

NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORIC PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION  
LEPAGE-DOUCET TWO-FAMILY HOUSE  
NH STATE NO. 687

**Location:** 767-769 First Avenue, Berlin, Coos County, New Hampshire

USGS Berlin Quadrangle  
UTM Coordinates: Z19 4926351N 326082E

**Present Owner:** State of New Hampshire

**Present Occupant:** Vacant

**Present Use:** Vacant

**Construction/  
Renovation Date:** c.1912

**Significance:** This house contributes to the Berlin Heights Addition Historic District under Criterion A. It was occupied by various members of the same French Canadian family from c.1912 to 1963. The construction of the dwelling adjacent to the primary family residence and the occupancy of the house by family members and/or other working class tenants illustrates a common pattern of development and occupancy in this urban mixed ethnic neighborhood. The house also contributes to the District under Criterion C as an example of the two-family American Foursquare House form, a locally popular house type of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The house is divided into two units – upstairs and down with building characteristics such as exterior stairs and an adjacent-room plan including a large kitchen with bedrooms and living rooms radiating off that space reflecting French-Canadian building tradition.

**Project Information:** Project personnel included Lisa Mausolf, Historian, and Charley Freiberg, Photographer. Existing Conditions Surveys, Inc. prepared the plans. This documentation is mitigation for the relocation of NH Route 110 through the Berlin Heights Neighborhood Addition Historic District. This document draws extensively from earlier documentation prepared by Preservation Company including The Avenues/Berlin Heights Addition Historic District Area Form 2004 and the 2008 addendum. The large format photographs were taken in October 2010 and October 2011 and the report was finalized in August 2015. The building was demolished in Fall 2012.

**Description:**

The Lepage-Doucet Two-Family House at 767-769 First Avenue is an example of a multi-family variant of the American Foursquare. The 2 ½-story, hip-roofed, two-family constructed in the early decades of the twentieth century is fairly prevalent in Berlin. In the multi-family American Foursquare, the building is constructed with a basic four-square form but is adapted to two-family living with a more elongated core, different entrance configurations, and large porches. In this case a two-story porch, original but later enclosed with continuous windows, spans the south (side) elevation. Sanborn insurance maps indicate that the side porch was originally continuous with a two-story front porch. Sometime after 1955 the front porch was altered to its present configuration. It has been reduced to a single story and only shelters the southern half of the façade including the off-center front door and a window to the south. A two-story wing with shed roof projects from the north side of the rear elevation. The wing is shown on the earliest Sanborn map and appears to be original.

The two-family dwelling rests on a mortared stone foundation which has been painted. Vinyl siding with vinyl trim now covers the building exterior. Any original decorative detailing has been removed for the application of the vinyl siding. The roof is sheathed with asphalt shingles and a brick chimney rises from the north slope. All of the window openings contain vinyl replacement sash in either a 6/6, 8/8 (applied mullions) or 1/1 configuration with vinyl shutters.

A tall flight of concrete steps at the southeast corner of the house extends from the sidewalk to the front porch. At the bottom of the stairs a concrete retaining wall extends to the north along the sidewalk. The three-bay, flat-roofed front porch is supported by square posts with a wrought iron railing and is set on a modern brick base. The off-center entry accesses the first floor unit and contains a modern door with stained glass upper panels. There is a pair of windows to the north of the entrance and another in alignment upstairs. A single window is located south of the door, echoed by a similar window above. At the south end of the façade another modern door provides access to the stairs leading to the upstairs apartment. The north elevation has three bays towards the front of the house. All but one of the six windows contains 1/1 sash; the first floor front window contains a modern 8/8 sash. The north elevation of the rear extension has only a single hopper window on the second story.

The south elevation of the house is dominated by the enclosed two-story porches. On the first floor level, toward the front and corresponding to the interior stairs, the wall is solid. To the rear (west) the first floor is punctuated by five 1/1 windows. The second story has eight 1/1 windows spanning the length of the porch. The west (rear) end of the enclosed porch has a modern storm door on the first floor set atop a set of wooden stairs and sheltered by an aluminum canopy.

