, a grooved leaching stone and, to the northeast, the foundation of what appears to have been an ice house and cooperage testify to the former busyness of the place. Old photographs reveal at least two barns southeast of the house, one of which was still standing, although derelict, into the 1950's. A small "rustic" gazebo-like structure -- with hipped roof and open sides -- probably built in the last half of the nineteenth century and used as a place to wait for the delivery of mail and groceries -- is located at the head of the driveway beside Mt. Hygeia Road and is the only presently surviving outbuilding. A mound built of stones and now grassed over, approximately four feet high and twelve feet in diameter, stands south of the house amid a grove of hemlocks. This is the foundation of "Rotundo of Worthies" Drown planned to erect but never finished due to his death in 1834. On the far north bound of the property at the roadside is the small stone-walled plot where Solomon Drown and members of his family are buried.

In the early twentieth century, Drown's descendants opened the house and gardens as a museum. From 1941 onward, however, as a result of the innumerable inherited legal interests in the property and some sentimental arguments against selling the family property, the house stood vacant for a period of approximately twenty years. It was offered to Brown University, but lack of an accompanying endowment and the property's isolated location combined to make that an unworkable solution. Finally, in 1963, William Leete managed to buy up the one hundred and forty-odd separate interests in the house and to begin the process of reclamation from the inroads of vandalism and the wilderness. The present owner is continuing restoration work on the house and has reconstructed a small barn to the south, modeled after a number of early nineteenth-century barns and framed and raised in the old way.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY: PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY: HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY) medicine
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1808

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

"Mt. Hygeia" is a singularly valuable document of rural Rhode Island architecture in the Federal period. It remains to this day basically unaltered from its original appearance and construction. Those changes which have occurred reflect the house's progress from a fine rural dwelling, through years as a family homestead and museum, and later as a vacant derelict, to its present status as a private residence and restoration project. Particularly valuable are the samples of original wallpaper, from the central stairhall and from one other room, preserved in the collections of the Providence Preservation Society, and Drown's original floor plan, on file with the bulk of his papers in the John Hay Library at Brown University.

To a large extent the changing fortunes of "Mt. Hygeia" reflect the development of the town of Foster. Foster was set apart from Scituate and incorporated as a separate town in 1781, and named for Theodore Foster, later United State Senator from Rhode Island (1790 through 1803). Throughout the last half of the eighteenth century and the opening decades of the nineteenth century, Foster grew in importance as an agricultural community (peak population came in 1820 with 2,900 inhabitants). With the development of water-powered manufacturing industries elsewhere in Rhode Island, Foster's prosperity and population went into decline. This trend was only significantly reversed in the mid-twentieth century, climbing to its present (1970) population of 2,626. "Mt. Hygeia's" twenty-two-year vacancy until 1963 is typical of the history of a number of houses in Foster: early twentieth-century abandonment and recent restoration.

"Mt. Hygeia" is important, too, as the home of Dr. Solomon Drown, one of the outstanding Rhode Island historical figures that Foster can claim as her own. Born in 1753 in Providence, graduated from Rhode Island College (now Brown University) in 1773, and trained in medicine at Dartmouth and in New York, Drown served as a surgeon in the Revolutionary War. He was stationed in New York City and in Bristol, Rhode Island, and was with General Sullivan at the Battle of Rhode Island. Following the War and a tour of the medical centers (and gardens) of Europe, in the course of which he enjoyed the friendship of Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and other noted men,

(See continuation sheet # 5)

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

3

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

Drown became a proprietor and agent of the Ohio Land Company in 1788 and travelled to the Northwest Territory. He took part in the settlement of Marietta, participating with General St. Clair and others in the Indian treaties at Fort Harmer with Chief Corn Planter. Drown continued to practice medicine in the Territory. The most notable of his patients was James Mitchell Varnum of East Greenwich, then serving as Judge of the Northwest Territory.

Drown returned to Providence for a short period of time, but moved to Virginia in 1792, paying a visit to Mount Vernon on his way. After seven years of residence in Union, Pennsylvania, Drown returned to Rhode Island in 1801 and bought a farm in Foster adjoining that of his close friend from college days, Senator Theodore Foster. Foster and Drown had long talked of establishing themselves in a rural setting conducive to contemplation and the pursuit of their chosen studies. Foster's interests were history, statistics and general literature; Drown's were botany, medicine, literature, and the classics.

