Corttis, Japheth, Farmstead

235 Corttis Road

Owner(s): Herbert E. Corttis, P.O. Box 821, North Grosvenordale CT 06255

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes ☑ No ☐

Interior accessible? Yes ☑ No ☐ If yes, explain ____________________________

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

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

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- Fieldstone
- Concrete (Type ____________)

Style of building: New England bank barns, Vernacular style

Date of Construction: c.1780, 19th c.

Vertical wood siding

Structural System

- Wood Frame
- Post & Beam

Roof (Type):

- Gable

Number of Stories: 1 1/2, B

Approximate Dimensions: Barn I: 41' x 84'; Barn II: 40' x 36'

Structural Condition: Excellent ☑ Good □ Fair □ Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: Excellent ☑ Good □ Fair □ Deteriorated

Location Integrity: On original site ☑ Moved □ When? ____________

Alterations? Yes ☑ No ☐ If yes, explain: Barn II converted - English to New England; Barn I basement dairy

FOR OFFICE USE:

- Town # ______ Site # ______ UTM ______

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

Related outbuildings or landscape features:
- ✔ Barn
- ✔ Shed
- ✔ Garden
- ✔ Other landscape features or buildings: Stone walls

Surrounding Environment:
- ✔ Open land
- ✔ Woodland
- ✔ Residential
- ✔ Commercial
- ✔ Industrial
- ✔ Rural
- □ High building density
- □ 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 ______________________________________

• Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

• Sources:


See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 2/22/2013

View Multiple Views Negative on File CTHP

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 8/30/2013

Organization Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Latitude, Longitude:
42.015859, -71.901943

Threats to the building or site:
- ✔ None known
- □ Highways
- □ Vandalism
- □ Developers
- □ Renewal
- □ Private
- □ Deterioration
- □ Zoning
- □ Other ____________________ □ Explanation ____________________
• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The Corttis Farmstead is a property of approximately 700 acres, located on both sides of Corttis Road, a north-south road in the rural northern part of the village of Wilsonville, in the North Grosvenordale section of Thompson. This is in the extreme northeast corner of Connecticut, adjacent to Massachusetts and Rhode Island. The property occupies the crest and sloping sides of a drumlin, a type of north-south trending hill rounded by glacial action. Drumlins have historically provided some of the best farmland sites in the interior uplands of Connecticut. The property includes multiple parcels, with 235 Corttis Road as the main farmstead complex, 95 Jezierski Road as an additional house (a c. 1700 brick Cape-style house) and barn, and parcels fronting on LaPorte, Tuft Hill, and Quinnebaug Roads. Brooks in the valleys east and west of the site drain southward into the French and Quinnebaug Rivers.

Two miles to the south, in North Grosvenordale on the French River, the North Grosvenordale Mill Historic District is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Three miles further south, the Thompson Hill Historic District is also listed on the National Register and is a village center with a town green surrounded by historic homes dating from the Colonial period to the early 20th century, including a number of Federal- and Greek Revival-style buildings.

The main Farmhouse is a c. 1750 five-bay 2 ½-story center-chimney Colonial-style structure, 27’ x 37’, with its ridge-line oriented north-south and its main entrance in the center bay of the west eave-side which faces Corttis Road across a lawn. The entry door is flanked by sidelights and a surround with corner block trim. The windows are six-over-six double-hung (non-original), and the building corners are trimmed with full-height pilasters having pointed arch inset panels and stylized capitals built up of parallel scroll-sawn brackets. The eaves and rakes have molded trim, deep entablature trim below the eaves, and cornice returns on the gable ends. The effect appears to be of an ornamental renovation in a vernacular Greek Revival mode at some time following the original construction. Siding is horizontal wood clapboards, roofing is asphalt shingles and the foundation is cut stone. The east, rear, of the Farmhouse has a fully-exposed basement as the grade slopes down toward the east. The foundation wall is a mix of wood, brick, stone, and some concrete block masonry. The east wall of the frame structure has been re-sided with vinyl siding.

A 2 ½-story wing, 26’ x 48’, extends south of the main block, set back one bay from the main façade. This has a five-bay façade, in which the southern four bays have a recessed porch at the ground floor level. The upper floors are supported by four square pilasters trimmed to match the corner trim of the main block. A 24’ x 24’ 2-story gable-roofed woodshed addition is attached to the south end of the house, set back about four feet from the south wing. This has vertical flush-boarding siding. The west eave-side has two six-pane windows in the second floor above two doors and a window on the ground floor. A fieldstone foundation is partially exposed as the grade slopes down toward the east. The south gable-end has a fully-exposed basement with wood infill between the east and west fieldstone foundation walls. Formerly a bridge spanned across from an east-side porch to an extant pass-through door in the north wall of the adjacent barn. The roof of this block is slate with two diamond-patterned inserts in a contrasting color.

