State Historic Preservation Office



CULTURAL RESOURCES INVENTORY - LANDSCAPES * OLMSTED PROJECT COVER SHEET

Please submit completed form to: Architectural Survey Coordinator
State Historic Preservation Office, Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development
450 Columbus Boulevard, Suite 5, Hartford, CT 06103

I	PROPERTY NAME (Current/Historic)					
D E	Montfort House / Liggett, R. H. "Fair Hill Farm";Stonecroft; Lourdes Shrine					
N T I	COUNTY	TOWN/CITY	VILLAGE			
	Litchfield	Litchfield				
F	JOB NUMBER					
C	Primary: 07369 Related Job Numbers:					
A T	Landscape Type					
- _I O N	☐ Park, Parkway, Recreation Area. Scenic Reservation					
	□ City/Regional Plan, Improvement Project					
	☐ Subdivision, Suburban Community					
	☐ College/School Campus					
	☐ Grounds of Residential Institution					
	☐ Grounds of Public Building					
	⊠ Private Estate / Homestead					
	□ Cemetery / Burial Lot / Memorial / Monument					
	☐ Grounds of Commercial / Industrial Building					
	□ Country Club / Resort, Hotel, Club					
	☐ Grounds of Church					
	□ Arboretum, Garden					
	□ Exhibition, Fair					
	☐ Miscellaneous					
	DATE OF ORIGINAL PROJECT: 1924					
	SUBSEQUENT PROJECTS: 1939					

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DESIGNER(S) (primary)			
☐ Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr.			
☐ John Charles Olmsted			
☐ Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr.			
☑ Other firm member(s): E.C. Whiting, Nelson Wells			
□ Other notes:			
Other Designers (prior to or following Olmsted project):			
Repositories consulted with source materials			
⊠ Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site, Olmsted Archives (online albums)			
☑ Olmsted Online (OlmstedOnline.org)			
□ National Archives and Record Administration			
□ Connecticut State Library			
☐ Hartford History Center			
☐ Other: Numerous drawings related to the design are held on-site			

Observations regarding features characteristic of Olmsted firm design

This site reflects principles used for many country places designed by the Olmsted firm. A long scenic drive, reminiscent of places like Biltmore, seems to have been constructed by introducing changes to an existing drive. The driveway provides an initial view of the house, seated at the top of a long meadow, and then crosses the primary axis from the house and approaches from the side, with filtered views of the house through the trees. The drive arrives at a motor court at the rear of the house. A doorway, aligned with the terrace and meadow opposite, leads through the house to provide views across the meadow to the hills beyond. From the terrace, a series of formal gardens leads away into the adjacent tree-line. While portions of this garden sequence are missing, the overall framework of the design and many of its major features remain intact. The site is a significant example of a large residential estate.

Surviving features resulting from the Olmsted firm's design work include:

- Entry Drive and Motor Court
- Approach Lawn
- Terrace and Octagonal Garden

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	PROPERTY NAME (Current/Historic)							
D	Montfort House / Liggett, R.H. "Fair Hill Farm"; Stonecroft; Lourdes Shrine; Montfort House (Job #07369)							
Е	COUNTY	TOWN/CITY	VILLAGE					
N	Litchfield	Litchfield						
Т	STREET AND NUMBER (and/or location)							
ı	East Street							
F	OWNER(S) ⊠ PRIVATE □ MUNICIPAL □ STATE □ FEDERAL □ TRIBAL □ EASEMENT							
ı								
С	LAT/LONG COORDINATES ⊠ Center Point □ Polygon							
Α	41.755502, -73.176908							
Т	PARCEL INFORMATION							
ı	Acres: 163.15 PID(s):	MBLU(s): 217-037-04	4					
0	USE (Present) (Historic)							
N	Retreat center Private residence							
	SURVEY TYPE							
	☐ Reconnaissance-Level ☐ Intensive-Level							
D	LANDSCAPE TYPE (Check all that apply)							
Е	 ☑ Designed ☐ Vernacular ☐ Cultural/Ethnographic ☐ Agricultural ☐ Linear ☐ System/Multi-Site ☑ Residential ☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☐ Institutional ☐ Maritime ☐ Green 							
S	□ Residential □ Commercial □ Industrial □ Ins							
С	☐ Other – specify:	eation of Commemorati	ve					
R	DATE OR PERIOD (Include source of date)							
Ī	1924/1939 (Olmsted Research Guide Online)							
P	DESIGNEDS (Entities that created designed cons	tructed or shaped the la	undecane)					
T	DESIGNERS (Entities that created, designed, constructed, or shaped the landscape) Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects							
ı	amotou Brothero Lunaccupe, il cinicoto							
0 N	DESIGN SCOPE (For designed landscapes, explain	n what work was commi	ssioned.)					
IN	Design includes planning of a large estate, including long approach drive, meadow, and sequence of formal							
	gardens		·					
	LOCATION OF DRAWINGS/IMAGES/SOURCE MA	ATERIAL						
	Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site; Libra	ry of Congress						
	VISUAL ASSESSMENT SUMMARY (Check boxes for the qualities that are key features of this landscape. If							
	attaching descriptive narrative, consider these categories.)							
	□ Layout & Spatial Relationships □ Circulation □	⊠ Water I						
	⊠ Circulation ⊠ Topography	⊠ Draina ⊠ Buildir	ige ngs/Structures/Objects					
	☑ Topography☑ Plantings/Vegetation		igs/Structures/Objects					
	☑ Views & Vistas	□ Necrea	dional opuot					
	☐ Boundaries	□ Design	Style:					
		•						
	1							

