

**Historic Preservation Council  
Regular Meeting April 2, 2014  
Agenda Item 6. C.**

**State Register Nomination for the Van Vleck Farm, 596-644 Flanders Road and the parcel bounded by Flanders, Church Hill and Cowles Roads, Woodbury, Connecticut**

The Historic Preservation Council votes to list the Van Vleck Farm, 596-644 Flanders Road and the parcel bounded by Flanders, Church Hill and Cowles Roads, Woodbury, Connecticut on the State Register of Historic Places.

Motion By \_\_\_\_\_

Seconded By \_\_\_\_\_

**Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism**  
**Historic Preservation and Museum Division/State Historic Preservation Office**

## CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating individual properties and districts to the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places (C.G.S. Chapter 184b, Sec. 10-409(2)). See instructions in *How to Complete the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Van Vleck Farm  
 other names/site number Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust -- Van Vleck Farm & Nature Sanctuary

### 2. Location

street & number 596 – 644 Flanders Rd. The property is over 200 acres. It runs a half mile along Flanders Rd. and about a half mile along the north and south sides of Church Hill Rd. up to where it intersects with Cowles Rd. (Maps 1 & 2)  
 city or town Woodbury  vicinity  
 county Litchfield zip code 06798  for publication

### 3. State Agency Certification

I hereby certify that this nomination  meets  does not meet the documentation standards and criteria for registering properties in the Connecticut Register of Historic Places. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 State Historic Preservation Officer Date

### 4. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)	Category of Property (Check only one box)	Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in count.)	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	9	(buildings, barns) Buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district		
<input type="checkbox"/> public-state	<input type="checkbox"/> site	1	(landscape) sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure		structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	2	(stone walls, dam) objects
		12	Total

**Property Owner**  
 name Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust, Inc.  
 address 5 Church Hill Road  
 city Woodbury state code CT  
 zip code 06798 phone (203) 263-3711

**5. Historic Preservation Council**

Approval date \_\_\_\_\_

Comments \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agricultural/Subsistence – processing maple syrup, storage, pasture, fields, animal facility, barns, outbuildings, coops, horticultural (greenhouse, garden), “check” dams, nut orchard, apiary

Domestic -- farmhouses

Commercial/trade – turkeys, sheep, office building

Recreation/Culture – outdoor recreation (hiking trails), art studio

Landscape – garden, forest, unoccupied land, underwater (ponds, streams, marsh), natural feature (trees), stone walls, conservation area (botany trail)

Transportation – dirt road, trails

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Agricultural/Subsistence – all sub-categories still apply

Domestic – rental residence(s)

Social – nature center, civic

Education

Recreation/Culture – outdoor recreation (hiking trails), art studio, museum (natural and farming history)

Commercial/trade – office building

Landscape – parking lots, park, garden, forest, unoccupied land, underwater (ponds, streams, marsh), natural feature (trees), stone walls, conservation area (botany trail, Van Vleck Farm & Nature Sanctuary)

Transportation – dirt road (designated scenic), trails

**7. Description**

**Architectural/Archaeological Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

See “Description of the District” and “Architectural Significance” write-ups attached

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation \_\_\_\_\_

walls \_\_\_\_\_

roof \_\_\_\_\_

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**SEE CONTINUATION SHEET**

Van Vleck Farm

Name of Property

Woodbury

Municipality

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable Connecticut Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for State Register listing.)

X  **1** That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to our history and lives of persons significant in our past; or

X  **2** That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

X  **3** That have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Levels of Significance** (local, state)

Local

State

National

**Areas of Significance** (Enter categories from instructions)

See "Historical Significance" write-up attached

**Significant Dates**

1786 - present

**Significant Person**

Natalie Van Vleck (Photos A & B)

**Cultural Affiliation** (Complete if Criterion 3 is marked)

**Architect/Builder**

N/A

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Van Vleck Farm

Name of Property

Woodbury

Municipality

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Beers, F.W. Atlas of Litchfield County: The Town of Woodbury. New York: F.W. Beers & Co. 1874

FNC&LT website -- [www.flandersnaturecenter.org](http://www.flandersnaturecenter.org). Marc Chabot, curator of the Natalie Van Vleck art collection, historical write-up about the founder.