The rear (west) elevation of the main house block has two windows on the upper level and a single window on the first floor above a flat-roofed projection with door which accesses the basement. The shed-roofed rear section has a single small window on each level of the rear elevation.

An asphalt driveway extends along the south side of the house, terminating at a single-story garage which is located west of the house. The shed-roofed, single-story building measures 36' x 20'. According to Sanborn insurance maps, it was constructed between 1920 and 1928, replacing a smaller shed. The building is labeled as a "shop" on the 1928 and 1950 Sanborn maps. The building is set on a concrete foundation. It is sheathed primarily in vinyl siding; the west (rear) wall is wood-shingled. The east façade has two modern overhead garage doors; that to the south is set higher and is fronted by a paved ramp. There are two blocked former windows on the north end of the rear elevation.

The property consists of a rectangular lot measuring 50' x 110' or 0.13 acre. The house is located above the street level and the garage is set uphill slightly from the house. As is typical of the neighborhood the house is set mostly on a ledge outcropping.

### **Interior Description:**

The building at 767-769 First Avenue was constructed as a two-family dwelling with a single-family apartment downstairs and a single-family apartment upstairs. The floor plans are virtually identical with the exception that in the first floor unit the wall separating the two original bedrooms has been removed, forming one large bedroom. The first floor has two entrances – the front door off the front porch and a secondary entrance leading from the south porch into the kitchen at the southwest corner. As is common in French-Canadian dwellings, the kitchen is the most important space in each unit and all the other rooms radiate from there.

The first floor unit was renovated about 2005 and displays more modern finishes compared to the upstairs apartment including the replacement of the drywall, all new wooden trim and a combination of modern six-panel and louvered wooden doors. In the first floor unit the kitchen has more recent improvements including a large island plumbed with a sink. Also, in the first floor apartment, a half wall (paneled) separates the living room at the northeast corner from the dining room at the south east corner. There is a hardwood floor in the dining room and vinyl and carpeting elsewhere. The ceiling is covered with fiberboard tiles.

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The second floor unit was renovated c.1960. Surviving historic finishes include a wide uncased archway flanked by half walls between the living room and dining room and a five-panel door in one of the bedrooms. There is also a French door between the dining room and kitchen. The front rooms retain plaster walls and several of the windows in the front room retain fluted wooden trim with cornerblock moldings. All of the remaining woodwork in this apartment consists of varnished plain woodwork and hollow core doors dating to c.1960. The plaster walls in the bedrooms have been covered with sheets of paneling and the ceilings are covered with tiles. With the exception of the carpeted back bedroom and the bathroom, the floors are hardwood. The enclosed porch has linoleum tile flooring and tongue and groove pine paneling.

The attic is unfinished and has exposed framing. There is a walk-in basement at the rear of the house. As is the case with most houses in the neighborhood, the house is built on ledge giving the basement limited headroom. The basement has a concrete floor.

The single-story garage has a workshop area on the south end and a storage room located in the back between the two bays. The storage room and the workshop areas each have a raised step separating them from the parking area.

**History:**

The lot on which this house stands (12-29D in Berlin Heights Addition) was sold to Willis Tucker of Gorham in April 1901 (Coos County Registry of Deeds Book 105, Page 110). Willis Tucker was a lumberman who was living with his family on Glen Avenue in 1900. He died in 1906. Just two months later Tucker sold the property to Philip Lepage (Book 105, Page 299). Philip and Mary Lepage lived next door at 763 First Avenue.

Inspection of Sanborn maps and Census data indicates that the house was built sometime between 1910 and 1914. It was built as a two-family house. The original occupants of 767-769 First Avenue have not been identified.

By 1920 George Arthur Doucet (1885-1963) was living in one flat with his wife Josephine (Josie), daughter of Philip and Mary Lepage. The August 1919 issue of the *Brown Bulletin* reports that George Doucet had recently married Josie Lepage. The couple took a wedding trip to New York and Atlantic City.

