

NEW HAMPSHIRE HISTORIC PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION
BRASSARD TWO-FAMILY HOUSE
NH STATE NO. 691

- Location:** 832 Second Avenue, Berlin, Coos County, New Hampshire
- USGS Berlin Quadrangle
UTM Coordinates: Z19 4926438N 326077E
- Present Owner:** State of New Hampshire
- Present Occupant:** Vacant
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Construction/
Renovation Date:** c.1917
- Significance:** This house contributes to the Berlin Heights Addition Historic District under Criteria A & C. It was originally built as a two-family investment property. About ten years after construction, it was purchased by Eugene Brassard, the second-generation French Canadian proprietor of the adjacent grocery store (836 Second Avenue) and was one of several adjacent properties owned by members of the Brassard family. This cluster of dwellings and store owned by family members illustrates a common pattern of development, ownership, 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. Although not always occupied by two families, the house conveys this historic use.
- 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 October 2011 and the report was finalized in August 2015. The building was demolished in Winter 2011/Spring 2012.

Description:

The Brassard Two-Family House at 832 Second Avenue is a variation on the multi-family American Foursquare. The two-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 typically adapted to two-family living with a more elongated core, different entrance configurations, and large porches. In this case the house is lacking the characteristic front porch, likely a concession to the small size of the building lot.

The main house block is 2 x 2 bays, two stories with a pyramidal hip roof. It is set on a rough-cut local stone foundation which is laid using a locally-popular technique with a thick mortar on the face of the stones and a projecting grapevine joint that is intended to simulate a formal ashlar pattern. Vinyl siding now covers the formerly clapboarded first floor while wood shingles sheath the walls of the upper level. Between the stories there is a flared, shingled skirt. The roof is sheathed in asphalt shingles and the overhanging eaves have molded cornices. The brick chimney which rises just off the ridge incorporates a decorative pattern of darker stretcher bricks on alternating courses at the center of each face (this detail is also seen at 840 Second Avenue). The predominant window is a double-hung replacement 1/1 sash. Shallow entablature lintels survive. There is a new tripartite window on the first floor of the façade although an original tripartite window survives on the first floor of the adjacent north elevation, toward the front. It has a central single pane fixed window with three-light transom flanked by smaller double-hung windows with three vertical lights over a single lower light. The wooden window is protected by a wooden storm window. Lighting the front stairway is a Queen Anne-style fixed window consisting of a rectangular central pane with smaller rectangular border and square corner panes.

Twin front doors (modern replacements) are located in the south bay of the façade, sheltered by a low-pitched gable door hood with cornice returns, a beadboard underside and diagonal braces. The door hood appears to be historic although the stoop is a modern concrete replacement with metal railings. The left hand entrance enters into the first floor unit; the right hand door opens to stairs that lead up to the second.

Projecting from the south wall is a single-story, flat-roofed sun porch addition that dates to the 20th century although it is not shown on the 1955 Sanborn map. It is set on a concrete block foundation and the continuous windows now contain 1/1 replacement sash. To the east of the sun porch is a two-story porch, enclosed by plywood on the lower level but open above, with simple posts on a clapboarded wall. Deteriorated concrete steps lead up to the porch which is also not depicted on the 1955 map. According to Sanborn maps, the rear section was originally only a single story in height.

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East of the porch is an attached three-level shed extension which is set on concrete. It is clad in wood clapboards with a flat roof and overhanging eaves on the south side. The Sanborn maps do show two small detached single car garages to the east of the house and it is possible that this extension is actually a reworking of the two earlier buildings with one set atop the other. There is a vehicle bay with a pair of hinged doors on the north wall. Above there is a loft door with diamond-shaped glass pane and other openings which have been filled in. On the south side, the lower level opening is covered with plywood and a single 1/1 window with entablature lintel is located on the second floor. There are no openings on the east wall.

An asphalt driveway extends along the south side of the house. The small lot measures just 0.06 acre with approximately 39' frontage along Second Avenue. There is only a small margin of yard around the footprint of the house on all sides. A narrow strip of land which is ten feet wide and 110 feet long forms the southern boundary and was intended to provide access to the residential property to the east (838 Second Avenue) which was also owned by the same family in the early 20th century.

