

NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORIC PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION
BICKFORD RENTAL HOUSE
NH STATE NO. 689

- Location:** 785 First Avenue, Berlin, Coos County, New Hampshire
- USGS Berlin Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: Z19 4926353N 326093E
- Present Owner:** State of New Hampshire
- Present Occupant:** Vacant
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Construction/
Renovation Date:** 1899
- Significance:** This house contributes to the Berlin Heights Addition Historic District under Criterion A. It is one of three houses on First Avenue (779, 785 and 789) constructed by prominent local developer Gershon Bickford in the late 1890s as investment properties. It was occupied by a number of French Canadian and Russian families over the years; highlighting the ethnic mix of the neighborhood. Under Criterion C, the house also contributes to the district as one of three nearly identical houses that were built in a row at the end of First Avenue.
- Project Info.:** 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 June, September and October 2011 and the report was finalized in August 2015. The building was demolished in Fall 2012.

Description:

The house at 785 First Avenue is the central of what were originally three nearly identical single-family houses constructed in a row at the north end (west side) of First Avenue in 1899 (the others are 779 and 789 First Avenue). Like its neighbors, the 1 ½-story, 3 x 1-bay, side-gabled house has a prominent gable wall dormer centered on the facade. The house at 785 First is presently sheathed in vinyl siding and is set on a mortared rubble foundation that is finished with a topcoat of mortar. The roof is covered with asphalt shingles. The predominant window is a replacement 1/1 sash flanked by vinyl shutters. A modern octagonal window has been added on the rear wall of the house.

The entire east façade is fronted by a single-story, hip-roofed enclosed porch accessed by stone and concrete front stairs. All three of the houses were originally constructed without porches. The 1901 Sanborn map shows the house without a porch but it had been constructed by the time of the February 1905 map, apparently added by the original owner who did not sell the property until 1907. (The other two houses at 779 and 789 First Avenue did not see the addition of porches until after 1950.) The porch was enclosed at a later, unknown date. As seen today, the porch has continuous 1/1 storm windows with an exterior wooden door featuring four horizontal panes of glass over a panel.

Extending behind the main house block is a 1 ½-story ell, aligned with the northern wall. Like the main house, it is sheathed in vinyl siding. An exterior, concrete block chimney rises along the west wall of the ell, punctuating the single story shed at the west end. A single-story, hip-roofed porch is located on the south side of the ell. Its date of construction is not clear. A porch is shown in this location on the 1905 Sanborn map but is not depicted on subsequent maps (Sanborn Maps, 1909-1950). Like the front porch, it was enclosed by continuous 1/1 windows at an unknown date.

The house has a small, open lawn to the east and south. There were two mature lilac bushes near the street which have been removed. To the south of the house there is a small dirt parking spot and a large but low rock outcropping. The paved driveway for the house next door at 789 First is immediately north of the house.

Interior:

The building at 785 First Avenue was constructed in 1899 as a single-family dwelling and has served that purpose since its construction. The house like its neighbors at 779 and 789 First Avenue employed a plan found in many small houses of the period. There is a large front room, entered directly through the front door, with the kitchen in the rear ell and several small bedrooms on the second floor accessed by a stair between the main block and rear ell.¹ Today, the main entry into the house is through the enclosed front porch. The interior walls of the porch have been covered with paneling. The off-center front door is a modern unit with 3 x 2 upper lights. To the north is a single window; on the south side of the entrance there is a pair of 1/1 windows.

Inside, the walls of the living room are covered with plywood sheets that have been varnished or polyurethaned. Adjacent to the front door, a wooden post gives rise to an east-west ceiling beam. The reason for the beam is not known although it may indicate a previous room division (a similar beam is visible in 779 First Avenue). The floor is covered in linoleum tiles and the ceiling is covered with fiberboard tiles. A closet is located in the northeast corner of the room and the staircase leading upstairs is located on the west wall, adjacent to the ell.

The rear ell contains the kitchen. The walls are modern drywall with simple baseboards and door and window surrounds. The floor is covered in linoleum and there are painted wooden kitchen cabinets. The rear shed is divided into a bathroom and utility room and are accessed through the kitchen. The walls of the enclosed rear porch, south of the kitchen, are sheathed in vertical, varnished, boards.