A Historic and Architectural Resource Survey in the Town of Woodbury, Connecticut

Prepared by Cunningham Associates, Ltd. Jan Cunningham, Survey Director

Inventory Form – Judson, Thomas, House, 614 Flanders Rd.

Inventory Form – Minor, William, House, 596 Flanders Rd.

History of Ancient Woodbury, by William Cothren, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 1871

“History of the Van Vleck House” by Virginia Walker Hart, 1996/97

Homes of Old Woodbury, Old Woodbury Historical Society, compiled by Edmund Sinnot, 1959

“Natalie Van Vleck: A Life in Art and Nature.” November 22, 1992. Sound View Press

Toward a Continuing Landscape. A Master Plan for the Van Vleck Farm Sanctuary, The Conway School of Landscape Design, Winter 2009

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 202 acres

**Municipal Map, Block and Lot Number and UTM Coordinate (If possible)**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

Map	Block	Lot			
1		007,021,	3		
	<u>096</u>	<u>022,023</u>			
	Zone	Easting		Zone	Easting
2		Northing	4		Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

The boundaries of this district are the same as the property owned by Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust, Inc. There are four parcels that make up the 200-acre property: Parcel ID # 096-007, 096-021, 096-022, and 096-023.

There are no maps recorded with the Town of Woodbury. (Boundaries are marked on Map 1)

A mid-point of the property is the Trail House building, which sits at 41 35’ N, 73 12’ W (identified on Maps 1 & 2).

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Anne E. Westerman, Board President and Arthur S. Milnor, Executive Director

organization Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust, Inc. date March 14, 2014

street & number 5 Church Hill Rd. telephone 203-263-3711

city or town Woodbury state CT zip code 06798

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism  
 Historic Preservation and Museum Division/State Historic Preservation Office

## CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM – Continuation Form

Van Vleck Farm

Name of Property

Woodbury

Municipality

### Description of the District

The Van Vleck Farm & Nature Sanctuary is an approximately 200-acre property located in Woodbury, Connecticut, and owned by Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust (FNC&LT) and shown in Maps 1 & 2. It is located at the intersection of Flanders Rd., a north-south country thoroughfare connecting Woodbury and Bethlehem, and Church Hill Rd., a designated scenic dirt road that dissects the property from east to west. According to Jan Cunningham in her Architectural Resource Survey completed in 1991 it is “a rural farming neighborhood” with “historic character” surrounded by stonewalls, historic maple trees, grazing meadows, pond, stream, lake, rolling hills and woodlands beyond. (Photos 1&2)

Before it was owned by FNC&LT, the Sanctuary was known as the Van Vleck Farm, a district with a very interesting history, which includes the following significant buildings:

Van Vleck House (originally the Thomas Judson house)		
Cape with lean-to and extended ell in rear.....	1786 .....	Photos 3-4
Artist’s Studio.....Vernacular Arts and Crafts interior.....	1929 .....	Photos 5-10
North Barn.....	c.1790 .....	Photos 11-26
With small shed outbuildings		
South Farm House (originally the William Minor house)		
Greek Revival.....	1840 .....	Photos 27-28
English Barn.....	c.1840 .....	Photos 29-32
Sugar House.....Post and Beam.....	2002 .....	Photos 33-34
Trail House.....	1964 .....	Photo 35

### Architectural Significance

At the northeast corner of the intersection facing the road behind stone walls sits the Van Vleck House, the centerpiece of this little neighborhood (Photos 3 & 4). Built by Thomas Judson in 1786 and purchased by the Van Vlecks in 1926, it is a center chimney Cape style house with a lean-to and long ell added to the rear. According to Cunningham the “features that confirm its late eighteenth-century attribution are the double plate which adds more headroom at the attic level, and the grouping of the façade windows in pairs.” She continues, “From the slight double pitch of the lean-to, it is apparent that [the house] was built in two sections. The main block was constructed with a double plate with a slight overhang across the façade; the overhang extends over both end elevations.” In Cunningham’s view it is “exceptionally well preserved” and it is “one of the best examples of post-Revolutionary domestic architecture in Woodbury.”