Outbuildings include two barns (Barn II and Barn I) which are located south of the Farmhouse, side by side approximately eight feet apart with their ridge-lines oriented east-west and their west gable-ends facing the road. Southeast of Barn I is a 1-story gable-roofed shed, with its ridge-line north-south. Constructed of a partial concrete foundation and wood upper walls, this has an opening in the gable-end, vertical wood siding above the concrete, and asphalt shingle roofing.

A 1-story milk room structure, 14’ x 18’, of concrete block masonry, is located adjacent to the southwest corner of Barn I. This has its ridge-line oriented east-west, a pass-through door in the south eave-side, and a double-hung window in each of the east and south sides. It is partially banked into the hill against a retaining wall which runs west from the corner of Barn I.

Massive dry-laid fieldstone walls with stone slab capstones enclose paddocks to the south of the barns.
Another structure (Shed II) is located on the west side of the road, north of the Farmhouse. This is a 1 ½-story garage or woodshed. Its ridge-line is oriented east-west. Its east eave-side has a series of hinged barn or garage doors, and a hay door in the attic. The southern pitch of the roof forms a saltbox profile, with a one-story south wall of dry-laid fieldstone. Siding is a mix of horizontal clapboard and vertical wood siding. A small shed addition projects from the north side, and has a pass-through door in the north eave-side.

• Other notable features of building or site (Interior and/or Exterior):

Architectural description:

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

- Farmhouse  c. 1780  C
- Barn I – Dairy  Late 19th c.  C
- Barn II - Horse  c. 1780, altered  C
- Milk room  20th c.  C
- Shed I  20th c.  C
- Shed II  19th c.  C

Barn I – Dairy barn:

(Note: this is referenced as Barn A by Mott’s Sturbridge survey of 1978)

This is the largest barn, a 41’ x 84’ eight-bay New England gable-roofed bank barn with its ridge-line oriented east-west. The main entry to the loft level is in the west gable-end, facing the road. The south eave-side has a full basement exposed to the lower grade at the south side. The bays are identified here from west to east as 1 through 8. Roofing is asphalt shingles and siding is vertical boards painted red.

Exterior:

The west gable-end has an entry area that ramps slightly up from the road and is supported by a retaining wall along its south side where the natural grade slopes down toward the east. The main entry is a single interior sliding barn door with a 20-pane glazed transom above. It is flanked by interior sliding doors at the two outer corners; the left (north) of these has a six-pane sash in the door. A pair of six-over-six double-hung windows is located in the gable attic above the eave level.

The south eave-side has its basement level exposed at the lower grade elevation. This has at the basement level, an opening in the center and one in bay 7. Both appear to have formerly had exterior sliding doors, now removed. The lower wall is of concrete up to approximately four feet above the floor level, and of wood above, with several six-pane stable windows. Grade continues to slope down, exposing several courses of fieldstone foundation along the eastern part of the wall. The Milk room abuts the left (west) corner. The upper level has a six-pane window in bay 2, bay 4, and bay 7. There is a siding divide at the floor level where the siding laps over the basement siding, and another at an upper loft level, with the upper siding lapped over the middle section. At each bent, a vertical board is applied like a batten over the adjoining siding.

The east gable-end has a massive fieldstone foundation wall from the downhill grade up to approximately four feet below the main loft level, encompassing most of the basement level. The upper part of the basement wall is wood and has one six-pane window near the left (south) corner. The east gable-end has one six-over-six double-hung window in the attic and is otherwise blank.

The foundation wall continues at the north eave-side. An addition with a concrete block masonry foundation sits in the angle between Barn I and Barn II. Its roof extends as a saltbox, continuing the slope of the north pitch of Barn I. The foundation has a door in its north face while there is a single six-pane window high under the eaves of the north side, off-center toward the west.

Interior:

The interior of Barn I is an eight-bay long, three-aisle wide post and beam frame of sawn timbers. The typical bent has two interior posts forming three aisles. The outer aisles have a tie-girt at the rafter plate level connecting over the
top of the post and projecting a few inches beyond into the center aisle. Queen posts sit on the tie-girt, slightly outboard of the main posts. These support longitudinal purlin plates which are in turn braced by a tie-girt across the center aisle at the purlin plate elevation. Sawn common rafters meet at the peak butted against a ridge-board. A hay track is suspended below the central tie-girt.