Interior Description:

The building at 832 Second Avenue was constructed as a two-family dwelling with a single-family apartment downstairs and a single-family apartment upstairs. Over the years, the house switched back and forth between single family and two-family occupancy. The first and second floor plans are similar although in recent years the first floor apartment had two bedrooms and the upper unit had three. The first floor unit also has the added square footage afforded by the later sun porch which makes for a larger kitchen. Until recently there was a full bathroom on the first and second floors although the last owner removed the fixtures and interior finishes from the first floor bathroom, leaving only the plumbing.

The first floor unit displays few historic details. There are a few entablature window lintels but most of the finishes appear to date to the 1950s or later. The kitchen and adjacent sunroom addition display deteriorating vinyl floor covering, metal cabinets, Formica counters with metal trim and formica panels covering the ceiling. There is a built-in ironing board cabinet in the sunroom. The living room in the northwest corner has paneling on the walls and a hardwood floor. Most of the door and window trim is plain, varnished (modern) trim. The back porch which has been enclosed by plywood has original clapboarded walls and a five-panel door accessing the back shed.

The second floor unit has more surviving historic finishes. It is accessed by a front stairway that runs along the south wall from the front door. At the top of the stairs various doors open onto the large hallway which also includes another built-in cabinet for an ironing board. The width of the hallway leading to the back bedrooms varies and is just three feet wide at its most narrow point. All of the woods are hardwood; there are some fluted moldings with cornerblocks and

simpler, wider door surrounds and baseboards. Most of the doors have five horizontal panels; the door leading to the back porch has an upper window and seven raised panels. A modest kitchen has been inserted in the middle room on the north wall and has c.1980 wooden cabinets and a pass-through opening to the room to the west. The ceilings are covered with fiberboard tiles.

The interior of the rear storage shed is unfinished and divided into several different storage areas on three levels. On the lowest level, double diagonal board doors on the north side open into a garage bay with concrete floor. The interior west wall of the garage is what was formerly the exposed exterior stone foundation. The shed utilizes a variety of interior sheathing including wide horizontal boards, varnished beadboard in the stairwell, painted red boards and insulated boards. There is a staircase leading to the second level which includes a raised loft at the north end.

The basement is accessed from a door in the first floor kitchen. As is the case with most houses in the neighborhood, the house is built on ledge giving the basement limited headroom of about 5.5 feet. The basement has stone walls and a concrete floor. There are no remarkable details present in the basement.

History:

The lot on which this house stands (17-29D in the Berlin Heights Addition) was sold by the Berlin Heights Addition to (Mrs.) Bell Foy Seekins in 1907 (Coos County Registry of Deeds, Book 137, Page 243). The 1900 Census places Bell C. Foy in Fairfield, Maine. She was then 39 years old, born in Maine, divorced and worked as a dressmaker. On January 7, 1901 Bell C. Foy of Fairfield, Maine had married Preston Seekins of Waterville, Maine. At 39 years of age, this was her fourth marriage; it was a first marriage for the 23 year old groom (Ancestry.com). The couple later divorced and in 1913 Mrs. Seekins married Ernest Atwood in Maine.

In 1912 Bell C. Foy Seekins sold her property in Berlin to local investor George Lapointe (Book 160, Page 30). Sanborn insurance maps indicate that the house was built between 1914 and 1920 (Sanborn 1914, 1920). In 1917 real estate agents Charles James and Miner B. Carpenter owned the lot and sold it to Paul and Minnie Tergeon. He worked in the Cascade Mill and at the time they lived on Third Avenue. The two-family house was standing the following year when it was bought by Eugene Lessard (Book 189, Page 98). Lessard lived here only a few years. He had emigrated from Quebec in 1912 and worked in the Sulfite Mill. The 1920 Census indicates that he was then 27 years old and lived here with his wife Delia and infant daughter, Florence. Their tenants were another French Canadian mill worker, Chrystolonge Dumas, and his wife Agnes (1920 Census). By the time of the 1930 Census the Lessard family was renting at 569 Champlain Street.

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By 1923 the property was owned by Maurice and Sarah Rubinoff. The apartment was occupied by Max Rubinoff (1923 Directory). The Rubinoffs sold the property to Alfred Landry in 1924 (Book 224, Page 66). He owned it for four years (Book 248, Page 227).