Drown eventually acquired five parcels of land and late in 1807 contracted for a new house to be built; it was completed in 1808. Drown made his farm a showplace of agriculture, establishing the first botanical gardens in the state and continuing his botanical studies. He experimented with various agricultural procedures and, with his son William, published a treatise on agriculture, Compendium of Agriculture, of the Farmer's Guide, in 1824.

Solomon Drown also served as Brown University's first Professor of Botany and Materia Medica. He taught actively from 1811 until 1827, and established Brown's first and only, short-lived botanical gardens in 1816. He also served as a Fellow of Brown University from 1783 until his death in 1834.

With Theodore Foster he tried to promote the town of Foster's welfare by working for the creation of the Hartford Turnpike, to link Connecticut cities and towns with Rhode Island, and for the establishment of the Foster Social Library in 1806. In addition, Drown tried to encourage domestic industry and reverse the already visible decline of Foster's economy. Experiments in flax cultivation and processing, and in the silk industry -- white mulberry

(See cont. sheet # 4)

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INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET 4

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 3

trees were still growing on the Drown place in 1901 -- were among his efforts.

Solomon Drown was also noted as a man of "belles lettres," He wrote odes and was called upon to give various orations, including an impassioned speech on the Greek struggle for independence and funeral orations for Genral Varnum and for President Washington. He also wrote a diary of his voyage on the private sloop-of-war Hope in 1780, made, apparently, in the hope of a share of the spoils the ship might acquire. This diary was published by the Drown family in 1872. Drown carried on voluminous international correspondence and was an active member of various professional organizations, including the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the Rhode Island Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry, and the Rhode Island Medical Society, of which he was Vice President.

Although Solomon Drown carried on to the end the labors of a country physician, his deepest and most absorbing interest seems to have been the natural world. Whether studying botany in treatises or at first hand on his habitual long walks, forcing perwinkle and hyacinth bulbs indoors in February, concocting new herbal medicines, planning his "Rotundo or Worthies", or advising his son on the value of agriculture -- "Venerate the Plough" -- nature and her bounties and habits were Solomon Drown's chief delights. To quote from a letter written in 1795 to Dr. Maxcy, the President of Rhode Island College (soon to be renamed Brown University):

I have been so long an inmate of the Western wilds, that with the poor Indian, I can find no place in which to worship the Supreme, so suitable as the magnificent temple of nature, reared by himself. When I enter the deep shades of a lofty and embowering forest, I find my heart in unision with those ennobling and affecting impressions, which I should not expect to receive in the superb cathedral of St. Paul's, or the more stupendous edifice of St. Peter's.

"Mt. Hygeia" to this day reflects the character of its first owner, Solomon Drown, a man of great knowledge, wide travel, and sophistication, who at the same time harbored a Wordsworthian reverence for Nature with its soul-inspiring beauty and its intrinsic value as a moral teacher and purifier.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

5

ITEM NUMBER

9

PAGE

2

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Champlin, Richard L.: "The Silk Craze in Rhode Island,"  
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Coleman, Peter J.: The Transformation of Rhode Island, 1790-1860  
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Cool, Robert N.: "Derelict Mansion One of Best Publicized Attractions,"  
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Didsbury, A. Russell: "Mt. Hygeia in Foster, Historic Landmark  
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Drown, William: "Sketch of the Life of Solomon Drown, M.D."  
Handwritten Manuscript in collection Rhode Island Historical  
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Drown, William and Solomon. Compendium of Agriculture, or the  
Farmer's Guide. (Providence, 1824).

"Drowne" Collection. Various papers, in the Archives, John Hay  
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Greene, Welcome Arnold: The Providence Plantations for Two Hun-  
dred and Fifty Years (Providence, 1886).

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c. 1962.

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Historical Society, Vol I #2 August 1957, Vol. I #3 September  
1957, Vol. #1 August 1959.

Patten, David: "Drown Builds Hygeia," Providence Journal,  
June 29, 1955.

