

CT Trust Resource ID: 2712

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): Smith-Sweet, Justin House; Browne, Matilda, House

Other Name(s) (Historic): Smith-Sweet, Justin House; Browne, Matilda, House

Street Address or Location: 54 Lyme Street, Old Lyme

Town/City: Old Lyme

Village:

County: New London

Designation(s): SRHD, NRHD, LHD

Owner(s): ANDERSEN, GERALDINE K TR

Public/Private: Private

Latitude: 41.3232 Longitude: -72.3276

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Domestic: single dwelling

Historic Use: Domestic: single dwelling

Accessibility to public: No Exterior visible from public road? Yes

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: NA

Style of building: Gambrel Cape Cod Cottage Date of Construction: 1710

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

Structural Systems(s): Post & Beam

Roof(Type): Gambrel (Material): Wood Shingle

Number of Stories: 1 1/2 Approximate Dimensions: 26' x 28', additions

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: Yes If yes, explain: Additions to rear

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Barn

Surrounding Environment: Residential

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

This house is located on the west side of Lyme Street in the Old Lyme Historic District and it is a contributing resource in the National Register and Local Historic District. It sits immediately to the north of the Old Lyme Town Hall complex. The 1.16-acre property extends west to tidal wetlands along the bank of the Lieutenant River. The front yard has a fieldstone well head southeast of the house. A driveway extends into the property to the north of the house. The original house has been extended by modern additions, and there are multiple outbuildings.

Other notable features of building or site:

The eastern block of the building is a 26' x 28' gambrel-roofed 1 1/2-story Cape Cod Cottage-type building. This has a four-bay façade facing east to the street, with an entry door and transom in the second from the south. Windows are eight-over-twelve double-hung sash. Two gable dormers are in the roof pitch, and have six-over-six sash. A stone chimney is off-center toward the north. Siding is wood clapboard, roofing is wood shingles. Additions at the rear more than double the current size of the house.

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

54 Lyme Street is known as the Justin Smith-Sweet House, built c. 1710 (per the plaque on the façade) and owned by Smith family members for more than 150 years. In the 1930s it was the property of Mrs. George Bogart, who apparently rented it out, as she also owned 78 Lyme Street (see Helen and Frank DuMond). The occupancy by Matilda Browne in the early- to mid-twentieth century, as a member of the Old Lyme Art Colony community, adds additional significance to the history of this house.

Matilda Browne (1869-1947) developed a strong connection to the art colony in Old Lyme, and this established Browne as an important member of the American Impressionist group. Browne was born in Newark, New Jersey, into a family with two sisters and a brother. She had the good fortune to grow up next door to famed landscape painter, Thomas Moran (1837-1926). Moran allowed her to experiment with his

own brushes and colors. She exhibited one of her early efforts, a floral study, at the National Academy of Design when she was only twelve years old.

After Moran, Browne studied under a series of accomplished tutors in the United States, France, and the Netherlands during the 1880s. She returned to the New York area. Records show that the artist was in Greenwich, presumably working at Cos Cob, in the late 1890s. She worked in Old Lyme from 1905-06 and periodically from 1911-24, living in the house at 54 Lyme Street. As her career accelerated, she exhibited and won awards nationally and in Connecticut. Sometime around 1918 she married Frederick Van Wyck, a New York merchant and author on local history, and in 1932 her illustrations were published in her husband's book, 'Recollections of an Old New Yorker.' After her husband's death in 1936, she lived in Greenwich with her sisters.

Although flower and animal painting became Browne's specialty, her skill in both genres led her to elevate her subject matter, and her work stands comparison with some of the best Impressionists of the age.

She is honored with the reputation of being the only woman at Old Lyme who was taken seriously as a painter by her male colleagues, and she was considered an important member of the Old Lyme group. In fact, Browne was asked to paint a door panel in the dining room at Miss Griswold's, a prestigious invitation and one that clearly shows she was a part of that coterie of artists.

Sources:

Interview by C. Hitchcock, and driving tour with John Pfeiffer and Martha Hansen, 11/14/2014.

Town of Old Lyme Assessors Records and GIS mapping: <https://oldlymect.mapgeo.io/> and <http://gis.vgsi.com/oldlymect/>.

Browne, Matilda, biography. Cooley Gallery. Accessed at: http://www.cooleygallery.com/b_inv/browne.htm.

Browne, Matilda, biography. ASKArt. Accessed at: http://www.askart.com/artist_bio/.

Browne, Matilda: Idylls of Farm and Garden. 2016. Florence Griswold Museum. Accessed at:

<https://florencegriswoldmuseum.org/exhibitions/matilda-brown-idylls-of-farm-and-garden/>.

Old Lyme National Register Historic District Nomination No. 71000918. National Park Service.

Old Lyme Village Walking Tour. No date. Old Lyme: Old Lyme Historical Society, Inc.

U.S. Federal Census. Accessed at: <http://www.ancestryheritagequest.com/hqa>.

Van Wyck, Matilda Browne, obituary. 11/04/1947. New York Times.

Van Wyck, Frederick, obituary. 2/17/1936. New York Times.

WPA Architectural Survey: Old Lyme historic building 002. Accessed at:

<http://cslib.contentdm.oclc.org/cdm/singleitem/collection/p4005coll7/id/4867/rec/2>.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock **Date:** 10/13/2014

View: East view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** May 22, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



SE view of 54 Lyme St., Smith-Sweet / Matilda Browne House

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ Site# _____ UTM _____

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