Eugene Brassard (b.1902) purchased the house in 1928, at the time of his marriage (Book 248, Page 227). Eugene was born in New Hampshire in 1902. His mother, Emma, was a French Canadian widow who came to this country in 1896 and owned the store next door (836 Second Avenue) where Eugene and his brothers operated a grocery. Eugene's wife Lucienne (b.1900) emigrated from Canada in 1928 shortly before they married. Their daughter Denise was born in 1929 (1930 Census).

For a time, there were two apartments in the house in addition to the owner's residence. In 1930 Sylvia Coulombe, a grocery salesman, was living in one apartment with his wife Aldea and paid \$18/month rent. Another apartment was rented to Arthur and Lea Brigo for \$20/month. He was a laborer in the paper mill (1930 Census). In 1932 the tenants were William Ryan and Joseph Ray (1932 Directory). Later directories all suggest the Brassards occupied the house as a single-family dwelling (1936, 1941, 1950 Directory). Other members of the Brassard family lived close by. For a while, Phillip Brassard lived in the house behind the store (838 Second) and George Brassard lived at 840 Second Avenue. In 1953 Eugene Brassard sold the adjacent grocery store.

In 1973 Lucienne Brassard, then of Sherbrooke, Quebec, sold the building to Roger Couture and Ralph Holmes (Book 555, Page 223). The downstairs apartment was rented for a number of years by Mrs. Regina Landry (1969, 1974 Directory). In 1974 the property was sold by Ralph Holmes and Roger Couture to Leon and Rose Suffill (Book 570, Page 636). At the same time Lucienne Brassard also sold the Suffills the narrow strip of land (110' x 10') along the south edge of the property which led to 838 Second Ave. to the east (Book 576, Page 486). Rose Suffill died in 1982 and the property was later inherited by Dorothy Girouard (later Nadeau). Dorothy Nadeau sold it to Randy Belanger in 1990 (Book 761, Page 536). Belanger's estate sold the property in 2001. It was purchased by Jayco Laughton in 2006. He returned it to a single-family residence before selling the property to the State of New Hampshire in April 2011 (Book 1325, Page 41).

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Bibliography

Ancestry.com <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?h=1149329&db=MaineMarriageRe&indiv=try>

Berlin Directories, various dates.

Coos County Registry of Deeds, Lancaster, NH.

Maine Marriage Records

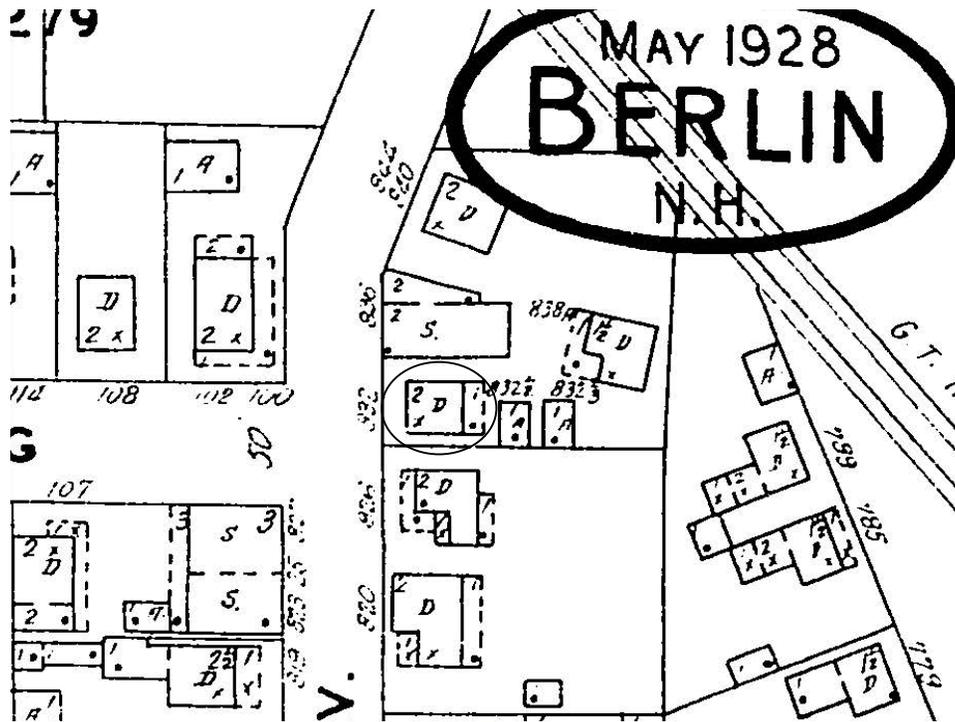
http://www.maineancestry.com/individual_marriage_record.asp?id=61934