Alongside the house is a small salt box studio built by the Natalie Van Vleck in 1929. With a sweeping roof line (Photos 5, 6); expansive north facing windows; hand crafted medieval door (Photo 9); beams, arches, mortises and tenons all taken from a pre-existing shed and barn on the site or from older, local barns (Photos 7-10); and window shutters manipulated by pull weights; it is a stirring example of Arts and Crafts design. A large open space with fireplaces upstairs and down (Photo 7), an upstairs bedroom loft, a side workroom, and both a woodworking and metalworking shop in the basement, it was Natalie Van Vleck’s working art studio.

Along Flanders Road looking to the north from the Van Vleck House across a long grazing meadow (Photos 1 & 2) there is a barn complex (Photos 11 & 12). Built circa 1790 the barn is L-shaped with open bays and barnyard facing south

(Photos 15 & 16). Recently refurbished it is in very good condition (Photos 13-21). One of the bays presently houses a small museum of 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century farm and household tools and implements. The main section of the barn includes animal pens below (Photos 21, 25, 26) and a hay loft above with a wheel and axle hoist (Photos 22-24). Throughout the barn there are hand-hewn joists, and beams, wooden pegs, trusses and iron stabilizers (Photos 19-21). Currently the barn houses chickens, a pig, a horse and donkey, goats, and an array of sheep that serve as mainstays in the several children's programs that the Nature Center runs throughout the year. Several undated, small outbuildings are near, perhaps originating as a corn crib, animal shelter, or other storage shed (Photos 15 & 16). More recent additions at the north-most end of the property include a small residence built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for farm staff and a long pole barn for storing cars and farm equipment.

Back along the road looking south across another meadow from the Van Vleck House is the South Farm House (Photos 27 & 28). Recently refurbished, Cunningham describes it as a "two story vernacular house with a gable-to-street orientation and a three bay, side-hall plan". Built about 1840, "it is influenced by the Greek Revival style, as indicated by the rectangular window in the gable peak and the intersecting kitchen wing." The house now serves as the administrative offices and Welcome Center for FNC&LT.

Accompanying the house and situated directly behind it is a perfect specimen English barn (Photos 29-32). Built before 1840, it has an east-west orientation with wide bay doors on the south side. Again like the North Barn it has hand-hewn joists and beams, trusses and wooden pegs throughout.

Back in the woodlands along Church Hill Rd. are two structures of more recent origin. One is a large traditional styled post and beam sugarhouse with an overhang along its length (Photos 33 & 34). This is the production center with boiler, etc. for a very active maple syrup enterprise. Built in 2002 the building also has a large work area for a camp classroom, educational displays, workshops and meetings.

Across the road from the sugarhouse is a small "trail" house that was built in 1964 (Photo 35). This was the first building built by Flanders Nature Center when it was first established. It still serves as a classroom and storage area for camp programs.

The entire district described here is now owned by Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust, Inc., a non-for-profit organization founded by Natalie Van Vleck and friends in 1963 (Maps 1 & 2). Flanders was bequeathed the entire 200-acre property upon Ms. Van Vleck's death in 1981. Taken as a whole, the property represents an exceptional timeline of local history with each element carrying its own architectural significance. The 18<sup>th</sup> century Cape, the significant 19<sup>th</sup> century farmstead with intact outbuildings, and the 20<sup>th</sup> century artist's studio all represent larger trends of development in Litchfield County. Most importantly, they represent the 20<sup>th</sup> century trend of urbane artists seeking to practice their creative skills in the rural quiet of Connecticut.