Preston, Howard W.: Botanical notebook. Unpublished manuscript  
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# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Beaman, C.C.: "Sketches of Foster," Providence Journal, 1854-1858  
In Rhode Island Historical Society Library.

See Continuation Sheet 3

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY about 13

UTM REFERENCES

A | 1,9 | 2,7,1 | 4,10,10 | 4,6 | 3,3 | 3,2,10 |

B | 1,9 | 2,7,1 | 4,3,0 | 4,6 | 3,6 | 1,8,0 |

c | 1,9 | 2,7,1 | 2,0,0 | 4,6 | 3,6 | 1,3,0 |

D | 1,9 | 2,7,1 | 1,8,0 | 4,6 | 3,6 | 2,8,0 |

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Plat 17 Lot 86

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ancelin Lynch, National Register Coordinator

ORGANIZATION

Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission

DATE

November 30, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

150 Benefit Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Rhode Island 02903

# 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

December 27, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER



Solomon Drown House / "Mt. Hygeia"

Foster, Rhode Island

James Baird

c. 1974

James Baird, Mt. Hygeia Road, Foster

Solomon Drown House from the west southwest.

Photo #1



Solomon Drown House / "Mt. Hygeia"

Foster, Rhode Island

Eric Hertfelder

November, 1976

Negative: Rhode Island Historical Preservation  
Commission

Fireplace treatment and cornice, northwest  
parlor.

Photo #2



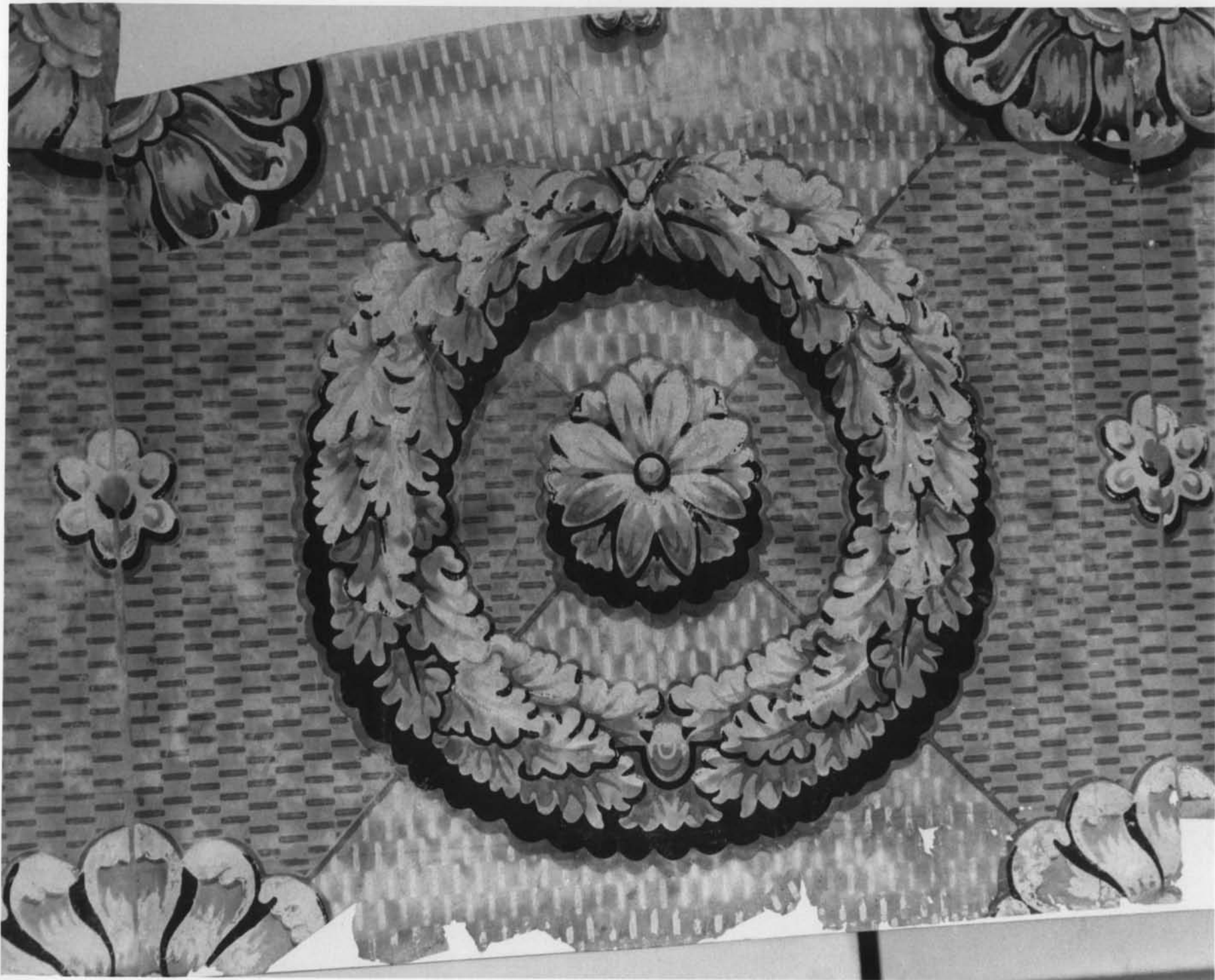
Solomon Drown House / "Mt. Hygeia"

