### HISTORIC RESOURCES

**Agricultural Heritage Multiple Property Submission - State Register**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Building Name (Common)</th>
<th>Downs, Jerome A., Farmstead / RoJo Farm</th>
<th>Record No. 5018</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Building Name (Historic)</td>
<td>Downs, Jerome A., Farmstead / RoJo Farm</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Address or Location</td>
<td>312-327 Litchfield Turnpike (Route 69)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Town/City**: Bethany  
**Village**  
**County**: New Haven  
**Owner(s)**: William Fischer, 312 Litchfield Turnpike, Bethany CT 06524

### PROPERTY INFORMATION

**Present Use**: Agriculture/Subsistence: agricultural outbuilding; Domestic: single dwelling  
**Historic Use**: Agriculture/Subsistence: agricultural outbuilding; Domestic: single dwelling

**Accessibility to public**: Exterior visible from public road?  
**Interior accessible?**: Yes  
**If yes, explain**:  
**Style of building**: Gambrel bank barn, Vernacular style  
**Date of Construction**: c. 1915

- **Material(s)** (Indicate use or location when appropriate):
  - Clapboard  
  - Asbestos Siding  
  - Brick  
  - Wood Shingle  
  - Asphalt Siding  
  - Fieldstone  
  - Board & Batten  
  - Stucco  
  - Cobblestone  
  - Aluminum Siding  
  - Concrete (Type)  
  - Cut Stone (Type)  
  - Other: Vertical wood siding

- **Structural System**:
  - Wood Frame  
  - Post & Beam  
  - Balloon  
  - Load bearing masonry  
  - Structural iron or steel  
  - Other

- **Roof (Type)**:
  - Gable  
  - Flat  
  - Mansard  
  - Monitor  
  - Sawtooth  
  - Gambrel  
  - Shed  
  - Hip  
  - Round  
  - Other

- **Material**:
  - Wood Shingle  
  - Roll Asphalt  
  - Tin  
  - Slate  
  - Asphalt Shingle  
  - Built up  
  - Tile  
  - Other

**Number of Stories**: 2 1/2, B  
**Approximate Dimensions**: Barn I: 32' x 36' plus additions, Barn II: 25' x 35'

**Structural Condition**: Excellent  
**Exterior Condition**: Excellent  
**Location Integrity**: On original site  
**Movements**: Moved  
**When?**:  
**Alterations**: Yes  
**If yes, explain**: Barn I, II converted to residence, Barn II, III relocated, additions

### FOR OFFICE USE

- **Town #**  
- **Site #**  
- **UTM**

- **District**: S  
- **NR**:  
- **If NR, Specify**: Actual  
- **Potential**
**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT’D)**

Related outbuildings or landscape features:
- [x] Barn
- [ ] Shed
- [ ] Garage
- [ ] Carriage House
- [ ] Shop
- [x] Garden
- [ ] Other landscape features or buildings: Lake Bethany to the east

**Surrounding Environment:**
- [x] Open land
- [x] Woodland
- [x] Residential
- [ ] Commercial
- [ ] Industrial
- [x] Rural
- [ ] High building density
- [x] Scattered buildings visible from site

- **Interrelationship of building and surroundings:**
  See continuation sheet.

- **Other notable features of building or site (Interior and/or Exterior)**
  See continuation sheet.

**Architect** ________________________________  **Builder** 1963 conversion by Gene Kluszewski

- **Historical or Architectural importance:**
  See continuation sheet.

- **Sources:**

  See continuation sheet.

**Photographer** Charlotte Hitchcock  **Date** 7/24/2013
**View** Multiple Views  **Negative on File** CTHP
**Name** Charlotte Hitchcock  **Date** 8/16/2013
**Organization** Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation
**Address** 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517

- **Subsequent field evaluations:**

  **Latitude, Longitude:**
  Barn I: 41.413866, -72.973443  Barn IV: 41.414367, -72.973976

**Threats to the building or site:**
- [x] None known
- [ ] Highways
- [ ] Vandalism
- [ ] Developers
- [ ] Renewal
- [ ] Private
- [ ] Deterioration
- [ ] Zoning
- [ ] Other _______________________
- [ ] Explanation ____________________
• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The RoJo Farm includes two parcels of land located on both sides Litchfield Turnpike in Bethany, north of the intersection with Hatfield Hill Road. The 1879 Jerome Downs House is on a 2-acre parcel on the west side of the road with a small barn and garage, while the main barns, now converted to a residence, are on a 1.8-acre parcel on the east side.