#### Historical Significance – Three phases of history:

- 1) Judson family (and others) farming 1786 - 1926
- 2) Van Vleck family farming and art studio 1926 - 1963
- 3) Flanders Nature Center under management of Natalie Van Vleck 1963 - 1981
- 4) Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust 1981 – current – this is what we are referring to above as "Current"

One of the founding families of Woodbury was the Judson family whom Jan Cunningham, in her Historic Resources Inventory, describes as "early proprietors of Woodbury, an extended family whose members lived almost exclusively in this part of town". In 1786 a Thomas Judson built a Cape style house (Photos 1 & 2) at the north-east corner of Flanders Rd. where it intersects with Church Hill. From then into the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it remained as a farmstead in the hands of Judson family members. In the 1920's the house and small acreage were sold from Judson family connections.

Subsequently the house went through several owners until 1926 when it was spotted by Natalie Van Vleck, a New York artist who was on a driving tour through northwestern Connecticut. At Natalie's suggestion her parents bought the house and small property and the following year the three moved to Woodbury permanently.

Natalie Van Vleck (1901-1981) was born in New York City (Photo A). Her mother was a member of the Macy family and her father traced his lineage to the Dutch settlers. She attended the exclusive Brearley School in New York City, and took art classes with Agnes Richmond at the Art Students League. After high school she decided not to attend college, but chose instead to study full-time at the Art Students League. There she came under the tutelage of Robert Henri, the leader of the so-called Ashcan School. Henri directed his students toward a more personal approach to painting. Later still at the League she studied with Max Weber who inspired the cubist and abstract elements in the work that Natalie produced during the 1920's. In 1922 she traveled to Spain, Capri and Naples to paint. This began her annual odyssey over several years to pursue her art abroad. Her favorite sites included French Polynesia, Guadeloupe and Martinique. According to Marc Chabot, the FNC&LT curator, the landscapes of the islands "furnished her with a festival of inspiration...full of color and primitive spirit." With a very strong work ethic that endured throughout her career, Natalie worked in other media as well. Returning to New York after her travels she established a studio and gallery to sell elaborately-detailed and hand-colored frames, mirrors, screens and much more. Chabot notes that her "art encompassed three styles: cubist and abstract influenced painting; regionalist landscapes of the Connecticut countryside and tropical locales; and "arts and crafts"."

Within two years of moving to Woodbury, Natalie built a personal studio behind her parent's house (Photos 5-10). From elements of a pre-existing shed and barn, she designed a small saltbox style building with sweeping roofline, expansive north facing windows, and arts and crafts interior. Here she lived in an upstairs loft, and worked in the large open area on the main floor and the wood and metal shop in the basement. In the 1930's, Natalie's predominant technique had changed from cubism to a regionalist, precisionist style with hard-edged forms and rounded volumes, evoking a machine-age aesthetic. Her Connecticut subjects were rural landscapes (Photo B).

By 1934, with elderly parents, Natalie became more involved in the family's farm and, with the exception of local exhibits of former works, gave up her painting entirely. She found a replacement for her art in the inspiration of the natural world around her. The farm became a larger enterprise as more land was acquired. From the original 10 acres, several small pieces as well as the North Barn were added, and then more than 100 acres was purchased from Connecticut Light and Power in 1934. Subsequently as luck (or skill) would have it, Natalie won first prize in a local turkey shoot. Her winning turkey was matched with a neighbor's hen and thus she began raising turkeys commercially. She became fully involved in the process of raising, preparing, freezing and shipping her own special brand across the country.