The staircase leading upstairs from the living room is narrow and winding with wooden steps with high risers. At the top of the stairs there is a simple stick balustrade with a knobbed newel post. The walls of the staircase are sheathed in modern faux wood paneling. There is a small closet at the top of the stairway wall and a small hallway connects the two front bedrooms. The smaller bedroom to the south has a sloping ceiling with exposed lath and cracked plaster. The walls are papered and the flooring consists of unfinished wood boards. The larger bedroom to the north incorporates the front dormer window. The walls in this room are paneled and the ceiling has surface-mounted acoustical tiles. A door in the west wall of the bedroom leads to a storage area corresponding to the upper level of the rear ell. This unfinished space has a plywood floor and fiberboard attached to the sloping ceiling.

¹ See Preservation Company, *Berlin – The City That Trees Built: Turning Land and Lumber Into Neighborhoods* (Kensington, NH, 2015), 61. Of the three, 789 First Avenue is the most intact. See Level I Documentation Report prepared by Preservation Company.

The basement consists of an unfinished crawl space with low head room, stone walls and an uneven dirt floor with rock outcroppings.

History:

The land on which this house is set was originally part of the Berlin Heights Addition of 1897. Developer Gershon Bickford filed a new subdivision plan for three lots in 1897 (Coos County Registry of Deeds Plan 1897 Book 90, Page 403) and soon after, three houses were built in a row at the end of First Avenue (779, 785 and 789 First Avenue). Such placement of nearly identical houses was unusual in Berlin. Gershon Percival Bickford (1873-1962) was born in New York City but raised in Washington, D.C. His father was a native of Milan, New Hampshire. Gershon Bickford moved to Berlin in the early 1890s and remained here until 1909 when he returned to Maryland where he continued as a real estate agent. During his nearly twenty years in Berlin, Bickford played a significant role in the development of residential properties in the city, as a real estate agent, developer and financier and was active in many of Berlin's newly developing neighborhoods. In addition to acquiring land and developing the lots as speculative housing or for rental purposes, he also resold unimproved lots and provided mortgages. The magnitude of his real estate activity is evident in hundreds of transactions in County grantor and grantee indices. He lived with his family at 739 Second Avenue (Preservation Company 2015: 55-56).

In 1907 Bickford sold this house to John and Sarah Roy who lived here several years before ownership of the house reverted back to Bickford through foreclosure. The Roys were French Canadian, immigrating to this country in the early 1890s. John Roy worked in the paper mill. The couple had nine children of whom only six were still living in 1910. The eldest, Joseph was 16 and worked as a grocery store clerk. The other children ranged in age from infancy to 14 (Census 1910).

In 1914 Gershon Bickford sold the house to Isaac Aubin who sold it immediately to George F. Lapointe (then of Vermont) (Book 169, Page 96). He was the owner of several properties in the neighborhood. In 1917 Lapointe sold the house to "Fedora Molachka" (Book 179, Page 176). The 1920 Census records indicate that Fred and Mary Anne Molasky (presumably the same as "Fedora Molachka" mentioned in deed records) came from Russia in 1909; he worked as a laborer in the paper mill. They had four children born between 1913 and 1918, all in Berlin. In 1920 there were also several Russian men boarding with the family (1920 Census).

In the later 1920s through the 1940s the house was rented by Kostick (also Carter or Constantine) Darchik (1895-1973), who was born in Kowel, Russia and came to this

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country in 1913. Darchik was employed by the Brown Company and was a member of the Russian church (*Berlin Reporter*, Aug. 16, 1973, p. 10). He was a widower and in 1930 he was living here with three Russian male boarders between the ages of 46 and 52. The men all either worked as woodsmen or in the paper mill (1930 Census).

In 1950 the house was occupied by Placid Caron; Darchik had moved next door to 789 First Avenue. Caron, born in New Hampshire in 1909, worked in the paper mill. He continued to rent this house until his death in 1975. During part of this period it was owned by John and Mary Sullivan. John Sullivan sold the property to Laurent and Carol Boucher in 1974 (Book 568, Page 461). It was sold to the State of New Hampshire in 2010 (Book 1310, Page 568).

Bibliography

Ancestry.com.

Berlin Directories, various dates.

Berlin Reporter, August 16, 1973 [obituary of Constantine Darchik].

Coos County Registry of Deeds, Lancaster, NH.

