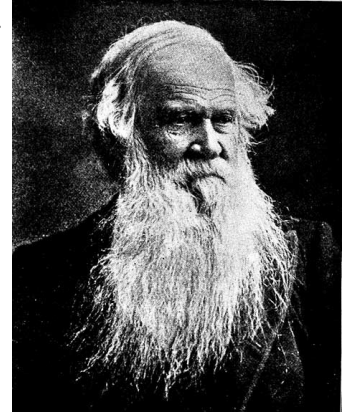


Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation  
St. Elizabeth House both a National Historic Landmark and Residence of Henry Barnard



Henry Barnard was born in his family's home, in what is currently St. Elizabeth House. After securing a law degree from Yale University, he was elected in 1837 to Connecticut's General Assembly where he introduced legislation to help the blind, the deaf and the insane. In 1838 he became secretary of the Board of Commissioners of the Common Schools and began to issue a series of reports detailing the problems he hoped to solve. At that time, elementary education was the responsibility of school districts in which the primary concern was cutting costs. Above all, the school districts were loath to spend money on teachers' salaries or on educational material. Barnard's solution was to invoke the authority of the state government to force each district to meet certain standards for buildings, teachers, attendance, and textbooks. Barnard's program was, of course, resisted and cost him his position.



Barnard as Chancellor of University of Wisconsin

He left Connecticut and became Rhode Island's first commissioner of education. He worked to raise teachers' wages, repair buildings, and obtain higher-education appropriations. He returned to Connecticut due to poor health. In 1850 Barnard became Connecticut's superintendent of schools and principal of the New Britain Normal School (now Central Connecticut State University). In 1855 he helped found the *American Journal of Education*, a 31-volume compilation of educational practices and techniques available to teachers across the country.

For 25 years the *Journal* provided a unique professional literature, disseminating all types of educational information at precisely the time that the nation was striving to establish public schooling on a secure footing. Carefully edited and frequently published by Barnard at his own expense, the *Journal* came to overshadow his other achievements. From 1858 to 1860 he served as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin and in 1866-1867 as president of St. John's College in Maryland. As the nation's outstanding educator, he was appointed the first U.S. commissioner of education in 1867, resigning three years later. He continued to edit the *Journal*, eventually producing thirty-two 800-page volumes, until his retirement in 1880.

He died in Hartford on July 5, 1900, reportedly at the family homestead at 118 Main Street. Upon his death the Daughters of the Holy Spirit purchased the residence as a convent, and subsequently added two additions, to create an affordable home for working women. Center City Churches subsequently operated the facility, which included the Friendship Center—a soup kitchen for the neighborhood. When its continuation as affordable housing was threatened, Mercy Housing and Shelter Corporation was formed by the Sisters of Mercy to own and operate the facility.