

Captain William Webb Wakeman House
478 Harbor Road
Southport
Fairfield County
Connecticut

HABS No. CONN-301

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. CONN-301

CAPTAIN WILLIAM WEBB WAKEMAN HOUSE

Location: 478 Harbor Road (formerly 137 Rose Hill Road), Southport, Fairfield County, Connecticut

USGS Westport, Quadrangle Map; Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 18.644240.4555040

Present Owner and Occupant: William and Rosalind Payson

Present Use: Residence

Statement of Significance: The Wakeman residence was erected atop Rose Hill, overlooking the harbor circa 1828-33. Designed in the high Greek Revival manner, the structure's prototypical details and generous classical proportions create an appearance of dignified elegance. The three-bayed facade is framed by a two-story portico. Supported by four fluted columns, the capitals and entablature are similar to the "composed" order of Minard Lafever and the "composite" order of Asher Benjamin, popularized in the 1830s and 40s in their pattern books for architects and builders. The principal gable pediment is ornamented with a Greek Palladian-shaped window opening. Interior doorway trim is in bold relief of roll molding and seashell and acanthus motifs. Captain Wakeman's principal concern was in the prosperous shipping trade between New York and Savannah, and was also involved in the East Indian and China transport. As was the case of many of Southport's residents, his wealth was accumulated through Mill River's harbor economy

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Circa 1828-1833.
2. Architect: No information available.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The land upon which the structure stands was originally undivided common land. W. W. Wakeman purchased the multi-acre lot from the Town of Fairfield circa 1828. Since no title transfer was recorded in the deed records until 1880, the house apparently remained in the Wakeman family until this time, if not longer. Records cited are

in the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

- 1880 Deed, June 17, 1880, recorded in Volume 61, page 742.
Julia B. Nichols to Anna and Abbey B. Nichols and Jane Kippen.
- 1884 Deed, October 18, 1884, recorded in Volume 63, page 125.
Anna Nichols to Clara B. and William Hall, mother and son.
- 1885 Deed, July 9, 1885, recorded in Volume 64, page 35.
Clara B. and William Hall to Ebenezer Monroe.
- 1913 Deed, October 4, 1913, recorded in Volume 82, page 533.
Mary Louise Monroe to Charles M. Taintor.
- 1955 Deed, May 16, 1955, recorded in Volume 328, page 36.
Executors of the Estate of Charles M. Tainto to Mary Jane Beirn.
- 1962 Deed, April 27, 1962, recorded in Volume 436, page 237.
Mary Jane Beirn to William and Rosalind Payson.

4. Original plan and construction: The original house consisted only of the rectangular porticoed section. The main block is two stories with attic and partially exposed basement and measures thirty feet (three-bay northwest front) by forty feet. A timber mortise-and-tenon frame is covered by flush horizontal butt-boarding on the front facade and clapboarding on all other facades. The structure's elegant appearance is created primarily by the two-story front portico. Supported by four fluted columns, the capitals and entablature are similar to Minard Lafever's "Composed" order which he printed in his hand book The Modern Builders' Guide (1833). In keeping with Lafever's design, the Corinthian capitals are carved in an acanthus leaf and rosette motif and the entablature is composed of two smooth fascias and a very delicate, simple cornice. The gable pediment is ornamented with a Palladian-shaped window opening of a small window flanked on each side by a pair of fluted pilasters supporting a Greek cornice and a semi-circular fanlight with key-stone. The main entry is framed by side-lights and a fixed glass transom.

The interior is laid out in a side stairhall plan with double parlor on the east side and a small room behind the stairs. The opening between the parlors is framed by deeply carved roll molding with corner blocks in an ornamental seashell motif. All doorways in the main section are trimmed in a similar fashion. The main stair in the entry hall curves up to the second floor and has very simple, delicate balusters and newel.

5. Alterations and additions: The two-story ell section, built at a right angle to the original block, was added sometime at mid-century. A lithograph of the Wakeman residence in D. Hamilton Hurd's History of Fairfield County (1881) pictures the house with the two-story ell and porch. This section is quite plainly appointed on the exterior. Aside from the smooth cornice at the principal eave and the thin, plain cornice over each window opening, the only decorative feature which stands out is the sawed wooden porch balustrade. The ell now serves as the main dining room and kitchen.

The Southport "Chronicle" reported on December 30, 1901 that "Mrs. William Wakeman's home is undergoing radical changes." What these changes included is difficult to determine. One possibility is the addition of the enclosed porch at the northern end of the ell.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

William Webb Wakeman was born in Southport on June 19, 1799, the son of Jesup Wakeman, an eminent citizen of the community. In addition to owning a general store in Southport, Jesup also operated a line of boats out of Mill River Harbor, he served as one of the first directors of the Bridgeport Bank in 1807 (until 1822), he was actively involved in the Turnpike Company which laid the first major throughway between New York City and New Haven, and he was a principle proprietor of a large tract of Firelands in Ohio's Western Reserve, a part of which is now the village of Wakeman, Ohio. Upon his death in May 1884, Jesup left an estate of \$120,000.