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C O N D	EXISTING CONDITION ⊠ Recognizable □ Not Extant/Not Recognizable Changes: An addition to the structure to support its use as a seminary was constructed on the site of one of the gardens. Parking for the Lourdes Shrine interrupts the entry drive sequence.							
I T I O N	POTENTIAL THREATS □ None Known □ Infrastructure Improvements □ Onsite Development □ Adjacent Development □ Vandalism □ Overuse □ Deferred Maintenance □ Invasive Vegetation □ Environmental – specify: □ Other – specify:							
E N	SETTING (One sentence description) This country place-turned-retreat center is located in a rural area surrounded by forest. VEGETATION Maintained Open Land □ Natural Open Land ☑ Woodland/Forest □ Wetland ☑ Specimen Plants □ Other – specify: SLOPE □ Level/Nearly Level □ Moderate Slope ☑ Steep Slope □ Elevation (ASML): 1100'							
V I R								
O N								
M E N T	CONNECTICUT PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE (Eco-Region) □ Northwest Highlands ☑ Western Uplands □ Western Coastal Slope □ Central Valley □ Eastern Coastal Slope □ Eastern Uplands Soil Description: Site dominated by well-drained Paxton and Montauk fine sandy loams.							
H I S T	SUMMARY (Provide a brief overview in this space. More detailed narrative can be attached.) In 1924, Richard Liggett hired the Olmsted firm to plan his estate. The house was completed by 1927, and work continued on the grounds until 1930, when the Liggetts lost much of their fortune during the Depression The property was sold to Montfort Missionaries in 1947.							
O R Y	NATIONAL REGISTER RECOMMENDATION □ Recommended Eligible (Criterion □ A □ B □ C □ D) □ Not Eligible □ Not Evaluated Explanation: Significant example of Country Place landscape architecture and architecture. NR Listed: □ District-Contributing □ District-Non-Contributing □ Individual □ Insufficient Documentation							
R E	NAME Kevan Klosterwill and Carolyn Brackett	ORGANIZAT Red Bridge	-					
P O R	ADDRESS 2100 Green Street, San Francisco, California 94123							
T E	PHOTOGRAPHER Kevan Klosterwill		DATE 9/14/21	□ Permission to use photographs				
D B Y	SURVEY METHOD ☑ Site Visit/In-Person Walkover □ Drive-through/Windshield □ Digital Review Only							

ATTACHMENTS (Include the following items in the PDF)

- \boxtimes Location Map \boxtimes Site Map \boxtimes Photographs with captions \boxtimes Historic Images (if applicable)

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

DESCRIPTION (Visual Assessment Summary)

Layout & Spatial Relationships: A long scenic drive leads to the house, crossing a meadow aligned with the front terrace and approaching from the side. A series of formal gardens leading from the front terrace is arrayed to the opposite side, along a series of shifting axes. This culminates in a walled octagonal garden.

Circulation: The house is approached by a curving asphalt entry drive. Some paths, no longer apparent, provided access to the formal gardens. Other steps lead from the parking court to a statue.

Topography: The entry drive follows a rolling course before climbing to approach the house, which is sited on a high point at the top of a long meadow.

