



The Connecticut Freedom Trail

documents the struggle toward freedom. This trail designates sites that celebrate the struggle for justice and equality that continues in the 21st century. Sites depict the efforts, in all their forms, of the state's African American community and all the communities that championed the goals of universal freedom and human dignity.

Application for Listing to the Connecticut Freedom Trail

The following is a list of **CRITERIA** that the Selection Committee has developed. Keep these points in mind as you answer the questions in the application.

1. How the site represents one or more of the eligible categories;
2. If the site is the location of a "First," or provided opportunities for others that followed;
3. If the site is centered around Connecticut history/events; and
4. If sufficient time has passed to be able to evaluate the site within the context of history (ideally at least 50 years, but there may be some sites of importance that are less than 50 years old).

One Sentence Summary: Home sites of James Lindsey Smith, freedom seeker, businessman, minister and author.

Site Information:

Name of site (if applicable):

Address: (1) 59 School Street, Norwich, CT 06360

(2) 16 Oak Street, Norwich, CT 06360

Property Owner:

(1) Name: Barbara J. Jordan
Address: 13A Bella Vista Street
Quaker Hill, CT 06375

(2) Name: Richard Stepanian & David Gage
Address: 6 Randall Street
Chicopee, MA 01013

General Information

Present use of property: (1) Residential (private home) and (2) Residential (two-family home)

Age of property: (1) c. 1840 and (2) c. 1870

Open to the public: Yes ☐ No ☒ (Both) Visible from the Public Road: Yes ☒ No ☐ (Both)

Type of site (check at least one):

- ☐ Amistad
☐ Civil Rights



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- ☒ Concept of Freedom (1) and (2)
☒ Underground Railroad (1) and (2)

Contact information of the individual or organization presenting application (please note: this entity will be considered if the Site Ambassador is listed):

Name: Norwich Historical Society / Sandra Soucy, Secretary
 Address: 69 East Town Street
 City: Norwich State: CT Zip: 06360
 Phone: (860) 886-1776
 E-Mail: sansoucy56@gmail.com & info@norwichhistoricalsociety.org

Longitude and Latitude of building or site to be included on the Connecticut Freedom Trail for future GPS mapping:
(1) Latitude: 41.526, Longitude: -72.08103 and (2) Latitude: 41.52783, Longitude: -72.07245

Historic Designations:

Is the project site recognized for its architectural/cultural/historical significance by any of the following designation program? (Check all that apply.) Visit connctis.ct.gov to determine if the property has a designation.

(1) 59 School Street	Yes	No
National Historic Landmark	[]	[X]
National Register of Historic Places	[X]	[]
Individually listed	[]	[X]
Contributing to a District District Name: <u>Jail Hill Historic District</u>	[X]	[]
State Register of Historic Places	[X]	[]
Individually listed	[]	[X]
Contributing to a District District Name: <u>Jail Hill Historic District</u>	[X]	[]
Historic American Building Survey (HABS)	[]	[X]
Historic American Engineering Record (HAES)	[]	[X]
Other: (specify) _____		



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(2) 16 Oak Street	Yes	No
National Historic Landmark	[]	[X]
National Register of Historic Places	[]	[X]
Individually listed	[]	[X]
Contributing to a District District Name: _____	[]	[X]
State Register of Historic Places	[]	[X]
Individually listed	[]	[X]
Contributing to a District District Name: _____	[]	[X]
Historic American Building Survey (HABS)	[]	[X]
Historic American Engineering Record (HAES)	[]	[X]
Other: (specify) _____		

Please describe the site and how it represents one or more of the categories for inclusion. Include any relevant sources and documentation. Attach additional sheets if necessary.

James Lindsey Smith was born into bondage in Heathville, Virginia. Trained as a shoemaker, he and two others escaped from enslavement in 1838. Crossing the Chesapeake Bay in a small boat, they made their way to New Castle, Delaware, where they took a steamboat to Philadelphia. There, local abolitionists sent Smith to David Ruggles, formerly of Norwich, CT, a conductor on the Underground Railroad in New York City. Ruggles arranged for Smith to stay with noted abolitionist, Rev. Samuel Osgood, a Congregational minister in Springfield, Massachusetts.

After attending Wesleyan Academy in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, Smith married Emeline M. Platt, and settled in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1842. In his extraordinary *Autobiography*, published in 1881, Smith described his childhood enslaved in Virginia, his harrowing escape, his life in Massachusetts, how he established his business and bought the **59 School Street** property, and then his purchase of the **16 Oak Street** house, where he and Emeline raised their family. He detailed the struggles he faced and the support he received while living in Norwich, as he became a leader in his community, not only as a businessman operating a boot and shoemaking business, but also as a minister in the local Methodist Church.