Preservation Company. Area Form for the Avenues/Berlin Heights Addition Historic District, 2008 Addendum. [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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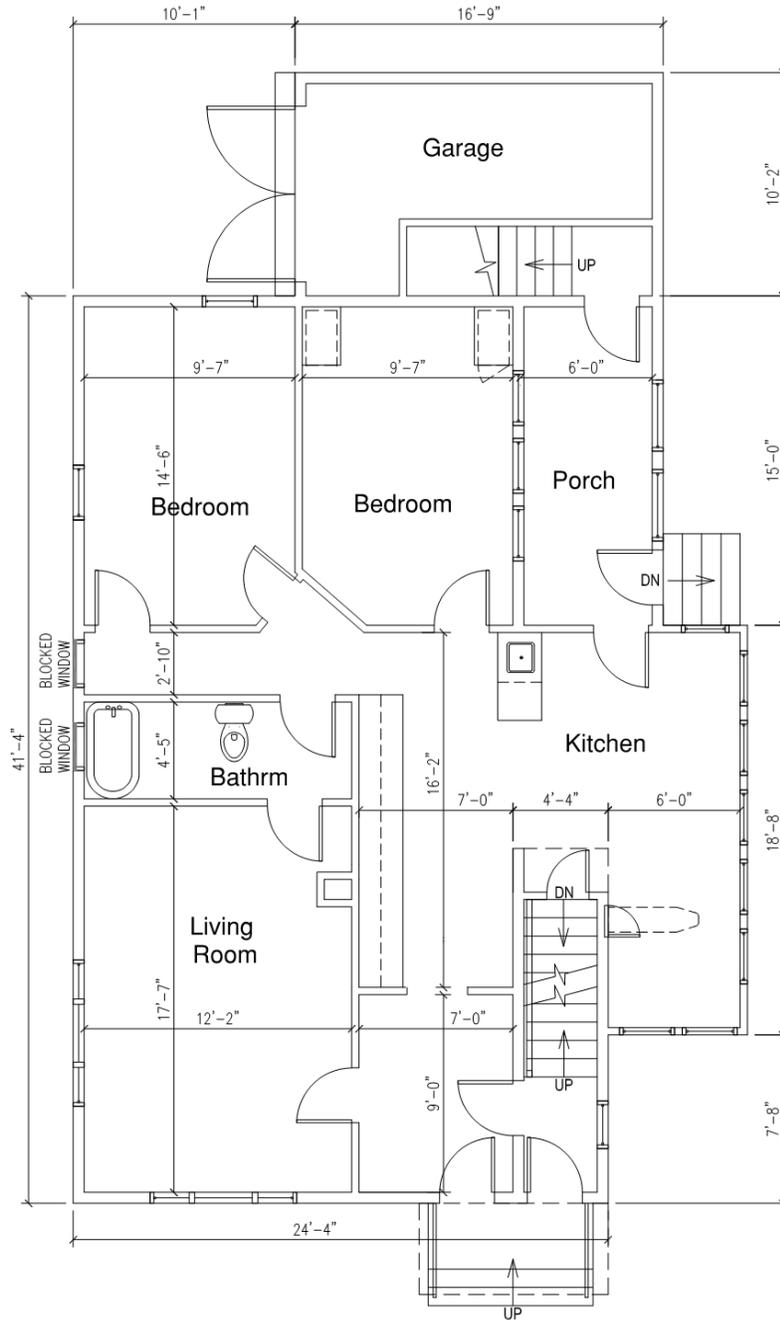


1928 Sanborn Map (832 Second (circled) is unchanged on the 1950 & 1955 maps)

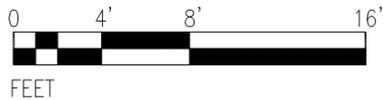
Note: 832, 836, 838 & 840 Second Avenue are all owned at this time by the Brassard family.

Two garages to the east of 832 Second may actually be incorporated in extension to east.