When she inherited the Woodbury farm after her mother's death in 1942, Natalie purchased the 75-acre Underhill property on the south side of Church Hill Rd (Photos 27-30; this building currently serves as FNC&LT Welcome Center). This brought her holdings to just over 200 acres. By 1955, Natalie turned her attention to raising Hampshire sheep, achieving the same business success as she had with her turkey farm decades earlier. Her Hampshire sheep became among the best herds east of the Mississippi river. All her woodworking and metal working skills, her hands-on involvement with agriculture and animal husbandry, and her work ethic allowed her to almost singlehandedly manage the enterprise. Natalie made the landscape of the Van Vleck Farm her palette.

During the 1960's, as suburban development began to encroach upon Woodbury's agricultural traditions, Natalie sought ways to protect the land and environment that had inspired her in art, work, and life for so many years. In consultation with prominent environmentalists and friends, she evolved the idea to develop a nature center on her property, preserving her farm's traditions, and wrote the first strategic plan for its use. In 1963, Flanders Nature Center was chartered as a non-profit organization. Soon, educational activities began to take shape on "Natalie's farm." Flanders became one of the first land trusts in the area in 1973, with its initial gift of land in downtown Woodbury. Upon her death in 1981, Natalie made her most significant investment in the Nature Center by bequeathing her 200 acres of land with all of its buildings. Eventually, as other properties were bought or donated, FNC&LT would become the de facto land trust for Woodbury.

For over two and a quarter centuries what began as a small rural farm evolved to an artist's haven, to a hub of commercial animal husbandry, to a nature center and to a land trust. The home of Thomas Judson has become the starting point of an enterprise that now owns and stewards over two thousand acres of land, that maintains and protects an inventory of 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings and their agricultural history, and that educates young and old in the lasting values of nature, art, and the environment.

# Map 1: Existing Conditions



The 200-acre Van Vleck Farm Sanctuary is the center of educational programs and activities for the Flanders Nature Center and administration for the Land Trust.

**LEGEND**

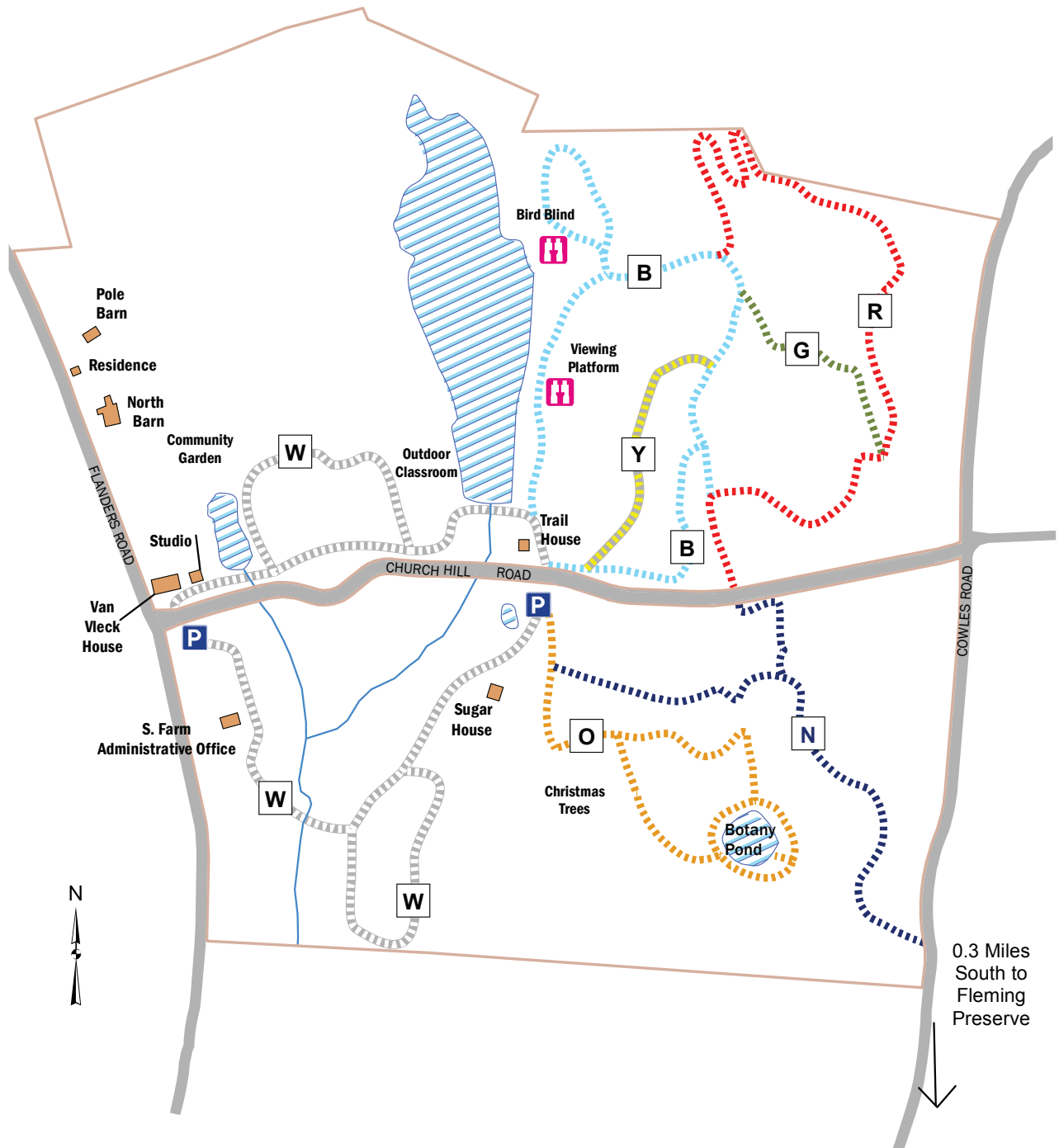
- WOODLAND
- BROOK
- TRAILS
- 10' CONTOUR LINE
- LEDGE
- PARKING