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Both the 1920 and 1930 Censuses list George Doucet as a renter (paying \$25/month in 1930); he did not acquire the property until 1948 after Mary Lepage's death (Book 365, Page 384). Born in Worcester, Massachusetts to French-Canadian immigrants, Doucet worked for the Brown Company as a papermaker at the Cascade mill. He also served as secretary/treasurer of the local chapter of the International Brotherhood of Paper Makers. George and Josie Doucet had one child, Russell, who was born in 1920. Josie died in 1958 but George Doucet continued to live at 767 First Avenue until his death in 1963. The Doucets were members of St. Kieran parish and were buried at St. Anne Cemetery.

The other unit (#769) had a number of occupants over the years. Patrick Mullens was living here from about 1920 to 1930. He was born in Canada and was also a paper mill laborer. He shared the apartment with his wife Emma and three children. Patrick Shorey was living here in 1936. Leo and Flora (Lepage) Fortier were living here by 1939 and continued to live here until the early 1960s. Flora (or Florida) was a sister of Josie Doucet.

In 1963 Russell Doucet, administrator of his father's estate, sold the property to Edgar and Exila Dupuis for \$8,000 (Book 480, Page 281). They owned the house for about ten years. He worked as a woodsman. The other apartment was rented to Paul King. Leo and Louise Vallee acquired the property in 1976. Louise Vallee sold the property to Chau and Ke N. Tat in 2004 (Book 1097, Page 489). It was purchased by the State of New Hampshire in November 2010.

## **Bibliography**

Berlin Directories, various dates.

*Berlin Reporter*, 17 October 1963 [obituary of George Doucet].

*Brown Bulletin*, August 1919 [marriage of George Doucet and Josie Lepage].

City of Berlin Annual Report, 1930.

Coos County Registry of Deeds, Lancaster, NH.

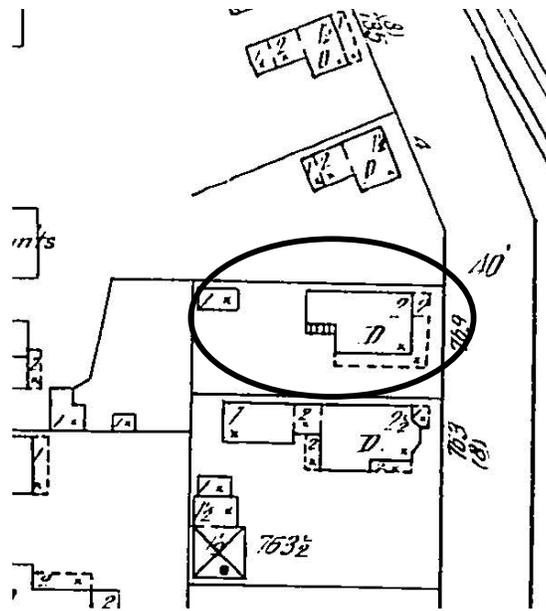
Preservation Company. Area Form for the Avenues/Berlin Heights Addition Historic District, 2008 Addendum. [On file at the NH Division of Historical Resources, Concord].

Preservation Company. *Berlin – The City That Trees Built: Turning Land and Lumber Into Neighborhoods*. Kensington, NH: 2015. [Prepared for the NH Department of Transportation and on file at the NH Division of Historical Resources, Concord].

Sanborn Insurance Maps, 1909, 1914, 1920, 1928, 1950, 1955.

U.S. Census, 1900-1930.

