

CT Trust Resource ID: 2128

## 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): Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum

Other Name(s) (Historic): Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum

Street Address or Location: 1819 Norwich New London Turnpike (Rte 32), Montville

Town/City: Montville

Village: Uncasville

County: New London

Designation(s):

Owner(s):

Public/Private: Non-Profit

Latitude: 41.4742 Longitude: -72.0997

### PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum

Historic Use: RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum

Accessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? Yes

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: During museum hours

Style of building: Vernacular craftsman style Date of Construction: 1931

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

Structural Systems(s): Load bearing masonry

Roof(Type): Gable (Material): Asphalt Shingle

Number of Stories: 1 Approximate Dimensions: 12' x 15', additions

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: Yes If yes, explain: Additions

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Barn, Tribal buildings on Mohegan Hill

Surrounding Environment: Rural

#### Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

Mohegan Hill, located on the west bank of the Thames River, had been meaningful to the Mohegans long before 1831, when they built the Mohegan Congregational Church on the hill. All around the church are features important to the tribe, including Moshup's Rock, bearing an indentation identified as a giant's footprint; formations where the Makiawisug, or 'little people,' lived; and Uncas' spring, associated with the leader of the Mohegans when they split from the Pequot tribe in the early 1600s. Also on the hill is the Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum, established in 1931 by John Tantaquidgeon and his children Harold and Gladys. Outdoor displays include examples of traditional wigwams and longhouses. The versions of these on view in 2017 were erected in 2011 and reflect current research in historic materials and construction methods (Wigren 2016).

#### Other notable features of building or site:

The small museum building is constructed of local fieldstone, with arrowheads and stone mortars and pestles embedded in its walls and a diamond-shaped protective symbol on the chimney. It has a low-pitched gable roof, with asphalt shingles. The original building was a rectangle of only 12' x 15' which has been enlarged by additions in 1957 and 1962, and rehabilitated in the last few years.

Architect: Tantaquidgeon, Gladys & Harold Builder/Maker: Tantaquidgeon, Gladys & Harold

#### Historical or Architectural importance:

The Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum was planned and built by members of the Mohegan Tribe at a time, in the 1930s, when tribal members were working to re-establish the community knowledge of their traditions, beliefs, and language. The museum became a focal location where traditional artifacts and more recent artwork were preserved and shared with other members of the tribe, and with the public. Gladys Tantaquidgeon, as a writer and conservator of community artworks and records, played a critical role in the cultural preservation of her own and other tribal traditions.

Gladys Tantaquidgeon (1899-2005) was born in Uncasville. During her early years, she intermittently attended non-Indian schools but never graduated from high school. She entered the University of Pennsylvania at the age of 20 where, despite her lack of formal education, she

studied anthropology under the noted scholar and chair of the Department of Anthropology, Dr. Frank Gouldsmith Speck. She studied traditional herbal medicine with her aunt, Emma Fielding Baker, and was named the Medicine Woman of the Mohegan Tribe. In the 1930s, Tantaquidgeon worked for the federal Bureau of Indian Affairs as a community worker on a Sioux reservation in South Dakota. Her efforts resulted in the promotion of Native American artwork as a method of preserving tribal autonomy. Native communities were able to benefit economically while encouraging the development of original Native American art. Ceremonial practices outlawed by the United States government were included in this art revival, and Tantaquidgeon's efforts led to a reversal of the ban on centuries-old cultural practices. Her experiences with reservation life on the Plains made her more conscious of the social issues women faced and this influenced her work as a librarian at the Niantic Women's Prison during the 1940s. In 1942, Tantaquidgeon published 'A Study of Delaware Indian Medicine Practice and Folk Belief' in which she documented the traditional practices and herbal medicine of coastal tribes of the East. Her efforts, as well as those of her father and brother, led to the creation of the Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum in Uncasville in 1931. Gladys Tantaquidgeon's work maintaining the records of the Mohegan people has been cited as significant in the federal recognition of the Mohegan Tribe in 1994. Tantaquidgeon's preservation of Mohegan documents, such as records of marriages, births, deaths, and graduations, provided evidence that helped the Mohegan Nation achieve recognition. She received honorary doctorates from Yale University and the University of Connecticut, and was inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame in 1994.

#### Sources:

Bruchac, Margaret. Spring 2015. The Speck Connection: Recovering Histories Of Indigenous Objects. Penn Museum, Museum Blog. Accessed at: <http://www.penn.museum/blog/museum/the-speck-connection-recovering-histories-of-indigenous-objects/> .

Connecticut History web site: <http://connecticuthistory.org/the-story-trail-of-voices/>

Connecticut Womens Hall of Fame. 1994. Accessed at: <http://www.cwhf.org/inductees/education-preservation/gladys-tantaquidgeon#.Vy1Ts5MrJtQ>

Cunningham, Janice P. and Elizabeth A. Warner. 2001. Historic and Architectural Resource Survey: Town of Montville CT, Connecticut Historical Commission. Individual HRIs by Lutke, Jennifer M., Newport Collaborative Architects, 1997.

Tantaquidgeon Indian Museum web site. Accessed at: [www.mohegan.nsn.us/heritage](http://www.mohegan.nsn.us/heritage)

Wigren, Christopher. 2016. Manuscript version of Buildings of Connecticut. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. To be published in 2017 by Wesleyan University Press.

Zobel, Melissa Tantaquidgeon. 2000. Medicine Trail: the life and lessons of Gladys Tantaquidgeon. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press.

Tantaquidgeon, Gladys, Obituary. 2005. New York Times. Accessed at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/02/nyregion/02tantaquidgeon.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2005/11/02/nyregion/02tantaquidgeon.html?_r=0)

**Photographer:** Charlotte Hitchcock Date: 5/09/2014

**View:** Southeast view

**Form completed by:** Charlotte Hitchcock Printed On: May 6, 2016

**Organization:** Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

**Address:** 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

**Threats:** None known

**Subsequent field evaluations:**



Southeast view of Tantaquidgeon Museum, 1819 Norwich NewLondon Tpke, Uncasville

#### FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # \_\_\_\_\_ Site# \_\_\_\_\_ UTM \_\_\_\_\_  
 District ☐ S ☐ NR If NR, specify: ☐ Actual ☐ Potential