Sources  
 1. Planning and Trail Map for Flanders Nature Center  
 2. Connecticut GIS

# VAN VLECK FARM AND NATURE SANCTUARY

5 CHURCH HILL ROAD, WOODBURY, CT



## Legend

- Stream
- Road
- Parking & Information
- View Location
- Pond
- Building

## Trails

- Blue/Ed Briggs Trail - 0.8 miles
- Green Trail - 0.2 miles
- Navy Trail - 0.5 miles
- Orange/Botany Trail - 0.6 miles
- Red Trail - 0.65 miles
- White/Farm Trail - 1.1 miles
- Yellow Trail - 0.2 miles

0 0.1 0.2 Miles

## Photos A & B



Natalie Van Vleck 1901 – 1981  
Artist, farmer, and businesswoman  
Founder of Flanders Nature Center

*North Church, Woodbury.* Oil, 22 x 25 in., ca. 1930



## Photos 1 & 2



View south from North Barn  
Van Vleck house in background



View east from North Barn

## Photos 3 & 4



Front photos of Van Vleck House



Photos 5 & 6



View of Studio from Road



View of Studio from Van Vleck House



Interior views of Studio

Photos 7 & 8



## Photos 9 & 10



Interior of Studio Door; sunlight coming through doors



Photos 11 & 12



North Barn from Studio window



North Barn from Studio – Flanders Rd. on left

Photos 13 & 14



North side of North Barn

Photos 15 & 16



West view of North Barn from Flanders Rd.

Photos 17 & 18



South views of North Barn

Photos 19, 20, 21



Interior views of North Barn bays



Photos 22,23,24



Wheel hoist in North Barn loft



Photos 25 & 26



Interior North Barn with animals

## Photos 27 & 28



South Farm House and Barn from the south



Rear of South Farm House



Views of South Barn from the south

Photos 29 & 30





Photos 31 & 32



Interior of South Barn



Sugar House  
Photos 33 - 34

Photos 33, 34, 35



Trail House  
Photo 35