- (1) The house located at **59 School Street**, in the historic Jail Hill section of Norwich, is the first home purchased by James Lindsey Smith. In his *Autobiography*, Smith described with pride the purchase of this house three years after relocating from Springfield, MA, to Norwich:



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The next year I had accumulated money enough to pay one-half for a frame house -- only a few steps from where I then lived -- before taking possession of it. Three years from this time I paid off all the mortgage on the house; then I truly felt that it was my own, since through my energy and toil, I had gained it.

Smith and his family lived in this home from 1845 to 1857, when he purchased a larger one located at 16 Oak Street in Norwich. He explained:

As the years rolled on my family began to increase, so I deemed it necessary to procure a larger house. Having made several attempts I bought a desirable one on Oak Street.

- (2) Smith purchased house located at **16 Oak Street** in 1857, but the need for a new home did not come without problems as he and his family faced discrimination:

After a struggle of a few years, we moved into our new home. Reader, you must not think that I obtained it without any trouble. Ah! no; it was under difficulties; I had many a heart ache: I was persecuted on every hand for getting a home. While many would be encouraged for their industry and toil, my people are subject to all sorts of abuse for buying desirable homes for their families.

Smith and his wife, Emeline, lived here for the rest of their lives, and Smith spent his later years writing his *Autobiography*, in which he accurately and poignantly describes his life, especially in Norwich, Connecticut. James Lindsey and Emeline are both buried in unmarked graves in Yantic Cemetery in Norwich.

Sources: (Listed in the following section)

Is there any additional information that the Committee should be aware of?

Smith's son, James H. Smith married Lucretia Quay (whose ancestor, Lebbeus Quay, fought in the American Revolution) and continued his father's boot and shoemaking business in Norwich. Both James H. and Lucretia are buried in the City Cemetery, not far from the Oak Street house. Smith's daughters all eventually moved to Washington, D.C. where two of them, Lucinda A. Smith and Emily J. Smith taught in the freedmen's schools after the end of the American Civil War. Lucinda became principal of the J.R. Giddings School, the first public school in D.C. dedicated to educating African Americans. Copies of Smith's riveting *Autobiography* are available locally and online.

Sources:



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Brown, B. W. & Rose, J. M. (1980). *Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650-1900*. Gale Research Co. <https://archive.org/details/black-roots-southeastern-ct-1650-1900>

Carley, Rachel and Miner, Regan. *Walk Norwich: Norwich Freedom Trail*. Norwich, CT: Minuteman Press: 2019.

Joshua R. Giddings Elementary School - The First All Black Public School in DC. N&M House Detectives - Unlocking History. 2022.

www.nmhousedetectives.com/single-post/2016/08/22/joshua-r-giddings-elementary-school-the-first-all-black-public-school-in-dc. Accessed 22 June 2023.

Lathrop, Arthur Lester. *Victorian Norwich, Connecticut*. Salem, MA: Higginson Book Company, 1999.

Norwich, Connecticut Land Records, Deed Book 52: 287-288; 61: 152.

Our Story: Wilbraham & Monson Academy. <https://www.wma.us/about/our-story>. Accessed 22 June 2023.

Resisting Slavery: Rev. Samuel Osgood.

<https://www.ourpluralhistory.stcc.edu/resistingslavery/osgood.html>. Springfield Technical Community College, 2009. Accessed 22 June 2023.

Smith, James L. *The Autobiography of James L. Smith*. Norwich, CT: Thames Printing Co., Inc., 1976. Originally published by the Press of the Bulletin Co., Norwich CT, 1881.

Signature of Applicant: Sandra J. Soucy

Date of Submission: June 18, 2024



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Photographs:

Color photographs and a site map are a requirement and should be included below. The photographs should include: a CONTEXT image (depicting the location of the site, such as, an aerial view, streetscape, neighborhood or city map); front, back, and side views of the main structures, pertinent interior views, and any other views or details that are important to explaining the nature of the nomination.