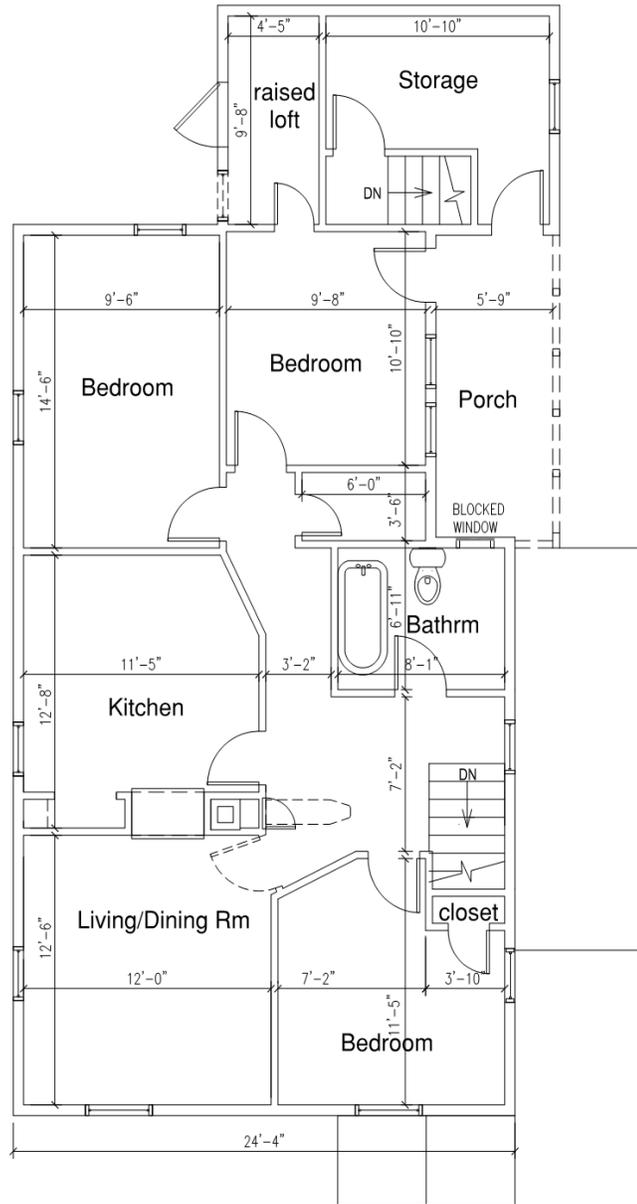
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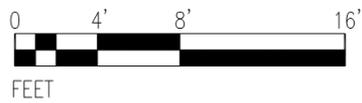
2 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