Litchfield Turnpike runs north-south along the side of a hill which slopes down toward the east to the valley of the West River. Extending from New Haven through Woodbridge, the road passes several lakes, which are water supply reservoirs owned by the South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority. Lake Bethany, constructed in 1894 by damming the West River, is immediately adjacent to the eastern parcel.

The primary village centers of Bethany were historically located along Amity Road (Route 63) which runs roughly parallel to the west, along a ridge top. The Congregational and Episcopal Churches are located on Amity Road near the northern edge of the town, with the Christ Episcopal Church carriage shed listed on the State Register of Historic Places. The c. 1807 Wheeler-Beecher House, also on Amity Road slightly north of the two churches, is also a National Register-listed property. Farmsteads in Bethany also included in this thematic State Register nomination are: the Russell Homestead, 20 Round Hill Road; Clover Nook Farm, 50 Fairwood Road; the Abram Carrington Farmstead (Cherry Tree Farm), 144 Bethmour Road; the Doolittle Farm at 329 Downs Road, the Bishop-Tuttle-Megin Farmstead, 163 Carrington Road, and the Davidson Farmstead (Minnow Brook Farm), 539 Litchfield Turnpike. The last two are located nearby, within a mile of this property.

The Farmhouse is a 2 ½-story gable-roofed vernacular Italianate-style building, 25’ x 45’ with its ridge-line oriented east-west and its east façade facing the road. There are shallow cross-gable wings projecting north and south from the eave-sides, and a lower 2-story ell extends west at the rear. The east gable-end is a three-bay façade with a side-hall plan and a porch and entry at the left (south) bay. The porch has Italianate-style posts and detailing; windows are mostly two-over-two double-hung sash and have molded cornices and simple casings. Arch-topped decorative windows are in the attic – a pair on the east and a single on the south gable – and at the stair along the south eave-side. At the rear wing a 1-story porch on the south side has a secondary entrance, and at the north side there is another entrance with a 1-story porch. The walls are covered with vinyl siding but the the original wood trim remains. Roofing is asphalt shingles and the foundation is random ashlar stone, probably locally-quarried basalt.

To the northwest of the Farmhouse is a small barn (Barn IV), a balloon-framed 1 ½-story gable-roofed structure, 15’ x 25’, with its ridge-line oriented north-south. It appears to be of early 20th-century construction, has a banked lower level with a fieldstone retaining wall at the north and west sides, a door opening in the south gable-end, single-pane attic windows in both gable-ends, and a window in the west eave-side. It is currently used as a woodshed. A driveway enters the western part of the side south of the Farmhouse, and terminates in a paved parking area; a modern small garage structure is to the south.

On the eastern parcel, Barns I and II are abutting and located close to the road, while Barn III is to the northeast. A paved driveway to the south of Barn I enters the site and terminates in a paved area along the south side of Barn I. Another unpaved drive enters north of Barn II and leads to an open area north of the barns and west of Barn III. Southeast of the buildings is an open garden area with garden shed and a small pond.

Barn III is an 18’ x 30’ gable-roofed English barn, moved here in 1994 from a location near the Lake Bethany dam. Its ridge-line is oriented north-south and it is set on a newly-built fieldstone foundation which provides a banked basement for the northern bay, while the other bays have dirt floors. The three-bay structure has a square rule timber frame with dropped tie-girts. The end bays are enclosed as stalls or work areas while the center bay has pairs of hinged doors on both the west and east eave-sides. The east side doors are notable for their chamfered head corners, a feature which was present on the west doors as well prior to re-construction. The east side has a pair of multi-pane stable windows in each of the end bays. The south gable-end has two stall doors, and the west side has a second opening to the north bay work area. The attic peak has a louvered vent in each gable-end. Siding is vertical boards, unpainted, which were recycled from another structure. The roof is wood shingles.
• Other notable features of building or site (Interior and/or Exterior):