59 School Street, Norwich, CT





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16 Oak Street, Norwich, CT

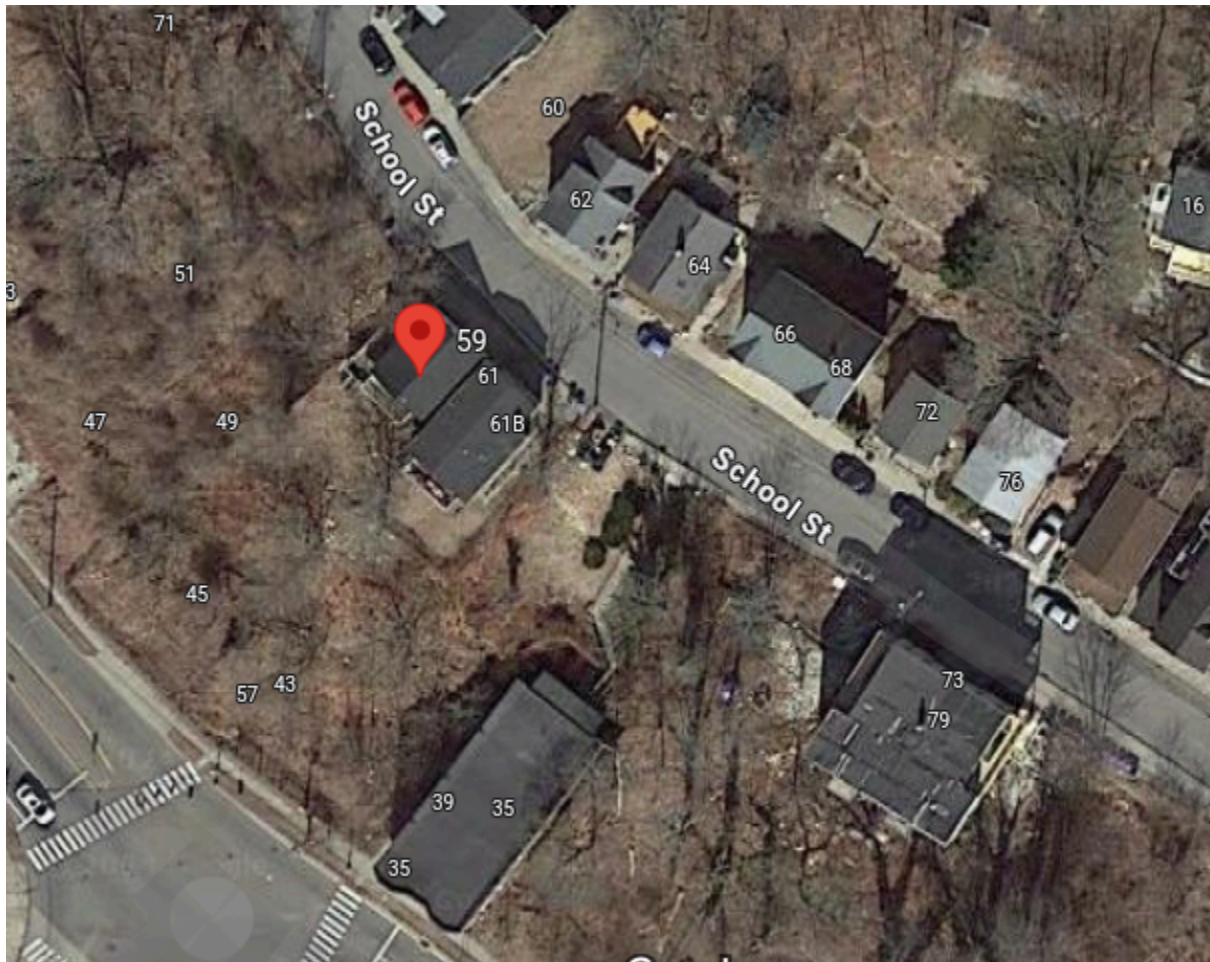




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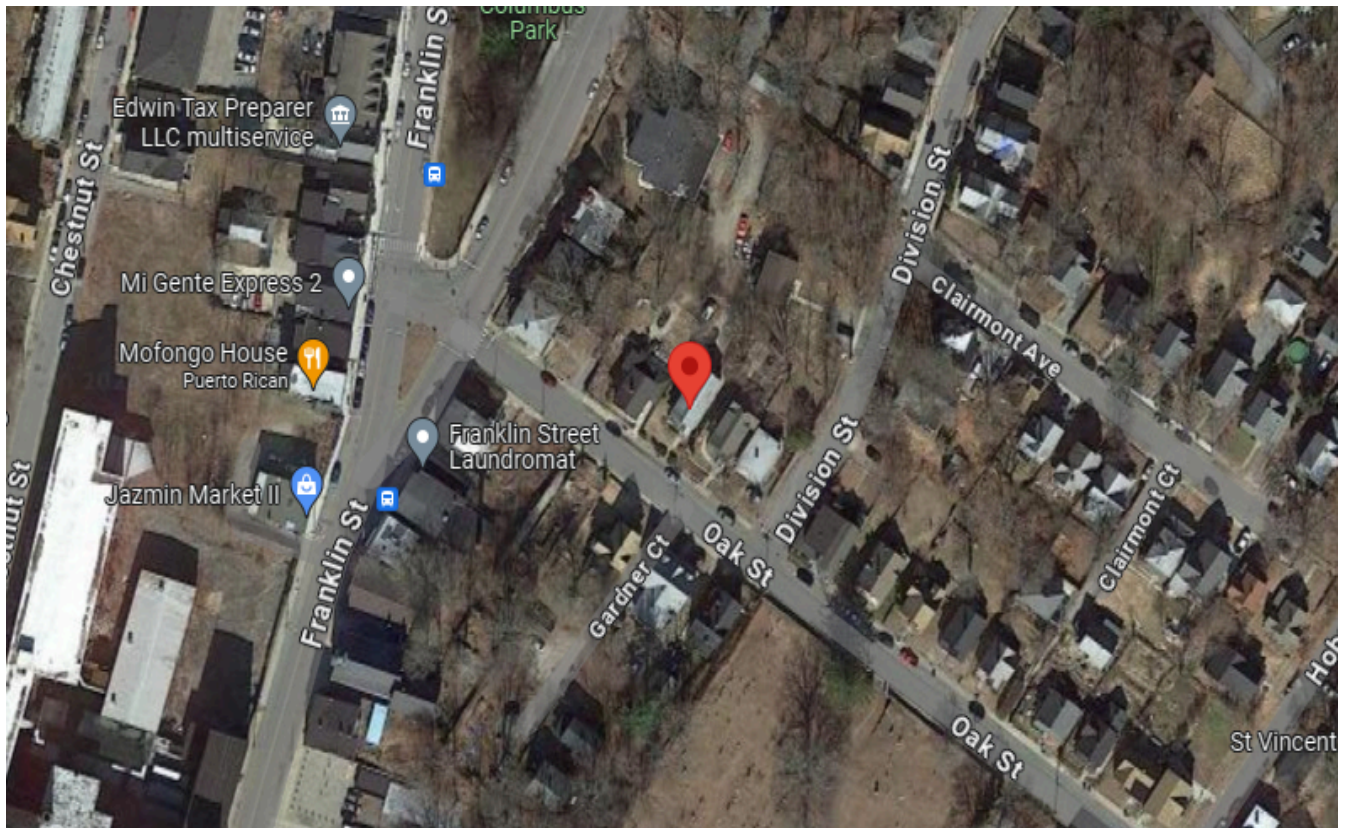
59 School Street





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16 Oak Street



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Norwich CT Land Records: Volume 52, Pages 287-288

Vol. 52, Pg. 287
Norwich Land Records

George Perkins Personally appeared George St. Martin signer and
Rec. for Record dealer of the foregoing instrument, and acknowledge
April 4th 1845 the same to be his free act and deed before me.
Othniel Leger Town Clerk. George Perkins Justice of the Peace.

To all People to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting:
Know ye that I John G. Standish of Norwich in the County of New Lon-
don & State of Connecticut for the consideration of six hundred dollars
received to my full satisfaction of James L. Smith of said Norwich do
give, grant, bargain, sell, and confirm unto the said James L. Smith
a certain tract of land lying in the City of Norwich in said town of

288
Norwich, on the South Westerly side of School Street, bounded and described
as follows (viz.) Beginning at the corner of the premises by said Street, thence
South 49° West four rods & 2 links, abutting South Easterly on land of Stephen R.
Sift, thence North 40° West two rods & 15 links abutting Westerly on my re-
-maining land, thence North 60° East four rods & Eleven links, abutting North
Westerly on land of Richardson lately owned by Hannah Freeman, thence South