A lower tie-girt connects the posts across the center aisle of each bent and supports a high loft level along most of the length of the barn, except for a full-height opening at bay 3. Lower tie-girts in the outer aisles support an upper loft in the sides; this corresponds to the siding divide visible on the exterior. The north addition is open to the interior of Barn I.

The basement is framed with three pairs of interior posts which are octagonal in section, a pair each between bays 2 and 3, bays 4 and 5, and bays 6 and 7. These support lateral girders overhead in the main floor framing and longitudinal girders as well. At the alternate bent locations, there are lateral girders strengthened by triangular timber and iron trusses above the main floor. These are visible in the main loft level. Similar trusses are found in other barns included in this thematic nomination of Agricultural Resources, including the Larson Barn in New Milford (388 Danbury Road) and Happy Acres in Sherman (2 Taber Road). This basement level was converted to dairy stable use in the 1920s and has the remains of a manure trolley system still visible at the ceiling, although the stanchions are gone. Prior to the 1920s the cows were stabled in the main level; a stone ramp in the northeast corner allowed cows to walk down to the lower grade level pastures.

**Barn II – Horse barn:**

(Note: this is referenced as Barn B by Mott’s Sturbridge survey of 1978)

This is a 40’ wide by 36’ long gable-entry bank barn, which was originally an English barn (Mott). It was altered to a New England configuration and fitted out as a three-aisle horse barn. Interior finishes make it difficult to see the original layout, however Mott’s inspection of the attic framing indicates the original barn to be c. 1780 and the frame to be of hand hewn chestnut timbers. The tie-girts are continuous across the width and canted queen posts support the purlin plates. Rafters are mortised into a ridge-pole (Mott). Horse stalls are in place in the north aisle while the center aisle is higher and the south aisle has enclosed areas.

The west gable-end facing the road has the main entry through a pair of interior sliding barn doors. These are flanked by a six-over-six double-hung window on each side. The left aisle (north) has a similar window at an upper level, and there is another centered in the attic gable. The south eave-side is hidden by Barn I, but from the interior a similar window can be seen.

The grade slopes down toward the east along the north eave-side wall, exposing a fieldstone and granite block foundation with an opening off-center toward the right (west) with a pass-through door and one six-pane window. Above at the main level there is a row of five small high square windows for the horse stalls and at the right (west) corner a six-over-six double-hung window and a boarded-up pass-through door. This formerly connected to a bridge over to the south shed addition on the Farmhouse. In the upper loft above there is one similar double-hung window. The west and north walls are finished in horizontal clapboard siding painted red.

The east gable-end wall has a full-height fieldstone foundation, battered from bottom to top, with a double door opening off-center toward the right (north). This has hinged doors and a pair of two-pane transom windows above. The main and upper loft levels and the attic have staggered six-over-six double-hung windows, one at each level. The left portion of the wall is covered by the north addition of Barn I. The east wall is finished in vertical board siding painted red. The roof is asphalt shingles.
• 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.

The Corttis Farm is significant as an intact family-owned farmstead with a large landholding. Its site encompassing a typical glacial drumlin exemplifies a pattern of Connecticut agriculture dating from the first English settlement of the area. The structures dating from the 18th century into the early 20th century demonstrate the evolution of a farmstead from subsistence farming to a commercial scale dairy farm. The New England dairy barn in particular is an exceptional and intact example of its type. The Corttis family have a long genealogy and include members such as Edgar Corttis, a prominent local politician and farmer.

Historical background:

The Corttis family was one of the founding families of English settlers in the area, with descendants named Japheth Corttis recurring over many generations. The Census records of 1860 and later appear with various spellings, but can be matched with the published maps of 1856 (Woodford) and 1869 (Gray) where J. Cortis or Curttis [sic] are identified at the site. The family had substantial landholdings in Thompson and across the state line in Massachusetts.

The last Japheth had sons Edgar Corttis (1862-1927) and Elmer Corttis (b. 1864) who came to inherit the property, with Edgar taking over the Connecticut land and Elmer the land in Massachusetts. Edgar graduated from Amherst College in 1884, was prominent in local politics as a County Commissioner, among other offices. His children with his second wife Florence Edith Brown Corttis (1887-1944) were Lucy (1897-1970), Herbert S. (1902-1967), Harold (1905-1963), Elizabeth (1913-2008), Christine (1920-1996), Alice, Ruth, and Dorothy (1925-2013). Harold was legally blind and remained on the farm along with his aunt Mary (1860-1940) and sister Lucy, who appear in the 1940 Census. Herbert was not a farmer, but rather went to Middlebury College and then worked for the W.T. Grant Company. He spent most of his vacation time working at the farm, as is remembered by his son Herb, the present owner. Harold continued working with oxen into the 1960s, resisting the use of tractors.