Architectural description:

Inventory of structures (C – contributing, NC – non-contributing):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Contributing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farmhouse, 327 Litchfield Turnpike</td>
<td>1879</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn I, 312 Litchfield Turnpike</td>
<td>Late 19th c.</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn II, 312 Litchfield Turnpike</td>
<td>19th c.</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn III, 312 Litchfield Turnpike</td>
<td>19th c.</td>
<td>C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barn IV, 327 Litchfield Turnpike</td>
<td>20th c.</td>
<td>C</td>
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Barn I:

The main barn is a banked Dutch gambrel-roofed dairy barn, 32' x 36', with its ridge-line oriented east-west perpendicular to the road. The main block has its floor level at the upper grade along the road on the west side and the banked lower level originally opened to the lower grade on the east side and south sides.

On the east gable-end, a large 1-story addition, 20' x 33', with a hip roof, was added when the building was converted to a residence in approximately 1963; this encompasses the entire east side of the basement level. The addition has a full-width glazed wall looking eastward over the view toward Lake Bethany. Above the hip roof the east gable-end of the barn has a bank of four windows, also added in 1963.

The south eave-side exposes the basement level to the lower grade elevation. The basement formed a ground level dairy stable. The interior has two rows of steel columns supporting longitudinal built-up girders. These in turn carry the floor joists of the upper level. The south wall has a row of five nine-pane stable windows; the wall is finished with horizontal tongue-and-groove board paneling, painted white. On the exterior between the windows there are rectangular frames which appear to be passive solar heating elements dating from the 1960s. The exterior siding is vertical boards from the window sills up and mortared fieldstone masonry below.

At the southeast corner of the barn there is a small mid-20th-century greenhouse of a type erected from stock components. It has a low masonry knee-wall supporting the gambrel-profile glass and metal rib structure. This is connected to the hip-roofed addition.

At the west end of the barn there is a concrete milk room structure which is banked into the hill and has a flat concrete slab roof. The west door of the upper level opens out onto this surface. The south wall of this milk room is flush with the main barn and has a door with a hood above and a window to the right.

The exterior of the west gable-end has an entry door to the upper floor level, with a flat-roofed hood supported with angled brackets.

The interior of the upper level of the main barn is a clear span hay loft, now converted to a large full-height living room with the structural system remaining fully exposed. The gambrel-roofed structure consists of four trussed ribs forming three 12-foot bays. Each rib is made up of two scissor trusses tilted up and meeting at the peak, each forming the knee wall, lower and upper roof pitches of one side of the barn. These ribs are composed of 2 x 10 sawn dimension lumber with bolted connections, braced longitudinally with angle braces connecting to double purlins at the change of roof pitch. Between the major trusses, balloon framing with 2 x 6 rafters fills in to complete the roof surface. Narrow spaced deck boards support the original wood shingles which are visible between the decking. The roof has been subsequently over-shingled with asphalt shingle roofing. A hay track is suspended from the ridge.

Barn II:

The northern section of the residence is a post and beam structure, originally a barn, approximately 25’ x 35’, which was formerly located slightly further north and west, closer to the road. During the conversion to a residence, the barn was moved to its present location abutting Barn I.
The barn structure appears to have been a three-bay 1 ½-story English barn with its ridge-line oriented north-south. A full second floor was inserted on the interior. The west eave-side has a gable-roofed wall dormer with a projecting hoist arm with a hay track. Alterations include a residential entry door centered below the dormer, a shallow-pitched porch roof over the entry, and tall narrow windows on the first and second floor levels. A narrow horizontal trim board visually demarcates the second floor. The north gable-end has an ocular window at the peak and a square two-sash sliding window at the ground level. The east shed-roofed extension wraps partially around the north end. The east eave-side has a gambrel dormer with a gabled projecting bay window, added in the 1963 renovation, as well as a shed-roofed 1-story extension.