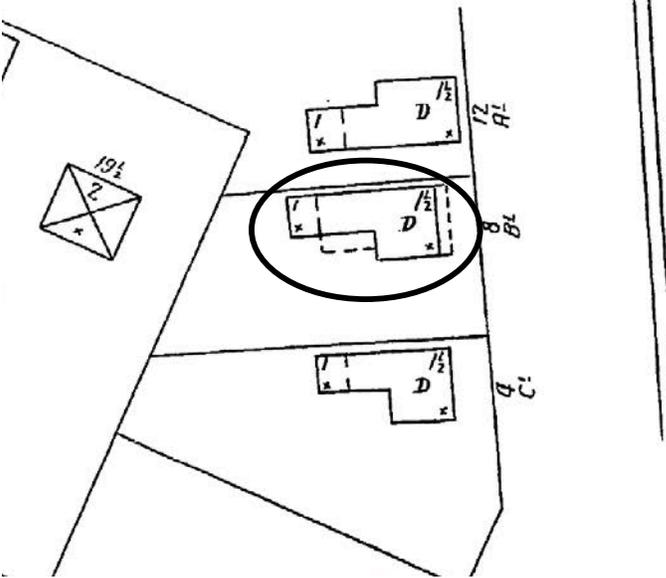
Preservation Company. Area Form for the Avenues/Berlin Heights Addition Historic District, 2008 Addendum. [On file at the NH Division of Historical Resources, Concord].

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, Berlin, 1901, 1905, 1909, 1914, 1928, 1950, 1955.

U.S. Census, 1900-1930.

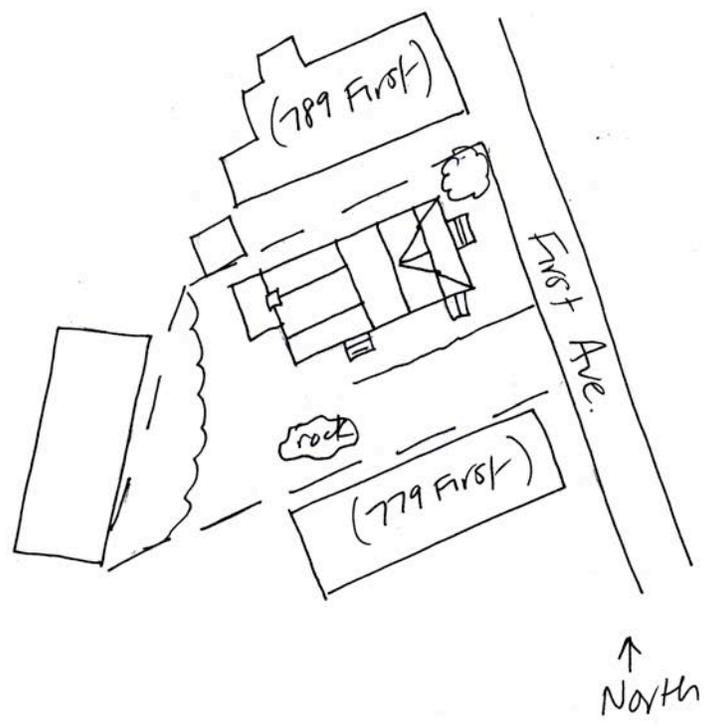
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785 First Ave. is at center (circled)

Sanborn Insurance Map, Feb. 1905

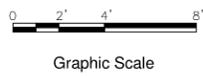
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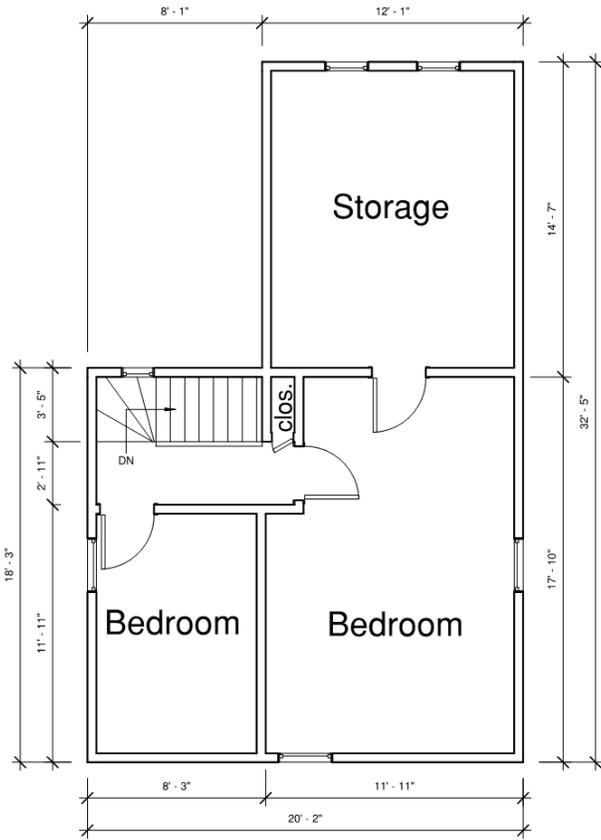
Existing Site Map