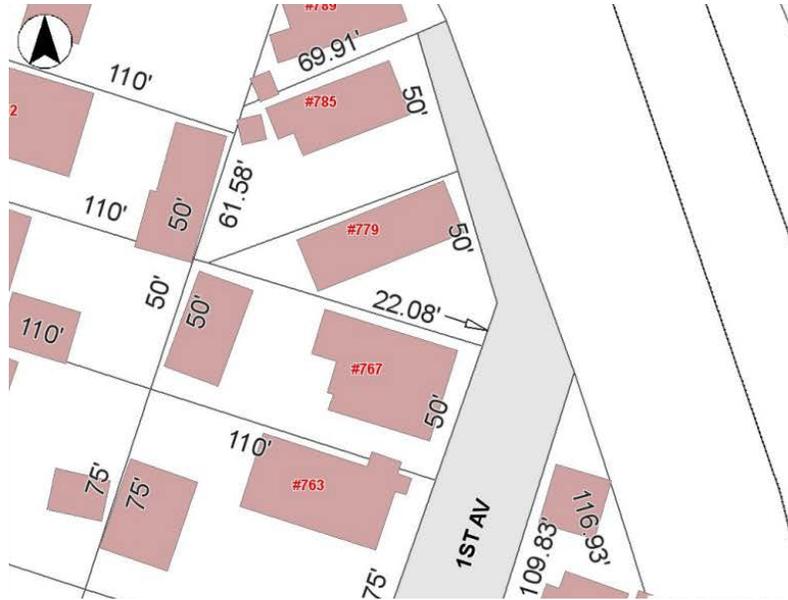
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1914 Sanborn Map

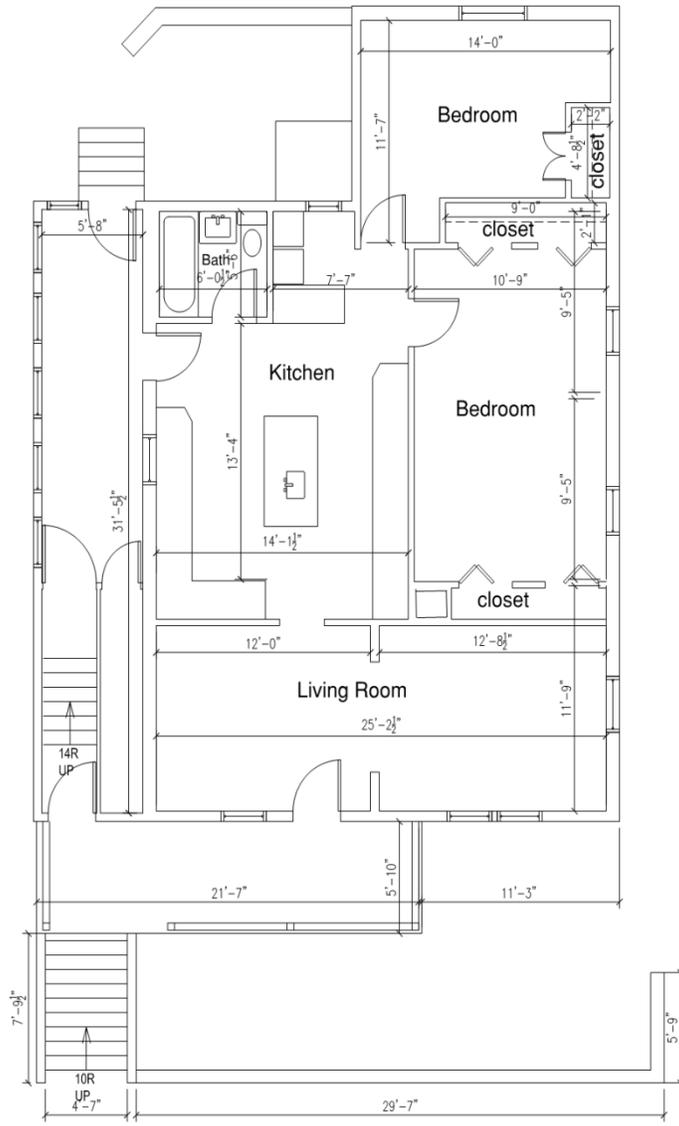
Note original two-story, front and side wrap-around porch. Porch is still in place at time of 1955 Sanborn map. Also, shed to rear enlarged to present form between 1920 and 1928.