As a young man, William worked with his father in his commercial and trade enterprises. He acquired his own vessel early in his career, and gradually accumulated a line of trade vessels, sailing between New York and Georgetown, then later to Savannah, Georgia and Galveston, Texas. By mid-century he was involved in the East Indian and China trade under the firm name of Wakeman, Dimon & Co. He built and owned a line of steamships during the late 50s, and was commissioned by the Federal government during the Civil War to transport troops and equipment. The firm name was changed to Wakeman, Gookin & Dichinson, and finally to W. W. Wakeman & Co. Post-Civil War steamship trade was heaviest between New York and Savannah, and Wakeman concentrated his line on this route. In addition to his investments in the merchant trade, he was an original trustee of the Southport Savings Bank and an incorporator of Oak Lawn Cemetery

Captain Wakeman married Mary Catherine Hull in 1833. After his death on April 19, 1869 at their New York City residence, Mrs. Wakeman lived in the Rose Hill mansion until 1880.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old views: Lithograph of the Captain William Webb Wakeman Residence in D. Hamilton Hurd's A History of Fairfield County, Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & C., 1881.

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Fairfield County Deed Records, Office of the Recorder,
Fairfield Town Hall, Fairfield, Connecticut.

b. Secondary and published sources:

Fairfield Historic District Commission. Final Report: Establishment of Historic Districts in Greenfield Hill and Southport. Fairfield, 1966.

Hurd, D. Hamilton, compiler. History of Fairfield County Connecticut. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1881.

Southport "Chronicle," October 1868; December 30, 1901.

"The Town Crier," March 4, 1965.

Prepared by David T. Van Zanten
Team Architect
Historic American
Buildings Survey
September 1966

Jan E. Cigliano
Staff Historian
Historic American
Buildings Survey
December 1978

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Southport Historic District Commission, several members of whom provided the necessary funds. The project was completed in the summer of 1966 under the general direction of James C. Massey, then the Chief of HABS; Ralph Schwarz of the Ford Foundation; and Architect

John C. Waite (Columbia University); with assistant architects Christopher Benninger (Harvard University), Richard Haines (University of Kentucky), and Andrew Craig Morrison (University of Michigan), and architectural historian David T. VanZanten (Harvard University), at the HABS Field Office in Southport, Connecticut. The data was prepared and edited in HABS Washington office in December 1978 by Jan E. Cigliano, staff historian. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack E. Boucher in September 1966.

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Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, DC 20013-7127

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Addendum to
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(Page 6)

This is an addendum to five data pages previously transmitted to the Library of Congress.

Location: 478 Harbor Road (formerly 137 Rose Hill Road), Southport,
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The following statements will provide corrections to the information originally transmitted for this property.

In regards to data page 2, the first four deeds cited do not refer to the Wakeman Homestead.

1880/61:742

The land involved in this deed is probably in Fairfield center area; it is not in Southport. The grantee "Anna" is given in the actual deed as "Anna P." She and all the other grantees are probably children of Samuel Allen Nichols (1789-1864), and not the same person as the "Anna Nichols" of 63:125. (For more information on the Samuel Allen Nichols family, see History of Bridgeport, volume II, p. 276, edited by George C. Waldo, published 1917 by S.J. Clarke, New York and Chicago.)

1884/63:125; 1885/64:35; 1913/82:533

These deeds refer to property located at 494 Harbor Road, the Allen Nichols house, HABS CT-336. Fairfield Assessor's Map 241, Lot 24. This property can be traced back from the 1913 deed through ownership by the Nichols family (purchased 1826/40:246 by Sturges Nichols) to the original grants from the town of Fairfield to the heirs of Samuel Morehouse II (1750/15:432) and to Solomon Sturges (1765/15:431).

Neither William Webb Wakeman nor any of his ancestors ever owned this property. Wakeman's homestead property came to him from his father, Jesup Wakeman (1771-1844), who acquired about 21.75 acres in the Rampasture (hill on which Wakeman House is sited) between 1796-1818. The only deed located which specifically mentions the Wakeman house is that of 1843/47:142, Jesup Wakeman to William W. Wakeman--5 acres. This does not, however, firmly date the house.

The source of this information was correspondence to HABS from V. Louise Higgins, 29 Prospect Lane, Southport, Connecticut, dated January 4, 1987.

Edited and transmitted by: Holly K. Chamberlain, Historian
Historic American Buildings Survey
May 20, 1987