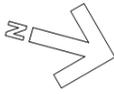
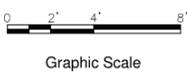
FIRST FLOOR 1
09



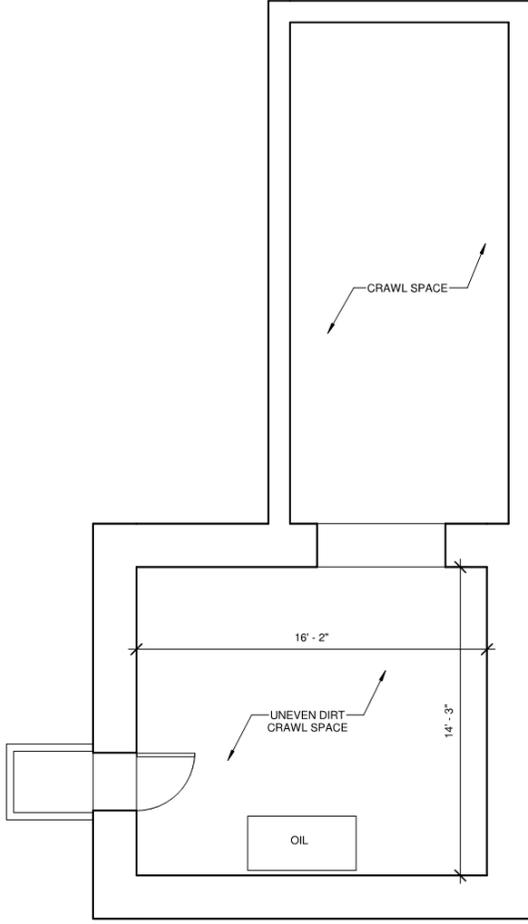
Existing First Floor Plan



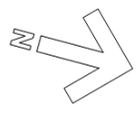
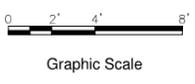
SECOND FLOOR 2
09



Existing Second Floor Plan



BASEMENT 0
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Existing Basement Plan

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New Hampshire

Photographer:

Charley Freiberg

NH State No. 689-1

View looking west showing south and east (façade) elevations. [September 2011]

NH State No. 689-2

View looking southwest showing east (façade) and north elevations. [September 2011]

NH State No. 689-3

View looking northeast showing west (rear) and south elevations. [October 2010]

NH State No. 689-4

View looking northwest showing 779, 785 & 789 First Avenue. [September 2011]

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Interior, first floor living room, looking northeast toward front door. [October 2011]

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Interior, inside south porch, looking west. [October 2011]

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Interior, first floor, looking south up stairs to second floor. [June 2011]

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Interior, second floor, looking north, down stairs to first floor. [June 2011]

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Interior, second floor, looking northeast toward front wall. [October 2011]