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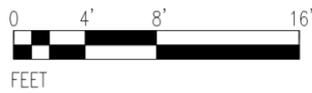


Assessor's Map

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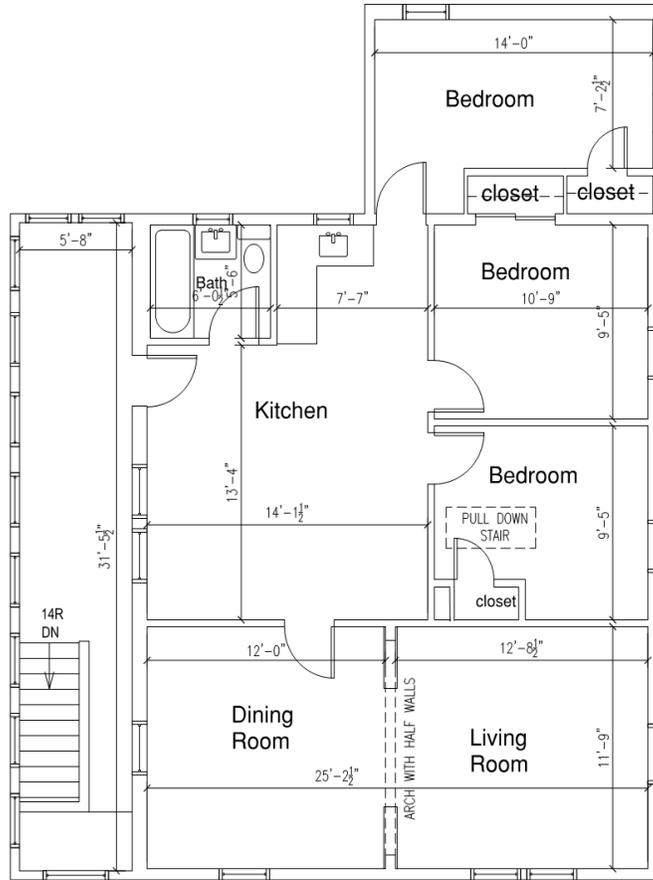


1 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

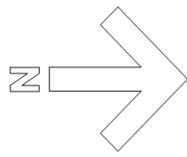
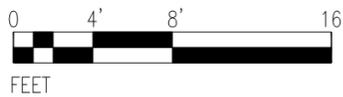


Existing First Floor Plan

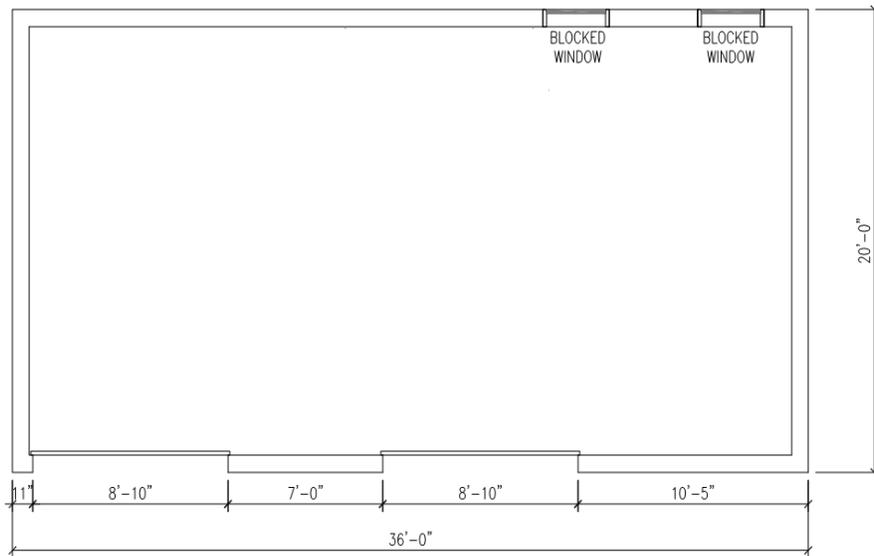
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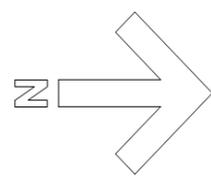
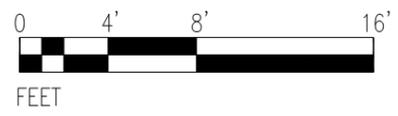
2 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
 EX-1