Plantings/Vegetation: The site is dominated by forest, with a broad lawn rolling away from the main terrace. Formal gardens are overgrown and no longer maintained.

Views & Vistas: The site is organized around a sequence of views related to the house and meadow. The front terrace of the house is aligned with the meadow, and the driveway that crosses is hidden by a rise in the topography.

Water Features: The site may have once had pools fed by an underground drainage system as part of its sequence of gardens, according to plans. This area is overgrown, however, and it is unclear if these features were constructed or are intact.

Drainage: A creek drains lower portions of the property. Some drainage inlets are located along the drive.

Buildings/Structures/Objects: The site features a large stone house, stone retaining walls and steps, brick garden walls, and other landscape structures.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE

In 1924, Richard Hampden Liggett (1864-1940) and his wife, Laura Ambler Liggett (1868-1942) (some references identify her as "Lura") purchased 170 acres near Litchfield to build a country home estate.

Richard Liggett was born in Harrisonburg, Virginia. He graduated from the University of Virginia and moved to Jacksonville, Florida in 1884 to practice law. According to his obituary, he argued cases frequently before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Liggetts were married in 1902 and had two sons, R. Ambler Liggett and Alexander C. Liggett. Laura Liggett was the daughter of D.G. Ambler of Litchfield and Jacksonville, who was one of the founders of First National Bank in Tampa, Florida.

Mr. and Mrs. Liggett hired noted architect Richard Henry Dana (1879-1933) to design the two-and-one-half story Tudor-style house constructed of native fieldstone.

In 1924, the Liggetts contacted Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects to develop plans for the grounds. The home was completed in 1927 but planning for the grounds would continue until mid-1929, overseen by E.C. Whiting and Nelson Wells. Although early meetings included both Mr. and Mrs. Liggett, and correspondence was mostly directed to Mr. Liggett, over time Mrs. Liggett became the primary contact for the firm. Correspondence reflects an often tense relationship as Mrs. Liggett directed the purchase of plants, questioned the amount of bills and requested dismissal of a supervisor recommended by the firm.

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

E.C. Whiting's report of his first visit in 1924 characterized the property: "It is undeveloped land, half in woods, some rather good woods and some pretty poor. There is an attractive small brook and ravine cutting more or less diagonally through the property. In this ravine there is a fair amount of hemlocks and laurel with a good deal of evergreen fern, maiden-hair fern and trailing arbutus. It is quite an interesting feature and Mrs. Liggett is particularly anxious to make as much of it as possible." Whiting reported on discussions about where to place the house to get a "splendid" view down the valley and where the entrance road should run.

Work began immediately on the property the Liggetts named Fair Hill Farm. Correspondence through the summer discussed the location of the house, roads, stable, garage, a group of cottages, a vegetable garden, orchard, trees and shrubs, and a formal garden with a wild garden on the lower hillside. Whiting noted: "This treatment will provide a very effective picture from the upper garden down the hillside to the proposed pond in the woods." In September, Whiting said he was glad to receive Mrs. Liggett's, indicating she was pleased with plans for Fair Hill Farm.

Work appears to have stopped until the summer of 1926 when construction of the house was imminent. After a visit in August, Whiting advised moving the house 22 feet up the hill and turning the axis a few degrees clockwise to save a maple tree. Architect Richard Dana agreed and noted that Mr. and Mrs. Liggett wanted the house as low to the ground as possible.

Whiting's attention to detail was evident in an exchange of letters with Dana in November of 1926 focusing on a set of steps: "I am frankly a little fearful of your solution of the step problem leading out of the court on the north.....My experience is that a 7½ inch riser with a 15 inch tread is an uncomfortably large step....If the riser is to be 7½ inches, the tread, I think, should be about 12, or vice versa, with a 15 inch tread the riser should be about 6 inches. But that is a detail. The main point which bothers me is the forbidding appearance of this high steep flight of stairs."

Dana disagreed: "With regard to the steps out of the north on the court, I do not see why these should have a 'forbidding appearance.' Only four steps will show on the court side below the oak gate." He continued: "Mrs. Liggett wants as few steps as possible and suggested having only four below the gate and the rest a steep slope. I explained to her that the slope would be too steep to be pleasant and that we really needed the ten steps I have shown."

