

Cecilia Préstamo / The Hartford Courant

Boce W. Barlow Jr. sits in the living room of his Blue Hills section home. He was the first African-American elected to the state Senate, and the first in the state judiciary. Barlow's house has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

# Honoring a home of historic achievement

and his family helped change us all

By JANE ELLEN DEE  
*Courant Correspondent*

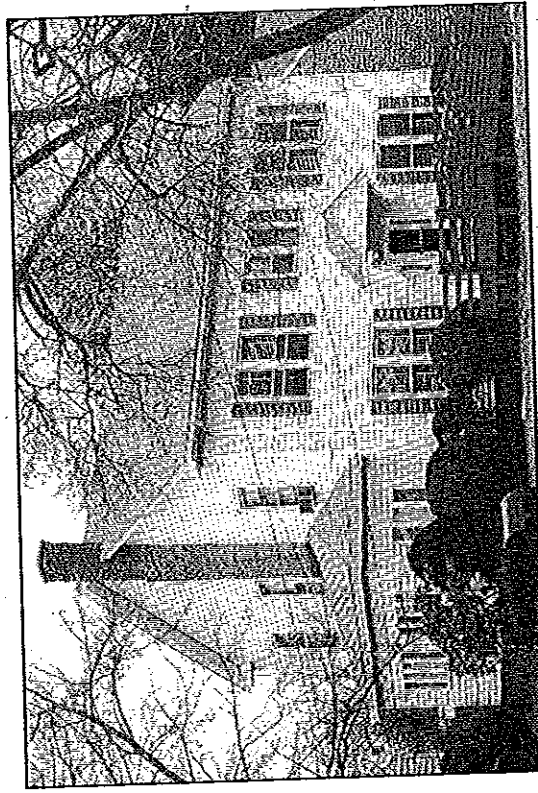


From a living room chair in his Canterbury Street home, Boce W. Barlow Jr. keeps a watchful eye on the life around him.

Barlow, 80, figures he's seen early five generations of children grow up in his North End neighborhood. "It's really a friendly neighborhood," Barlow said. Barlow, his wife, Catherine, and their two children moved into the colonial revival-style home in 1958. They were Canterbury Street's first black family.

Retired and convalescing from illness that left him partially physically disabled, Barlow now spends many afternoons reading newspaper and Nelson Mandela's book, "Long Walk to Freedom." He is surrounded by photographs of his family, and his favorite chair faces Canterbury Street.

Last summer, the Barlows' house, built in 1926, was placed on the National Register of Historic



Boce Barlow Jr.'s house at 31 Canterbury St. in Hartford was built in 1926.

because of the people who live there, especially Boce Barlow, a practicing attorney in Hartford for nearly 40 years, a judge on the old municipal police court, a state senator, and a prominent leader of the city's black community.

The Barlow house was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places by the Connecticut Historical Commission. "We wanted to increase the listings on the National Register of houses identified with women's history and black history," the commission's John Herzan said.

Catherine Barlow, who earned her master's degree from the Uni-

Hartford schools for 30 years as a teacher, guidance counselor and administrator. The two met while undergraduates at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

The Canterbury Street house is where throngs of well-wishers gathered in 1966 when Barlow became the first African-American elected to the state Senate. He also was the first African-American in the state judiciary. As a state senator, Barlow sponsored legislation that resulted in the creation of the departments of community affairs and correction.

Before buying the house, Barlow and his wife lived on Acton Street, and before that, in Bellevue

Square. At the time, there was only one black teacher in the Hartford public schools, and the only black employee at city hall was the elevator operator, Barlow said.

Barlow heard about the single-family house in a quiet neighborhood near Keney Park. Not wanting to attract attention in the all-white neighborhood, he drove by for a glimpse. "I wasn't impressed by the color. It was a drab gray," he said.

When the real estate agent heard a black family was interested in the house, he dropped the listing, Barlow said. This perplexed the home's owner, who Barlow credits with being open-minded. She invited him to look at the house and Barlow pronounced it sturdy, with a beautiful yard. He offered to buy it.

"It wasn't a warm reception," he said. Many of the Irish, Polish and Jewish neighbors ignored the Barlows when they moved in. "I knew what to expect," Barlow said. "We just paid no mind."

Barlow's career as a lawyer, prosecutor and judge eventually earned his neighbors' respect. His children also helped bring the neighbors together.

Barlow returned home many nights after practicing law to find groups of children playing in the spacious back yard. Barlow credits the children with doing more than making friends. They were breaking down barriers. "The key to so many things is children," he said.