The roof has an overhang at eaves and rake, and a gable-roofed cupola with louvered openings on all sides. Siding is narrow vertical boards stained dark brown, trim is painted white, and roofing is asphalt shingles.

The interior is finished as two floors of residential space in which some structural posts and beams are exposed. In the attic, the roof structure is visible, consisting of sawn dimension lumber king post trusses which appear likely to be of late 19th-century date, later than the timber frame of the lower portion which shows evidence of sash-sawn milling and square rule mortise and tenon joinery.

**Historical or Architectural importance:**

Applicable Connecticut State Register Criteria:

1. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
2. Embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.

This gambrel barn is particularly significant as an unusually fine example of an early gambrel structural system, apparently following designs published in the early 1900s at the time when plank or balloon framing began to replace post and beam techniques. It is an exceptionally elegant structure and has survived intact through re-use as a residential space. The farmstead gains significance from its association with the Jerome Downs family, residents at this site since at least 1832, and with two family members prominent in local politics, serving as First Selectman. The site is also of interest because of the re-use of the agricultural structures as residential and studio space for artist-owner Gene Kluszewski in the 1960s. Finally, the two parts of the historic property are re-united and agricultural use is ongoing again, under the ownership of Bill Fischer, resulting in preservation of the rural landscape.

**Historical background:**

The Jerome Downs House was built in 1879, south of an older house belonging to Kneeland Downs (b. 1803) and Ann (b. 1808), father of the first Jerome A. (1838-1904). It was built by Thomas H. Brooks, who also later built the Davidson House (see 539 Litchfield Turnpike). The house remained in the Downs family until 1955 (Bunton). Jerome A. and Alta Hotchkiss Downs (1851-1924) were the parents of the second Jerome A. (1869-1938). The Downs farm was known as Rojo Farm, named for the second Jerome A. and his wife Josephine Nettleton (1874-1953) who owned the farm from around 1900 through the 1930s. They had about 58 acres on both sides of the road. Jerome A. Downs was First Selectman of Bethany from 1903-08. Their son Stanley H. Downs (1907-1963) also served as First Selectman of Bethany, from 1953-63.

In 1954, following the death of Josephine, her son Dwight (b. 1903) sold the property to Robert and Helen Wilson. They in turn sold it in 1964, and at this time the two parcels were separated. The house at 327 Litchfield Turnpike was sold to Ralph and Elizabeth Hepler. The barns at 312 Litchfield Turnpike went to artists Gene Kluszewski and his wife Jane Marsden.

Gene Kluszewski was also a carpenter, and he converted the barns to a residence and studio, moving the English barn to connect the two structures and adding the hip-roofed studio wing on the east. Gene Kluszewski also is known to have worked on other residential conversions in Bethany. The decades of the 1960s and 70s saw a wave of artists and architects moving to rural areas of New England, hand-building or converting living and working spaces, as an expression of the environmental and anti-war movements. The style of the barn conversion reflects that era.
In 1991, Bill Fischer purchased the converted barns, and has lived there since. He retired from working as a physician and began a new career as a musician and contra dance caller.

Lake Bethany was constructed in 1894 on the West River by the New Haven Water Company (now South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority). At that time, a barn, that was to be inundated by the new lake, was moved to a site near the dam on Hatfield Hill Road. In 1994, Fischer moved this barn (Barn III) to his property and re-erected it. In 2012, he also purchased the Jerome Downs House, which had changed hands a number of times. Tobey Fischer, Bill’s son, is now farming there, and RoJo Farm is a working farm again.

**Architectural significance:**

This barn is particularly significant because it is an unusual example of a gambrel barn structural system. In the early 20th century several state agricultural colleges, including the University of Connecticut, as well as companies like James Manufacturing Company known for its “James Way,” published and promoted pre-designed systems for constructing gambrel dairy barns, often known as Wisconsin barns or ground level stable barns. These designs used lightweight sawn planks, often 2 x 8 or even 2 x 6 members, to create clear span spaces for hay lofts. Prior to the widespread use of these balloon framing systems, gambrel barns were sometimes constructed with post and beam framing, but in these instances there would be a pair of vertical posts at each bent, interfering with the hay storage space (see 102 North Street, Roxbury).

