

CT Trust Resource ID: 2955

HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY – BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

State Historic Preservation Office, DECD, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

Inventory form modified for the Creative Places - Arts & Letters Project

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common): Robeson, Paul and Eslanda, HouseOther Name(s) (Historic): Robeson, Paul and Eslanda, HouseStreet Address or Location: 1221 Enfield Street, EnfieldTown/City: Enfield

Village:

County: HartfordDesignation(s): SRHD, NRHD, ..Owner(s): Troiano, Beatrice J.Public/Private: PrivateLatitude: 41.9822 Longitude: -72.5925

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Domestic: single dwellingHistoric Use: Domestic: single dwellingAccessibility to public: No Exterior visible from public road? YesInterior accessible? If yes, explain: NAStyle of building: Neo-classical Revival Date of Construction: c. 1850-1903

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate)

Structural Systems(s): Wood FrameRoof(Type): Gable (Material): Asphalt ShingleNumber of Stories: 2 1/2 Approximate Dimensions: 32' x 46'. 25' x 28' rear wingStructural Condition: GoodExterior Condition: GoodLocational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NAAlterations?: Yes If yes, explain: SidingRelated outbuildings or landscape features: Accessory apartment, BarnSurrounding Environment: Residential

Interrelationship of building and surroundings: This site is associated with the writer, actor, singer, and civil rights activist Paul Robeson, who lived here in the mid-20th century. The property is a 1.58-acre lot on the east side of Enfield Street in the Enfield Historic District. The house is set back from the street behind a deep lawn and curving driveway with scattered shade trees.

Other notable features of building or site: The house is a 2 1/2-story Neo-classical Revival-style building with a five-bay facade facing west, including a full-height projecting gable-roofed portico with a monumental colonnade of four full-height columns. A perpendicular wing extends east. The walls visible from the street are finished in stucco with wood trim forming the classical portico and eave details.

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

The house is a contributing resource in the Enfield Historic District, which includes the buildings lining Enfield Street, the main street of the town, located on a north-south trending hilltop east of and parallel to the Connecticut River. The date of this house is given as 1850 in the historic district nomination, though it appears possible that its detailing may date from an early-20th-century updating.

The house was the home of Paul and Eslanda Robeson from 1940-1953. Their son Paul Robeson, Jr (1927-2014), grew up here and graduated from Enfield High School. The Robesons were forced to sell the house for financial reasons during the period of Paul Robeson's blacklisting and confiscation of his passport, which prevented him from traveling to perform outside the United States.

Paul Robeson (1898-1976) was an All-American football player, a Phi Beta Kappa scholarship student at Rutgers University and a graduate of the Columbia University Law School. An African American, he later became an internationally known actor and singer. He was an activist in civil rights causes. Robeson purchased this Enfield house during the height of his popularity and used it to entertain his guests. His family owned it from March 1940 until December 1953.

Robeson's refusal to remain silent about racism in the United States, along with his active desire for full human justice and his Socialist views, resulted in his being ostracized by American society and persecuted by the forces of anti-Communism in the post-World War II years. He was barred from appearing at concert halls, had his passport revoked and saw his name removed from the football records he had established. He spent the last 15 years of his life in exile abroad and as a recluse in Philadelphia, dying in January 1976. In 1995, Robeson was posthumously inducted into the National Football Foundation's College Football Hall of Fame.

Sources:

Connecticut Freedom Trail. <http://www.ctfreedomtrail.org/trail/concept-of-freedom/sites/#!/paul-roberson-house> .< Connecticut Museumquest blog. Accessed at http://www.ctmuseumquest.com/?page_id=4383 .

New York Times:

Fitzsimmons, Emma G. 2014. http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/28/arts/activist-and-author-paul-roberson-jr-dies-at-86.html?_r=0

Lubasch, Arnold H. 1993. <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/10/21/garden/in-harlem-with-paul-roberson-jr-finding-his-own-voice-and-learning-to-use-it.html>

Tuhus, Melinda. 1998. <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/04/05/nyregion/celebrating-a-marvel-named-roberson.html?pagewanted=1> .

Robeson, Paul: Biography. Accessed at <http://www.biography.com/people/paul-roberson-9460451#activism-and-a-curtailed-career> .

Robeson, Paul. 1958. Here I Stand. Boston: Beacon Press. Reissued in 1971, 1988.

Ransom, David F. 1978. Enfield National Register Historic District Nomination No. 79002664. National Park Service.

Photographer: Chris Wigren **Date:** 2012

View: West view

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** January 4, 2016

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



1221 Enfield Street - Robeson House (C Wigren photograph)

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____

District ☐S ☐NR **If NR, specify:** ☐Actual ☐ Potential