Whiting continued to write to Dana, making the case for his preferences. In December, Dana wrote again: "Thank you for your very considerate letter of November 26th about the steps for the forecourt." Dana signaled the discussion was at an end because he had read Whiting's letter to Mr. and Mrs. Liggett and "they still want as few steps as possible."

Whiting acquiesced: "I still feel that the type of step development I had suggested would be more attractive. I will give in gracefully, however, since both you and the Liggetts agree that the scheme as you now have it is satisfactory."

By 1927, Mrs. Liggett emerged as the primary contact. A report from Whiting's January visit noted he had received "lots of input from Mrs. Liggett about the walls around the laundry yard and service court." Mrs. Liggett wanted grass paths, but "Nelson Wells convinced her to use flagstone or gravel." Additionally, she explained the plan to hire local people to do the work with a supervisor recommended by the Olmsted firm on site continuously.

Whiting recommended "an Englishman named (Allan) Long" explaining "He is a man of considerable refinement and taste and is particularly valuable in watching and directing work where numerous little adjustments and refinements have to be decided on the ground....He could spend some time this summer looking up possible sources for collecting wild and semi-wild plants...." Mrs. Liggett's response was to inquire about Long's fees.

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

Long was hired, but by July Nelson Wells was reporting that "Long has not come up to their expectations," the first of many complaints about the supervisor.

In August, Whiting made another visit and reported "For the moment the important jobs are:

- Finish the main terrace wall
- Do the rose garden filling and build the boulder wall retaining it
- Build the bird pool (contract)
- Rough grade the octagon garden
- Build pool and walls for octagon garden (contract)
- Lay drains and water pipes"

The problems with Long were reported again: "And Long is mighty little help in all of this. Mrs. Liggett was very decent about Long and gave him full credit for accomplishing a good piece of work that they never could have done without his help, but Long's shortcoming irritates her, and she would rather have us send someone else next time."

In September Wells sent a planting plan, recommending sumac, forsythia, boltonia, mountain ash and double-flowering crab apples. He noted Mrs. Liggett's response: "The enclosed estimate was left with Mrs. Liggett, and she was astonished at the high cost of plants."

Wells returned at the end of October to assist with planting. He noted: "I spent one afternoon with Mrs. Liggett and her chauffeur trying to locate suitable hemlocks in the woods which could be used for transplanting in the future, but we found very few desirable trees."

The first months of 1928 were focused on Mrs. Liggett's objections to the bill she received from the Olmsted Brothers. She apparently wrote a letter (not found in LOC correspondence) questioning the firm's charges.

Whiting provided a lengthy response, starting with an outline of invoices between 1924 and 1927, totaling \$7,011.16. He noted the amount due as \$2,591.57 and that Mrs. Liggett had sent a check for \$834.35.

Whiting explained that "charges are made on a time basis..." and the "...fee is based almost entirely upon the amount of time required by members of the firm for visits, conferences, and inspection, and for studying and restudying designs and determining the many of various details of the plans as they are worked out in the office. That fee constitutes the only profit we make on the work, and it is based on what seems to us a fair compensation per day or per hour."

Whiting said had worked 175 hours and charged \$1,700, less than \$10 per hour. "Without 'patting myself on the back' I honestly think the results you are getting will prove well worth the charges, and these charges so far have not been at all unusual for work of your sort."

No additional records confirm if payment was made, but the work continued in the Spring as Whiting sent a detailed letter and landscaping plans to Mrs. Liggett.

This apparently did not completely ease tensions. In October, in a letter to architect Dana about the project, Whiting wrote: "Confidentially, things have not been going as well as I had hoped on this Liggett work because Mrs. Liggett has just enough confidence in her own ability to interpret and carry out plans to make her feel it unnecessary to incur the expense of having <u>us_direct</u> the work. If I had the same confidence in her ability, I should be only too glad to have her take charge of the execution of plans, but unfortunately, she seems to have a very casual understanding of plans, and she is therefore missing some of the refinements and details which are the essence of a really good job. I still hope for the opportunity to see the job through, but just now the landscape architect is being classed as a not-really-necessary luxury."

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

Mrs. Liggett continued to contact Whiting, informing him that she was ordering some of the plants herself and directing him to order others. In January of 1929, Whiting included a note in a letter: "The check from Mr. Liggett has not yet come."

Nelson Wells expressed his frustration after a visit in May. The Liggetts had left town, but in surveying the property, Wells reported "Generally speaking everything that they have tried to do last fall and this spring is only half in accordance with our drawings and the other half very badly done according to their own ideas."