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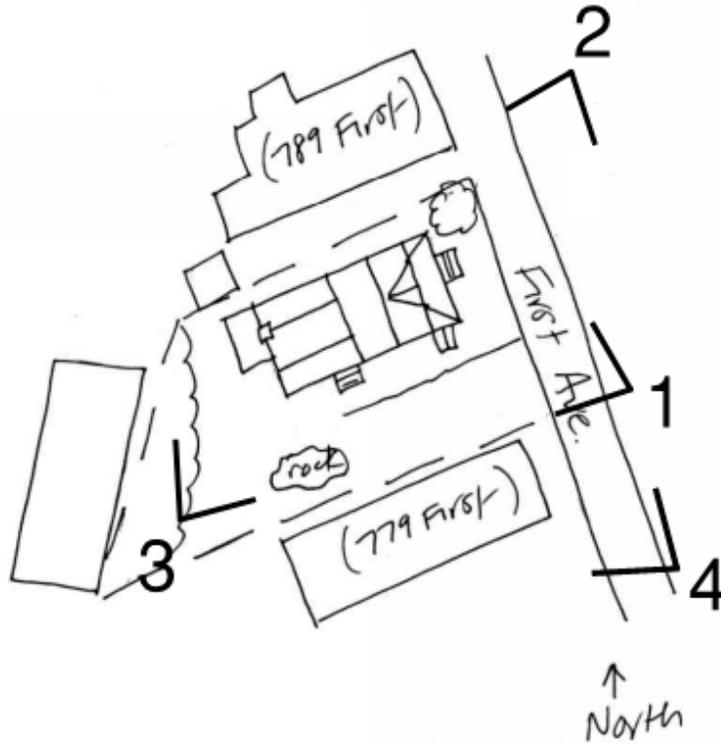
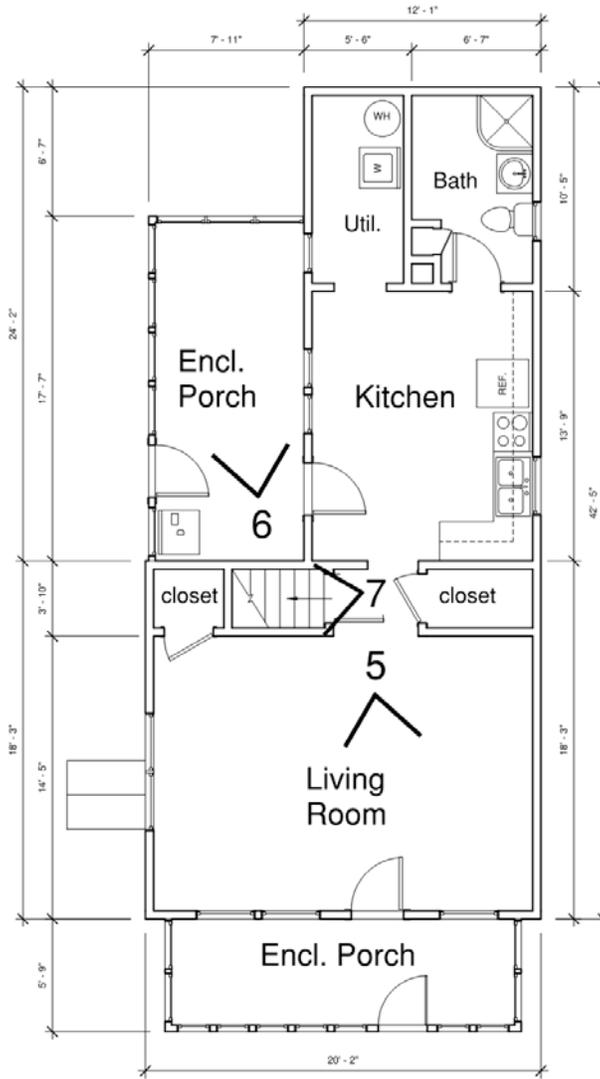


Photo Key – Exterior Photos

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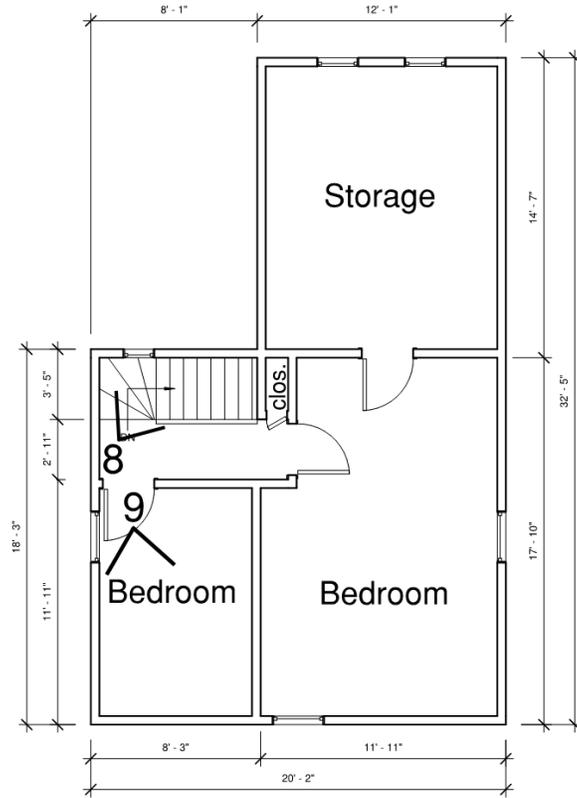


FIRST FLOOR 1
09



Photo Key – First Floor Photos

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SECOND FLOOR 2
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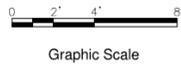


Photo Key – Second Floor Photos