Existing Second Floor Plan



3 EXISTING GARAGE PLAN  
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Existing Garage Plan

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New Hampshire

Photographer: Charley Freiberg

NH State No. 687-1 View looking NW at east (façade) and south elevations with garage visible in distance. [October 2010]

NH State No. 687-2 View looking southwest showing east (façade) and north elevations. [October 2010]

NH State No. 687-3 View looking NE showing west (rear) and south elevations. [October 2010]

NH State No. 687-4 View looking SE at north and west (rear) elevations. [October 2010]

NH State No. 687-5 View looking N-NW at south and east (facade) elevations of garage. [October 2010]

NH State No. 687-6 View looking east at west (rear) and partial south elevations of garage. [October 2011]

NH State No. 687-7 Interior view, first floor living room, looking northeast with front door at right. [October 2011]

NH State No. 687-8 Interior view, first floor, looking southeast toward door down to street with door to storage area at left. [October 2011]

NH State No. 687-9 Interior view, second floor living room, looking northeast. [October 2011]

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- NH State No. 687-10 Interior view, second floor, looking NW showing kitchen and door opening onto porch. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 687-11 Interior view, second floor, looking SE showing original five-panel closet door in bedroom. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 687-12 View of attic rafters from top of drop down stairs. [October 2011]

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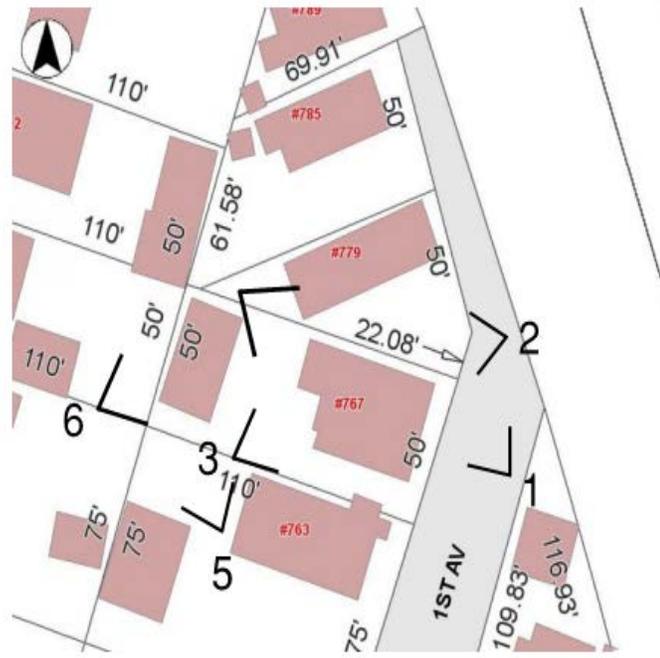
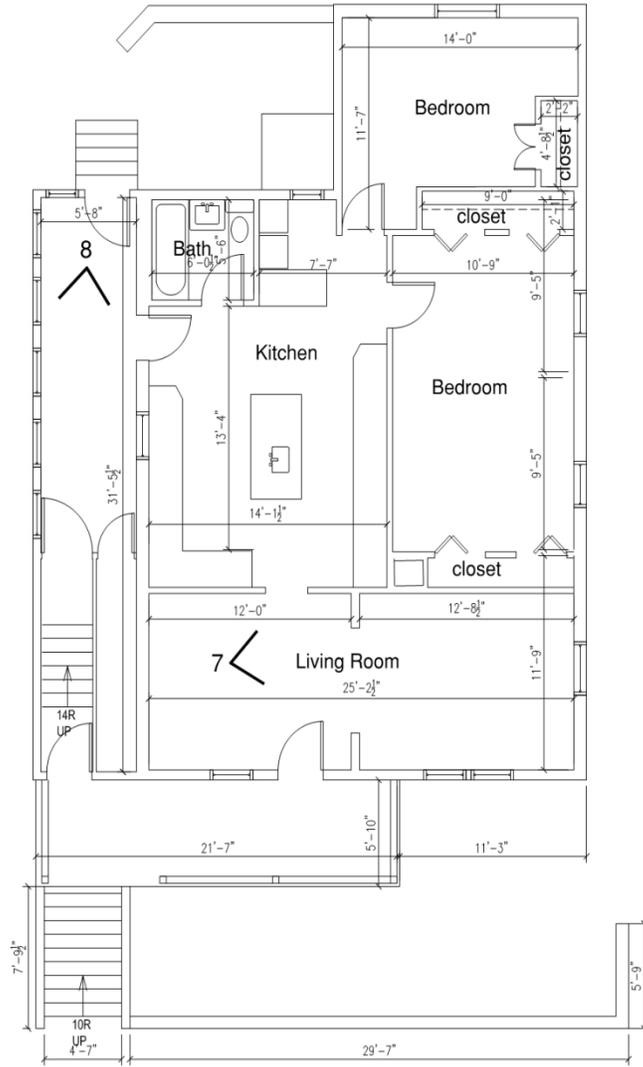