He requested that Whiting write a letter to the Liggetts "requesting our either being placed in close supervision of the work or severing connections because of the very unsatisfactory interpretation of our drawings."

Whiting accepted Wells' recommendation and in May of 1929, he wrote to Mrs. Liggett "Recently I have been thinking a good deal about your work...To be perfectly frank, I am much dissatisfied with the present basis of operations because the results are not what we like them to be in our work, and I feel pretty sure they are not satisfactory to you."

He continued "... you are straying just enough away from our plans and intentions to lose from 50 to 75% of the value of our services.....To be honest, I think we had better drop the work altogether and leave you free to go on without any sense of obligation to us, unless you wish us to take real charge of the work and give it such direction and supervision as we think necessary in order to secure results that will satisfy us all."

A response – or additional correspondence – is not found in the LOC documents, but it appears that work did cease.

In July 1930, at the onset of the Depression, Whiting received a letter from a friend informing him that Richard Liggett "had lost all of his money and Mrs. Liggett's too. Everything was invested in Florida banks..." The Liggetts had also lost a \$20,000 law suit with Torrington Manufacturing Company regarding a leaking roof.

Nine years later, in June of 1939, Mrs. Liggett wrote to Whiting asking for his consultation on the bowling green and directing him to bring the original map. The stationery letterhead now identified the property as Stonecroft.

Following a visit, Whiting reported "On the whole the place is quite delightful, though everything looks rather shaggy and in need of a haircut, and as it was in the old days, various details which were carried out after we gave up active direction of the work lacked the refinement and detailed niceness or appropriateness which they ought to have. In a big way, however, the whole scheme now shows what it was intended to be and looks very satisfying."

Richard Liggett died in 1940 at the age of 76 in Tampa, Florida. He obituary reported that he had been a winter resident for more than 40 years and had extensive business interests there.² Laura Liggett died in 1942 at the age of 75. They are buried in East Cemetery in Litchfield.³

In 1947, Stonecroft was sold to the Montfort Missionaries, a Roman Catholic religious order and the property became a seminary for training missionary priests.

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¹ Project Correspondence, Library of Congress.

² "Richard H. Liggett: Retired Litchfield, Conn. Banker Had Interests in Florida," obituary, *New York Times*, December 25, 1940.

³ "Mrs. R. H. Liggett Dies at 75, Year After Husband," obituary, *The Tampa Times*, Tampa, Florida, January 19, 1942.

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

In 1958, the Shrine of Lourdes, a replica of the Grotto Lourdes in France, was dedicated on the property. The shrine was built of local fieldstone by two Montfort Brothers, Brother Alfonso and Brother Gabriel, with the help of Montfort seminarians and local residents.

The Liggetts' home was renamed Montfort House and is now a retreat center.4

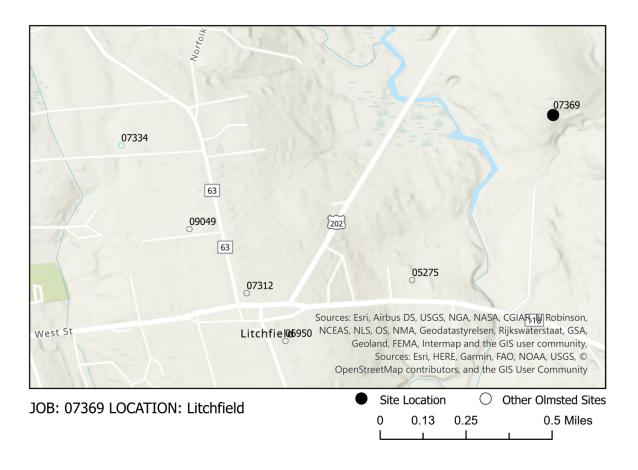
REFERENCES

"Richard H. Liggett: Retired Litchfield, Conn. Banker Had Interests in Florida," obituary, *New York Times*, December 25, 1940.

Mrs. R. H. Liggett Dies at 75, Year After Husband," obituary, *The Tampa Times,* Tampa, Florida, January 19, 1942.

"The Shrine of Lourdes in Litchfield," available at https://shrinect.org/ (accessed December 29, 2021).

GRAPHICS



⁴ "The Shrine of Lourdes in Litchfield," available at https://shrinect.org/ (accessed December 29, 2021).