Foster, Rhode Island

James Baird c. 1974  
James Baird, Mt. Hygeia Road, Foster

Kitchen fireplace and mantel.

Photo #3





Solomon Drown House / "Mt. Hygeia"

Foster, Rhode Island

James Baird 1973

James Baird, Mt. Hygeia Road, Foster

Sample of original wallpaper from Solomon  
Drown House, in files of Providence Preser-  
vation Society.

Photo #4



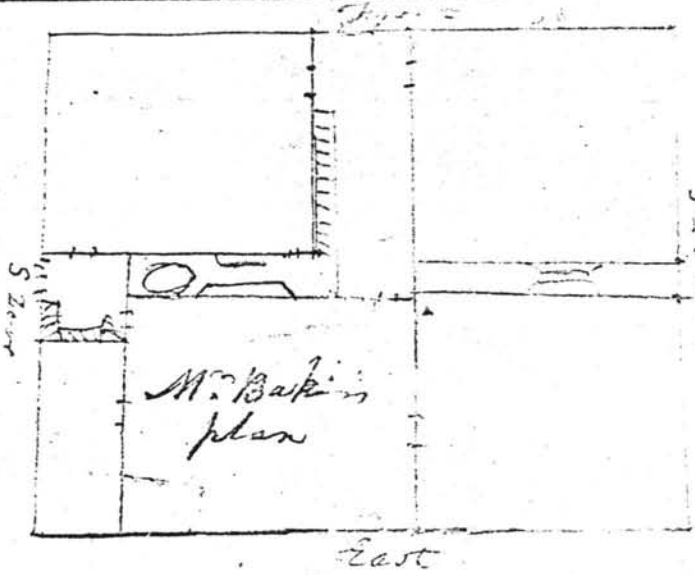
Solomon Drown House  
Mt. Hygeia  
Foster, Rhode Island

Photographer Unknown                      Date: c. 1900  
Copy negative: Rhode Island Historical  
Preservation Commission

Early twentieth century view of the house  
with surrounding plantings, taken from  
the west. From an old photograph.