Photo Key – Exterior Photos

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1 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

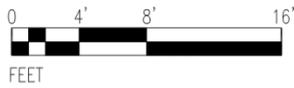
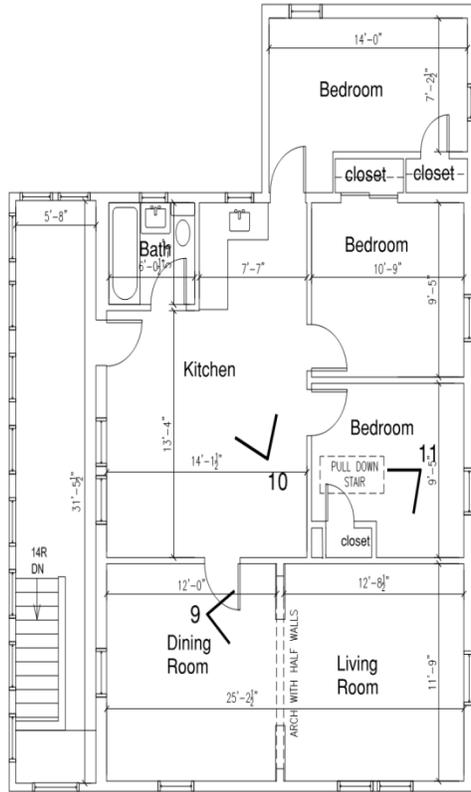


Photo Key – First Floor Photos

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2 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN  
 EX-1



Photo Key – Second Floor Photos



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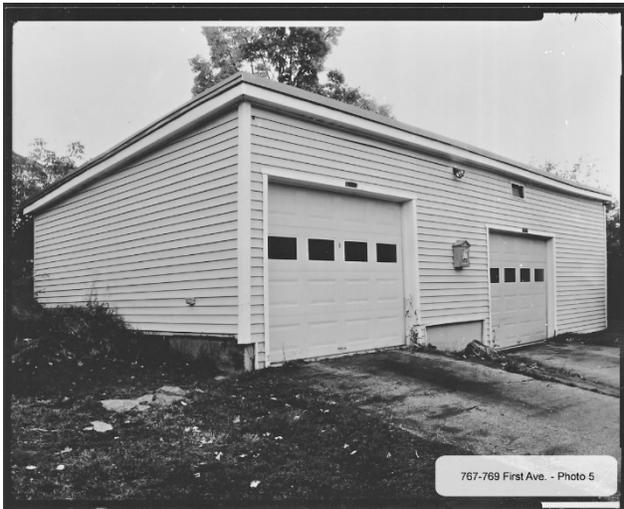
767-769 First Ave. - Photo 2



767-769 First Ave. - Photo 3



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767-769 First Ave. - Photo 5



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