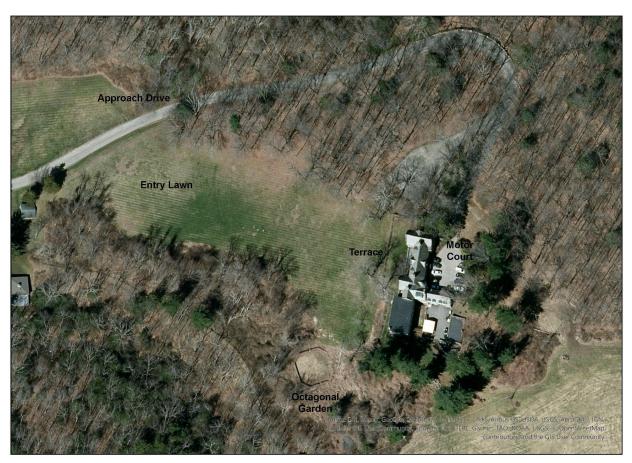
CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield



JOB: 07369 LOCATION: Litchfield PROJECT: Liggett - Fair Hill Farm

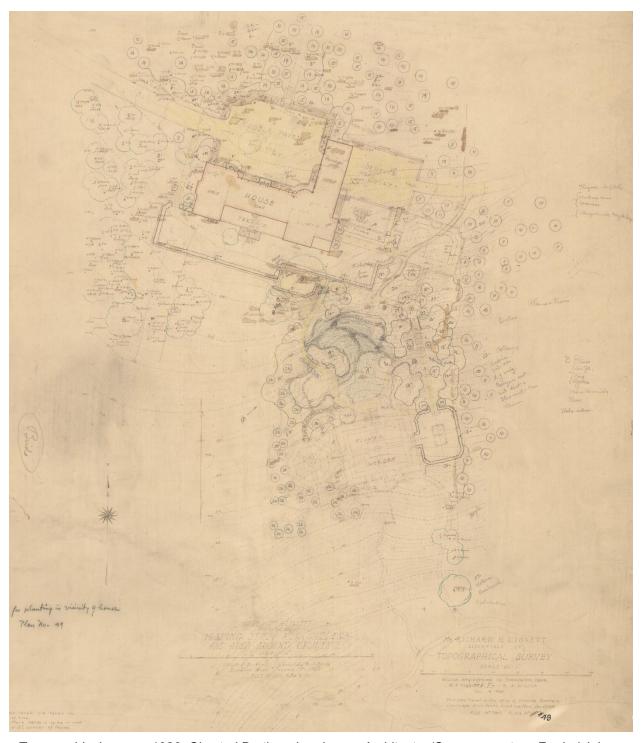
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CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield

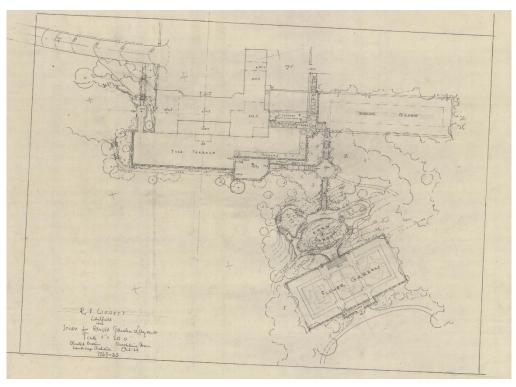


JOB: 07369 LOCATION: Litchfield PROJECT: Liggett - Fair Hill Farm

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Topographical survey, 1926, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)



Study for revised garden layout, 1929, Olmsted Brothers Landscape Architects. (Source: courtesy Frederick Law Olmsted National Historic Site)

CONTINUATION SHEET Richard A. Liggett Property (#07369) / East Street, Litchfield



JOB: 7369 LOCATION: Litchfield PROJECT: Liggett - Fair Hill Farm

0 25 50 100 US Feet

Aerial photograph overlaid with Olmsted firm plan. (Source: Kevan Klosterwill)



View north across drive to house. (All photographs taken by authors in 2021 unless otherwise noted)



View north from drive to house.



View south where the drive crosses meadow.



Trees along entry drive, with meadow beyond.



View south to meadow from house.



View north from meadow to house.



View north from meadow to house.



View northwest to steps leading to terrace.



View southeast into octagonal garden.



View north to statue above motor court.