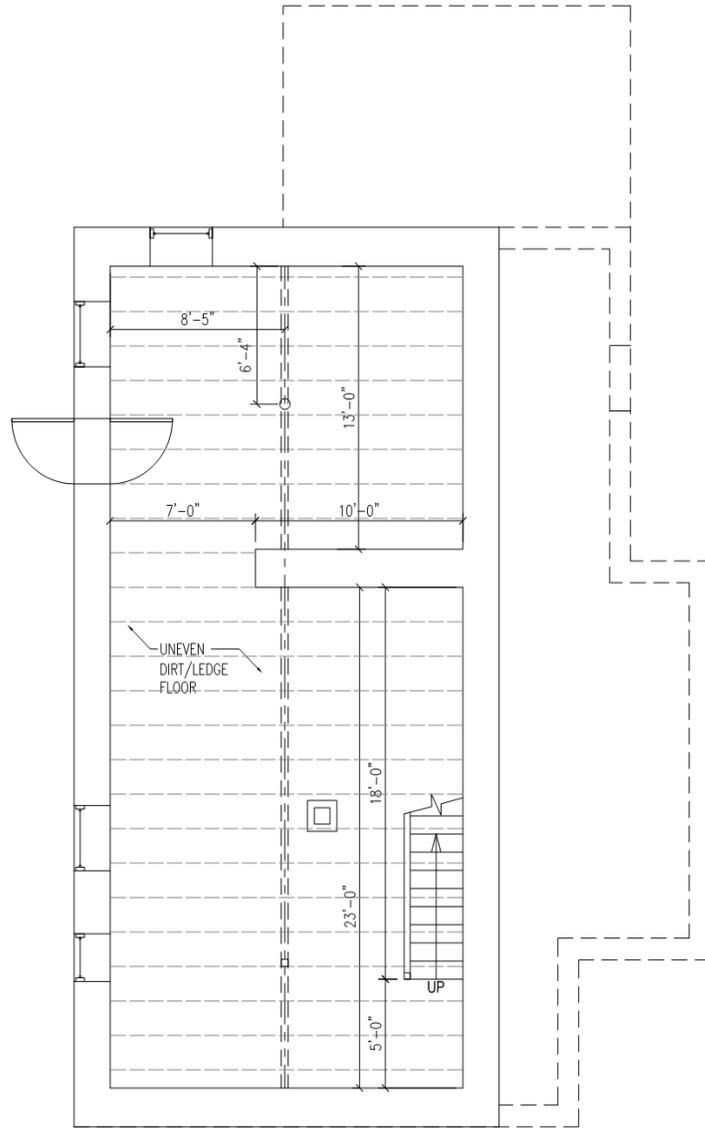


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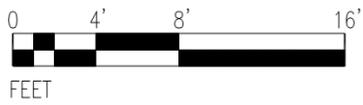


3 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN





1 EXISTING BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN



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Photographer: Charley Freiberg

- NH State No. 691-1 View looking SE at north and west (façade) elevations with 838 Second Ave. visible at left and 826 & 820 Second Ave. to right. [October 2010]
- NH State No. 691-2 View looking east showing west (façade) and south elevations. [October 2010]
- NH State No. 691-3 View looking NW showing south and east (rear) elevations. [October 2010]
- NH State No. 691-4 View looking SW at north and east (rear) elevations. [October 2010]
- NH State No. 691-5 View looking south at original wooden tripartite window on north elevation. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-6 Interior view, first floor, looking west toward front door with door to basement visible at left. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-7 Interior view, front stairhall, looking south at window. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-8 Interior view, first floor porch, looking east. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-9 Interior view, second floor hallway, looking north showing built-in ironing board cabinet. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-10 Interior view, second floor, looking west showing hallway and typical five-panel door to left. [October 2011]
- NH State No. 691-11 Interior view, second floor, looking southeast showing original glass-and-panel door leading out to clapboarded porch. [October 2011]

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NH State No. 691-12 View of second floor porch looking west toward street. [October 2011]

NH State No. 691-13 View looking south down stairs in attached shed. [October 2011]