37° East twenty eight feet, abutting easterly on said School Street to the place
of beginning; with a dwelling house thereon standing. I do have and to
hold the above granted and bargained premises, with the appurtenances
thereof unto him the said James L. Smith, his heirs and assigns forever, to
his and their own proper use and behoof. And also I the said John G. Stan-
dish do, for myself & my heirs, executors, and Administrators, Covenant with
the said James L. Smith his heirs and assigns, that at and until the encasing
of these presents I am well seized of the premises, as a good, indefeasible
estate in fee simple, and have good right to bargain and sell the same in
manner and form as is above written; and that the same is free of all in-
-cumbrances whatsoever. And furthermore, I the said John G. Standish
do by these presents, bind myself and my heirs forever, to warrant and
defend the above granted and bargained premises to him the said James
L. Smith his heirs and assigns, against all claims and demands whatsoever.
In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and seal this 3rd
day of April in the year of our Lord 1845.
Signed, sealed & delivered John G. Standish L.S.
in presence of State of Connecticut,
James L. Hoyt New London County, & Norwich April 4th A.D. 1845.
George Perkins Personally appeared John G. Standish signer and
Rec. for Record dealer of the foregoing instrument, and acknowledged
April 4th 1845 the same to be his free act and deed, before me.
Othniel Leger Town Clerk. George Perkins Justice of the Peace.



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Norwich CT Land Records, Volume 61, Page 152