Herb Corttis inherited the farm in 1968 after the death of his father, along with the additional farmstead at 95 Jezierski Road. This had been an Upham family farm until marriage to a Corttis combined the land holdings. The Corttis Farm was named a Bicentennial Farm in 1976, and although it is no longer a dairy farm, working agriculture still continues with beef cattle and hay production. The Farmhouse has operated as an Inn in recent years as well.

Architectural significance:

The oldest structures date to before 1800, although the Horse barn (Barn II) deserves further analysis to fully understand its provenance and alterations. The New England dairy barn (Barn I) is an exceptional example of the generous scale and proportions typical of barn construction in the late 19th- to early 20th-century years. The massive fieldstone and granite block retaining walls are fine examples of their type. The Farmhouse has unusual trim details, suggesting a creative vernacular interpretation of the Greek Revival or early Gothic Revival; the stylized capital was a locally popular feature (McDonough).

The Corttis Farm is significant as an intact family-owned farmstead still retaining an extensive landholding, the largest and best-preserved pre-industrial period farmstead remaining in Thompson. Its site encompassing a typical glacial drumlin exemplifies a pattern of Connecticut agriculture dating from the first English settlement of the area. The structures, from the 18th century into the early 20th century, demonstrate the evolution of a farmstead from subsistence farming to a commercial scale dairy farm. The New England dairy barn in particular is an exceptional and intact example of its type.
• Sources (continuation):
Photographs and field notes by Charlotte Hitchcock, 2/22/2013.
Interview with Herb Corttis, 2/22/2013, at the site, photographs by Herb Corttis from grant pre-application, 2012.

Map resources:
Town of Thompson Assessor's Records  http://data.visionappraisal.com/ThompsonCT/search.asp
Parcel IDs: 55/66/12, 38/69/5, additional parcels.

Aerial views from:

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
Eaton, Wm. C., Wall map of Windham County, Woodford, Philadelphia, 1856.


Print and internet resources:


Connecticut State Library online: iconn.org or http://www.cslib.org/iconnsitemap/staff/SiteIndex.aspx#directories

Barns Grant pre-application, 2012.

McDonough, Mark, Historic and Architectural Resources Survey of Thompson, Inventory No. 050, Connecticut Historical Commission, 1986.


3. Detail Site Plan showing contributing resources – base image from Google Maps.

4. South context view, camera facing northeast, showing Farmhouse, Barn II, Barn I, Milk house, and Shed I.
5. Northwest view of Farmhouse, camera facing southeast. Barns are at right rear.

6. Southwest view of Farmhouse southern blocks, camera facing southeast.
7. West view of Farmhouse, camera facing east. Barns are at left.

8. Southwest view of Milk room, camera facing northeast, with Barn I beyond and Barn II to the left.

10. Northwest view of Shed I and stone walls, camera facing southeast.
11. Southeast view of Shed II, camera facing northwest.

12. Northwest view of Shed II, camera facing southeast. Farmhouse is at left rear across the road.
13. Northwest view of Barn I, camera facing southeast. Barn II is at left.

14. Southeast view of Barn I, camera facing northwest. Farmhouse is at right rear. Milk house is at left rear.
15. Northeast view of Barns, camera facing southwest. Barn I is at left, addition at center, and Barn II at right.

16. Interior view of Barn I basement level, camera facing northeast. Note octagonal columns supporting the main loft level.
17. Interior view of Barn I upper level, camera facing west. Note hay track suspended below the upper tie-girts.

18. Interior view of Barn I upper level floor with trusswork bracing the floor framing, camera facing west.
19. West view of Barn II, camera facing east. Barn I is at right.

20. Northeast view of Barn II, camera facing southwest. Barn I addition is at left overlapping Barn II. Farmhouse woodshed is at right.
21. Interior view of Barn II main level, camera facing south, showing an early timber post surrounded by later material.

22. Interior view of Barn II tie-girt and queen post framing, from 1978 Sturbridge survey (Mott).

24. Image of the site from 1934 Fairchild aerial photograph, compared with Google Map view today; http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934.html. Changes since 1934 include some residential development and some regrowth of woodlands.