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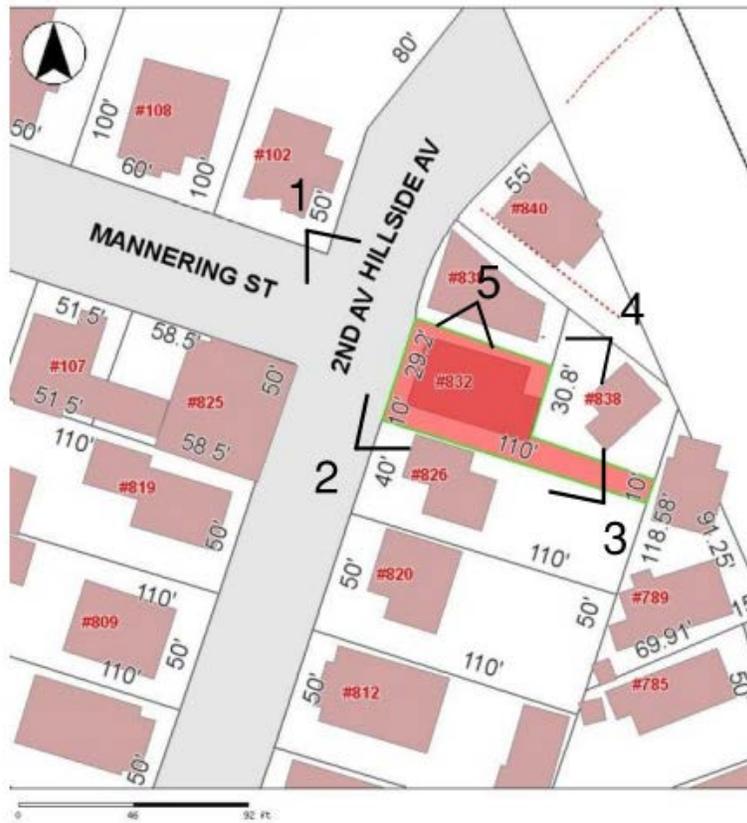
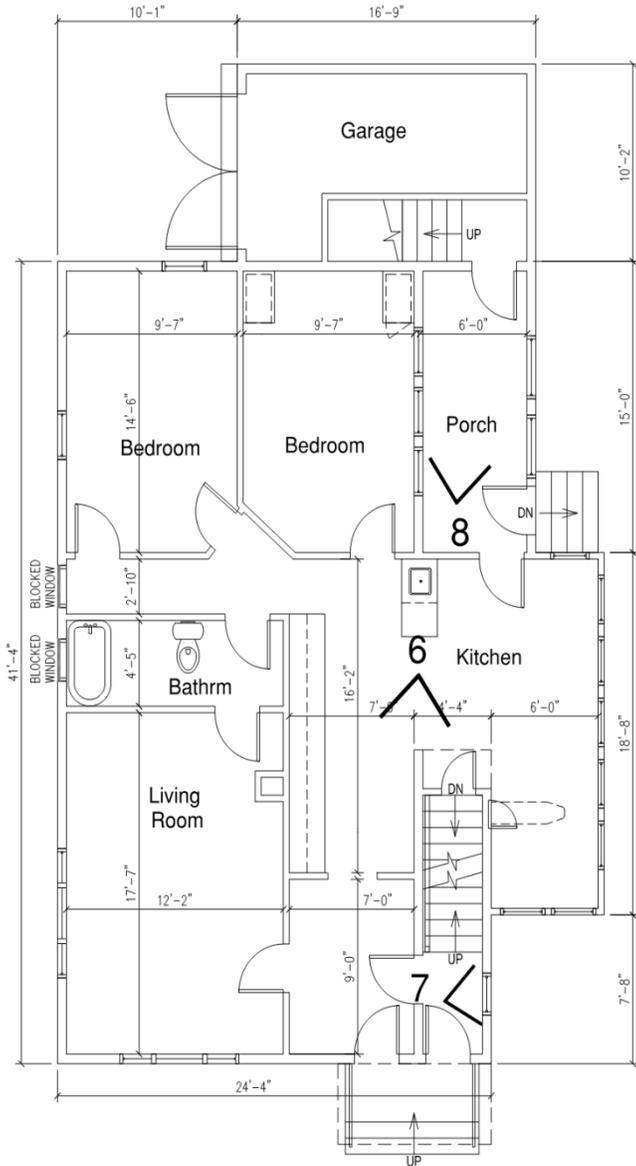


Photo Key – Exterior Photos

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2 EXISTING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

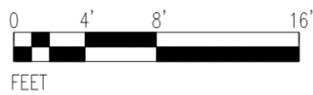
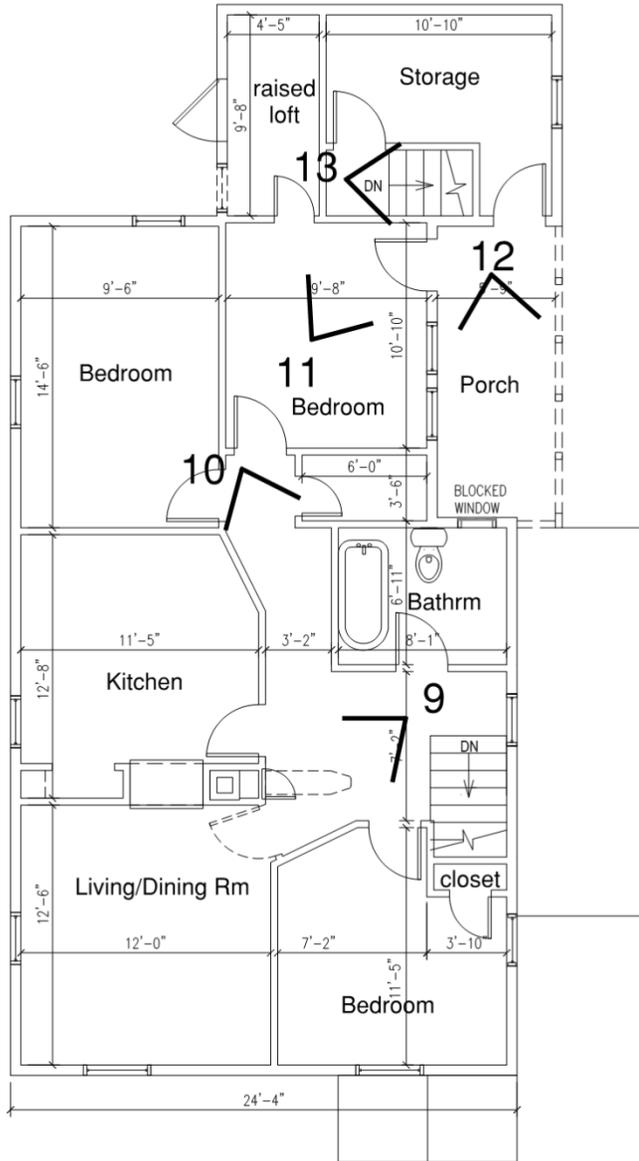


