Form 10-300 (Dec. 1968)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

Rhode	Island
COUNTY	

Providence

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The present appearance of the house is entirely its original one. It is, in its main portion, of three full storeys above a low basement, with a corner tower of four full storeys; at the rear is a service wing of two diminished storeys over a basement, through which runs a ramp or tunnel serving as norte-cochère. Attached to a corner of the service wing is a two-storey stable block forming a rear courtyard. The massing of the main house and its projections is asymmetrical, in the "Italian Villa" style, employed monumentally.

Construction is of brick with brown sandstone trim (entrance porch, terrace, window sills and lintels, balconies etc.), cornices and some minor appendages being of wood. The various roof areas are of painted metal and are of hipped form with surmounting balustrades (one hipped area conceals, however, a sizeable roof terrace with observation platforms). Windows are mostly double-hung, 1 over 1 of large plate glass, and are square-headed except for the third storey, where they are segmental-headed.

Interior trim throughout the many rooms is elaborate and varied, displaying moulded and carved wood, marble mantels, a variety of applied wall treatments, of hardware and lighting fixtures. One or two reception rooms "done over" near the turn of the century were in 1929 restored to a correct Victorian appearance.

With the exception of very small areas of damage due to minor leakage or cracks in plaster, the house remains inside and outside in practically pristine condition, having had, ever since its construction and to this moment, the most thorough and careful maintenance and repair.

Considering the date of its construction, c. 1875 ff., the house is perhaps slightly retardataire in its surface design or style, but this seems to have been a definite choice of the owner-architect.

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE (Include Personages, Dates, Events, Etc.)

The permanent significance, importance and interest of this house are spread over several areas—the chief one of which is its place as a remaining example of American XIX Century architectural history and taste. In that respect it is important in New England, and also well beyond it, for there remain anywhere very few very formally and monumentally treated durable masonry examples of the "Italian (Tuscan) Villa" style. This large example, upon which expense was not spared, stands intact externally; the interior is also preserved, with its parade of Victorian décor, luxury, equipment and convenience. (The furniture is likely to leave the house, but it is perhaps only incidental to the decorated rooms.) The house will be greatly rewarding to any historian or collegian making a study and even to the travelling sightseer making a passing inspection.

Second, the house by its character, size and particular siting (high on an embankment on an important street-corner) fills a special function as a landscape and cityscape "anchor" to its locale--its adjacent buildings and spaces. These include XVIII and XIX Century residences, a "Gothic" octagonal domed library of Brown University, a modern dormitory complex of the Rhode Island School of Design. It very perceivably is a cornerstone of its entire surroundings and it defines one boundary of the Brown campus. From more distant points of view it is a towering landmark of Providence's high East Side.

Third is the matter of close association with a personality of note: George Corliss was a figure of genius and importance in the industrialisation and mechanisation of this country. This is the house he planned, designed for himself in his success and prosperity—to include, within the exterior of his choice, all the comfort and convenience of living, all the modern apparatus and devices he could envisage. Though other persons no doubt were asked to handle the more fussy details of interior decoration, the house importantly is the product of both the aesthetic and practical, or mechanical, sides of a great and inventive mind.

Brown University, as designated recipient of this house, hopefully will realise the cultural significance of its possession and will accord it both the sympathetic use and careful maintenance it deserves.

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Form 10-300a (July 1969)

UNITED STATES OF PARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

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(Continuation Sheet)

(Number all entries)

8. Significance.

In addition to producing the over-all architectural design of his house, George Corliss also incorporated into it engineering innovations which reflect the extraordinary inventive character of the owner.

This dwelling stands as a landmark in housing history and improvement, being possibly the first one in America to be warmed by radiant heat, thermostatically controlled: In the stable complex adjoining the house Corliss installed a steam boiler and a small version of his famous steam engine. This engine drove a fan which sent air, through steam-heated ducts, through a tunnel and into the main house. There the heated air was distributed through ducts built into the walls, thus heating all rooms by radiation from their walls. These wall ducts all collected in the attic, from which the air was returned to the stable and re-circulated in order to conserve and re-use any heat which it still contained.

This heating (i. e., the steam engine effecting its distribution) was controlled by a thermostat-surely one of the earliest known-located in the main hall of the house. On the ceiling of this hall and running its full length was a rod of metal alloy which expanded and contracted markedly with changes in the house temperature. Through mechanical linkage, this rod regulated a governor on the engine driving the fan, and this regulated the flow of warmed air to the radiant heating duct-work of the house.

(Besides the above heating arrangements, Corliss made his own designs for other conveniences in his house, such as an hydraulic elevator, concealed sliding insect screens for windows etc.)