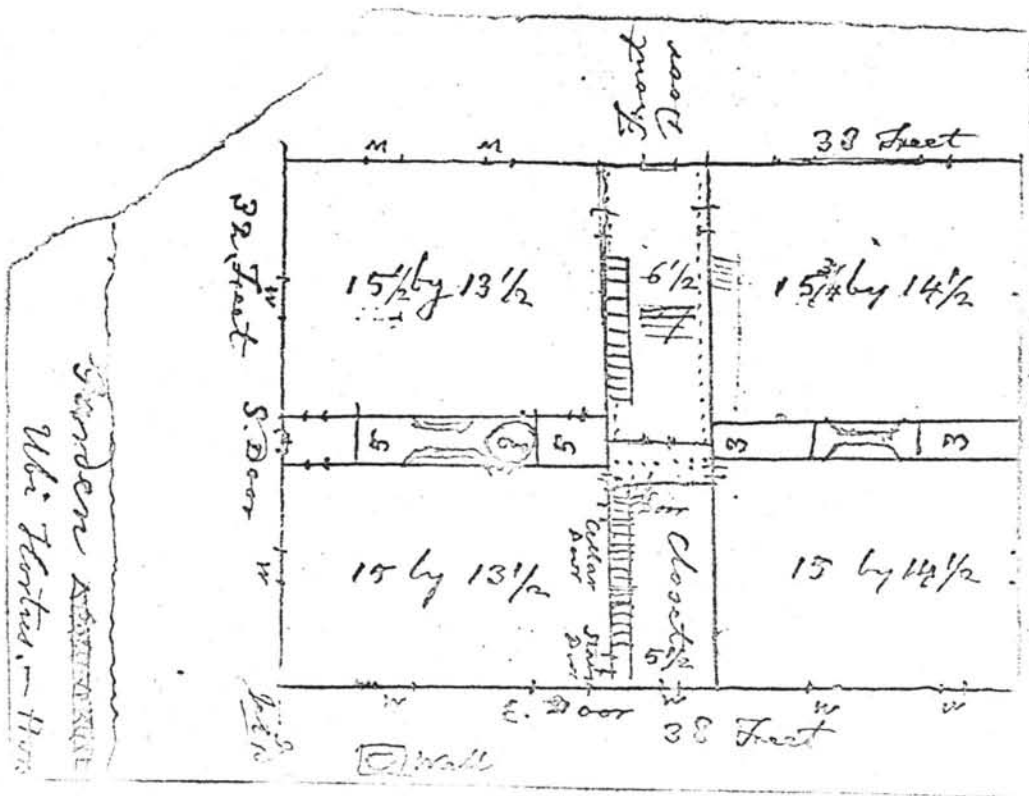
Photo # 5

Get 10' inches. = 33.8.  
 Rafter 1/3  
 11' 13" high - just R. plan



11' 13" high or less - no plan  
 by 30' 0" wide - 11' 13" high

~~Handwritten notes, possibly describing construction details or materials, including terms like 'Rafter', '11' 13" high', and '30' 0" wide'.~~



Walls  
 S. Door  
 Cedar Chest  
 Closet  
 Front Door

From Deane Papers

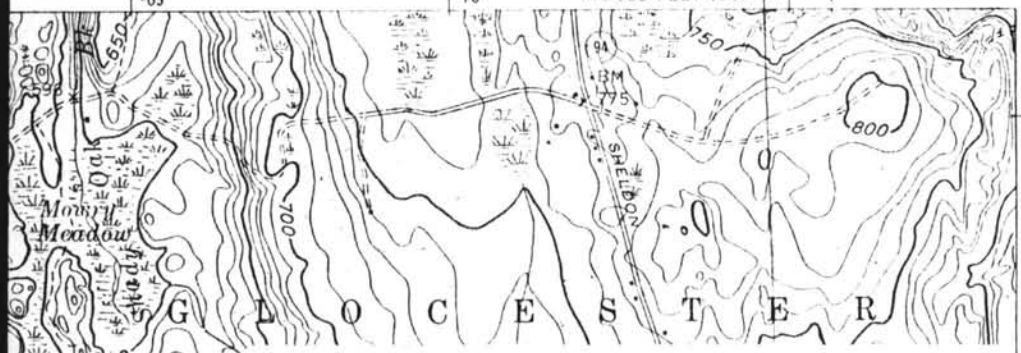
Solomon Drown House / "Mt. Hygeia"  
Foster, Rhode Island

Copy of floor plan found in Solomon Drown's  
papers, Brown University Archives, John Hay  
Library, Providence, Rhode Island.

EAST KILLINGLY QUADRANGLE  
CONNECTICUT-RHODE ISLAND  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

65671 NW  
(GHEPACHET)

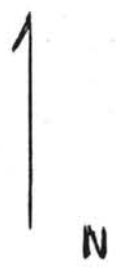
269 270 870 000 FEET (CONN.) 71°45' 41°52'30"



"Mt. Hygeia" / Solomon Drown House  
Mt. Hygeia Road, Foster, Rhode Island

A	19	271400	4633320
B	19	271430	4636180
C	19	271200	4636130
D	19	271180	4634280

380 000 FEET (CONN.)  
4 MI. TOR 1-102  
PROVIDENCE (CIVIC CENTER) 18 MI.



4637  
4636  
4635  
50'