Photo Key – First Floor Photos

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3 EXISTING SECOND FLOOR PLAN

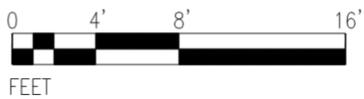


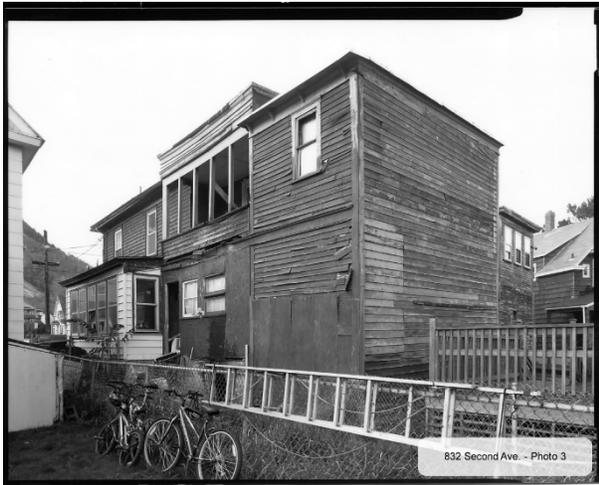
Photo Key – Second Floor Photos



832 Second Ave. - Photo 1



832 Second Ave. - Photo 2



832 Second Ave. - Photo 3



832 Second Ave. - Photo 4



832 Second Ave. - Photo 5



832 Second Ave. - Photo 6



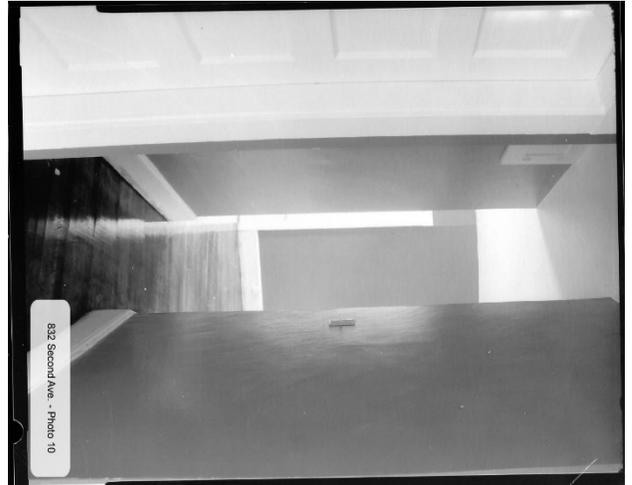
832 Second Ave. - Photo 7



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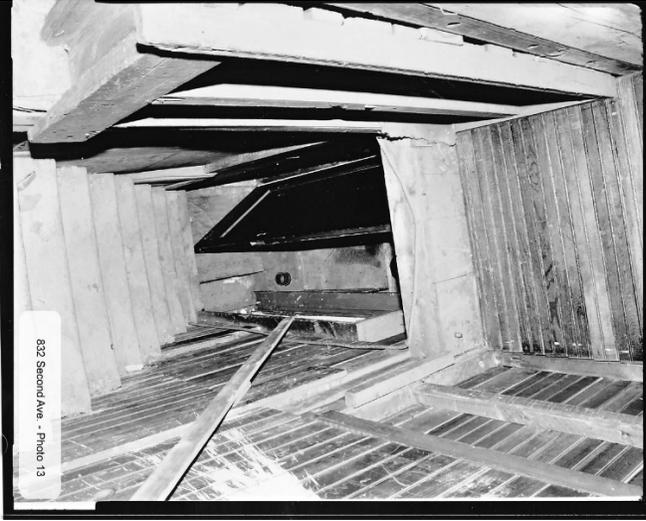
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