Following the death of Corliss's daughter—who evidently understood this remarkable heating system but failed to pass her knowledge on—later heirs and their maintenance contractors could discover no visible heating system at all. They were then accustomed to central heating through conspicuous steam radiators and consequently installed such a system throughout the house. The workmen employed in doing this also did not perceive the older system and so left its elements largely intact, as it still is except for some comparatively recent dismantling and alteration of the stable area.

What Corliss designed for this house was a first-of-its-kind in centrally generated, radiant heating and an unique example of XIX Century inventiveness, direct from the mind of a man who was a monumental personality in the technological progress of that era.

William Slater Allen, Registered Professional Engineer.

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9: MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES



PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

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Rhode Island PHOTO REFERENCE

Brackett (Charles) House

AND/OR HISTORIC: Corliss (George H.) House

15. Prospect Street

PHOTO CREDIT: Brown University Photographic Laboratory

COUNTY:

CODE

38

DATE OF PHOTO: 7067

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN:

Brown University Photographic Laboratory, Providence,

4. IDENTIFICATION

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1. NAME

COMMON:

LOCATION

STATE:

DESCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.

Providence

first-floor hall, looking east



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

STATE	
Rhode Island	
COUNTY	
Providence	
FOR NPS USE O	NLY
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

	COMMON: Brackett (Charles) House	-
	AND/OR HISTORIC: Corliss (George H.) House	
2.	LOCATION	
	Lis, Prospect Street	
	Providence	
	Rhode Island	007
3.	PHOTO REFERENCE	
	DATE OF PHOTO: C. 1955	Ì
	Richard B. Harrington, 23, James Street, Providence, R. I.	
4.	IDENTIFICATION	
	exterior seen from north-west	



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

STATE	Mark.
Rhode Island	7 140
COUNTY	
Providence	
FOR NPS USE O	NLY
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

AND	MON: Brackett OR HISTORIC: Corlis	(Charles) House s (George H.) H	louse		
2. LOCA	TION				
STRI	EET AND NUMBER:				
	15. Prospe	ct Street			
CITY	OR TOWN:				
	Providence		1 100	UNTY:	CODE
STA			CODE	Providence	007
	Rhode Isla	nd	38 1	Flovidence	
3. PHO	TO REFERENCE	,	hia Tab	ordt omr	Wal-trial
PHO	TO CREDIT: Brown Un	iversity Photo	graphic Lab	oracory.	
-	Е ОГ РНОТО: 1961				7 -
NEC	Brown U	niversity Phot	ographic La	aboratory, Providence, R	. 1. 1
4. IDE	NTIFICATION				
DE	SCRIBE VIEW, DIRECTI	bedroom, looki	ng north		
	nri nci nal	bearoom, Looki	ing nor on		



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

STATE	
Rhode Island	
COUNTY	The state of
Providence	
FOR NPS USE O	NLY
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

сомм		3		
AND/	OR HISTORIC: Corliss (George H.) House		
2. LOCA			***************************************	
STRE	ET AND NUMBER			
	15, Prospect Street			5 10 0
CITY	OR TOWN:			
- 1	Providence			COL
STAT	E:	CODE	OUNTY:	00
	Rhode Island	38	Providence	100
3. PHOT	O REFERENCE			
РНОТ	o CREDIT: Brown University Phot	ographic Lal	poratory	
DATE	OF PHOTO: 1961			7 //
NEG	TIVE FILED AT:	4	n	PT
	Brown University Phot	ographic La	boratory, Providence,	ILO IO
4. IDEN	TIFICATION			
DES	CRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.			
	principal bedroom, look	cing south		



PROPERTY PHOTOGRAPH FORM

STATE	
Rhode Island	
COUNTY	
Providence	
FOR NPS USE C	NLY
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE

(Type all entries - attach to or enclose with photograph)

COMN	DIAGNOUL (VICE)	ise		
AND	OR HISTORIC: Corliss (George	H.) House		
2. LOCA	TION			
STRE	ET AND NUMBER:			
	45, Prospect Street			
CITY	OR TOWN:			
	Providence			
STAT		CODE	COUNTY:	cot
	Rhode Island	38	Providence	00
	O REFERENCE			
РНО	O CREDIT: Brown University Ph	otographic I	aboratory	
DATI	OF 840TO: 7067			
NEG	TIVE FILED AT: Brown Universit	v Photograph	ic Laboratory, Provide	nce, R. I.
	DIOWN GHILLOS	,		
4. IDEN	TIFICATION			
	CRIBE VIEW, DIRECTION, ETC.			
T. 100		and the same	showing dining-room bey	-ond