The James Manufacturing Company formed in 1906 to market innovative dairy cow stanchion designs, then expanded into a wide range of dairy equipment and structures. The 1919 catalog shows a barn frame nearly identical to this one, with major trusses spaced at 12-foot intervals similar to the width of a bay in a post and beam frame. For a similar example, see Elm Springs Farm, 664 Rimmon Hill Road, Beacon Falls (1918-20). Also shown in the catalog are lighter truss systems designed to be built at two-foot intervals, forming a continuous tunnel-like effect that could be of any length. These became the standard during the mid-20th century – for example, see 104 Wright Road, Torrington (1941), or 177 New Haven Road, Prospect (1935). The Downs barn is particularly robust and elegant, due to the massive scale of its framing members.

It seems likely that the Downs gambrel barn dates from the period of 1915-20, based on its close resemblance to the prototype in the James catalog and the documented similar barn in Beacon Falls. The barn would have been built by Jerome A. and Josephine Downs, during the period of their RoJo Farm.

**• Sources (continuation):**

Photographs and field notes by Charlotte Hitchcock 7/24/2013.

Interview with Bill Fischer, 7/24/2013, at the site.

**Map resources:**

Aerial views from:  
http://maps.google.com/  and  

Historical aerial photography and maps accessed at UConn MAGIC: 
http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934.html  
http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/historical_maps_connecticut_towns.html.


**Print and internet resources:**


Bunton, Alice Bice, Bethany’s Old Houses and Community Buildings, Bethany Library Association, 1972.


1. Location map of 312 Litchfield Turnpike, Bethany CT – from http://www.bing.com/maps/ accessed 8/17/2013. 327 Litchfield Turnpike is across the road to the west.

3. Site Plan view showing contributing resources.
4. East view of Farmhouse at 327 Litchfield Turnpike, camera facing west.

5. Southwest view of Farmhouse, camera facing northeast. Barn IV is at left rear.

7. North view of Barn IV, camera facing south, Farmhouse at rear.
8. West view of Barn III, camera facing east.

9. Northeast view of Barn III, camera facing southwest. Note the chamfered corners of the barn door head.
10. Interior detail view of Barn III center bay, camera facing northwest, showing post and beam framing.

11. West side view of Barn II (foreground) and Barn I (rear), camera facing south.

13. East view of Barn I (center) and Barn II (right), camera facing west. Note the attached greenhouse at far left.
14. South view of Barn I, camera facing north. At left is the door into the banked concrete milk room.

15. Detail view of the lower wall construction, ground level of Barn I, showing concrete and fieldstone. Photo location is the east gable-end wall, inside the hip-roofed studio addition.
16. Interior view of Barn I loft level, camera facing west, showing the scissor truss ribs at the west end wall.

17. Interior view of Barn I loft level, camera facing west, seen from the stairs to the lower (basement) level. Note: the abstract painting on the west wall (yellow-brown tones) is by Gene Kluszewski.
18. Interior detail view of Barn I loft level roof truss, camera facing west. Note the extant hay track.

19. Interior detail view of Barn I loft level roof truss, camera facing northwest.
20. Interior detail view of Barn I lower banked basement level, camera facing southeast.

21. Interior detail view of Barn II second floor west corridor, camera facing south. Note the vertical slit windows which look out toward the road. At rear down a short flight of steps, the door leads to the Barn I upper level.
22. Interior detail view of Barn II loft roof trusses, camera facing south. Note king post truss.

23. 1934 Fairchild aerial photograph (left) of the site compared with modern Google aerial view (right). Second-growth woodlands have returned to some areas since 1934.

25. Illustration from “The James Way Catalog No. 27,” published in 1919. Photograph shows erection of the ribs after the lower level and loft floor have been constructed.

27. Illustration from “The James Way Catalog No. 27,” published in 1919. The windows shown closely match the nine-pane sash at the Downs gambrel barn, and appear to be a distinctive design feature of the James plans.