

CT Trust Resource ID: 2148

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): Peterson, Roger Tory Home & Studio

Other Name(s) (Historic): /Peterson, Roger Tory Home & Studio/The Cedars

Street Address or Location: 125-127-131 Neck Road, Old Lyme

Town/City: Old Lyme

Village:

County: New London

Designation(s):

Owner(s): Multiple

Public/Private: Private

Latitude: 41.3456 Longitude: -72.3374

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Domestic: single dwelling

Historic Use: Domestic: single dwelling

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

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: NA

Style of building: Neo-colonial revival, Shingle Date of Construction: 1920-1930

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

Structural Systems(s): Wood Frame

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

Number of Stories: 2 1/2 Approximate Dimensions: 32' x 40', additions

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: Yes If yes, explain: Modern guest house built 1991.

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Garden, Guest house

Surrounding Environment: Woodland

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

Located on the east side of Neck Road, south of Saunders Hollow Road, three parcels totaling more than 63 acres, belonged to Roger Tory Peterson. Three houses are sited close to Neck Road but out of sight from the public right-of-way. The interior portion of the 131 Neck Road parcel extends east to the Lieutenant River and south across the rear property lines of the other parcels. This land is covered by woodland and tidal wetlands. The buildings include:

At 125 Neck Road - Hip-roofed 2 1/2-story main house (c. 1920) and 1-story guest house on a 4.46-acre parcel on the east side of Neck Road; Peterson's home.

At 127 Neck Road - c. 1930 1-story ranch-style house on a 2.72-acre parcel; Peterson's studio.

At 131 Neck Road - a small c. 1930 1-story ranch-style house; used for administrative work and a reference library. Peterson owned this parcel, 56.08 acres, which has been acquired by the US Fish and Wildlife Service as the Roger Tory Peterson Unit of the Silvio Conte National Wildlife Refuge.

Other notable features of building or site:

The house which was Roger Tory Peterson's home for the last four decades of his life, is an early twentieth-century 2-story gambrel-on-hip building in a vernacular Neo-colonial revival or Shingle style. The upper floor has tall multi-paned casement windows, while the ground floor windows are smaller, also casements. Siding is wood shingles. An entry porch at the northwest corner has square posts and a hip roof. Additions extend on the south and east, including an attached garage. The Peterson property included a studio to the north, now at 127 Neck Road, administrative offices for the bird guide publications at 131 Neck Road, and the acreage of woods and tidal marshes to the east, extending to the Lieutenant River. The land, and the bird-watching opportunities it afforded, was the most significant feature of the property for Peterson.

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

Roger Tory Peterson (1908-1996), grew up in Jamestown, New York, at the eastern tip of Lake Chautauqua, fascinated by birds from his

early years. He left home to study and the Art Students League in New York City, and discovered the American Museum of Natural History and the Bronx County Bird Club, among his sources of mentoring and education in biology and bird-watching. In the early 1930s, as a science teacher in Brookline, Massachusetts, he created and published the 1934 first edition of 'A Field Guide to the Birds.' His system of illustrations revolutionized the practice of bird identification.

In 1954 Peterson and his family (first wife Barbara, with sons Tory and Lee), moved 'because he needed relative proximity to the American Museum of Natural History in New York and Houghton Mifflin in Boston. At the same time, he wanted to be as far away from them as possible, and live in a beautiful natural setting' (Hartford Courant 1996). He lived briefly on Homestead Circle, overlooking the Black Hall River. Soon, he moved to Neck Road where he effectively had his own nature preserve of over 60 acres on the Lieutenant River (Rosenthal 2010, p. 127). Following the death of Peterson's second wife, Virginia, in 2001, the Nature Conservancy and the Town of Old Lyme worked to preserve the open space, ultimately arranging its acquisition and transfer to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as a unit of the Silvio Conte Wildlife Refuge.

Roger Tory Peterson is credited with inventing the modern field guide, combining paintings of birds with descriptions in a portable format, and enabling even amateurs to easily identify a variety of bird species. As an internationally-known naturalist, Peterson helped raise awareness about the dangers of chemicals, including DDT, to raptors, including bald eagles and osprey. He was also a noted painter of nature, although his continuous revisions to the bird guides left him little time for painting as pure art.

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/>.

Zillow real estate listing for 125 Neck Road, accessed 2/27/2014.

Hartford Courant. Accessed through ProQuest. Dee, Jane E. 4/21/2002. Peterson's Perspective: A Developer Has His Eye On The Famous Birder's Homestead In Old Lyme, But The Nature Conservancy Has Other Plans. Dufresne, Beth. 6/04/2010. A Cozy Nest: a Visit to Old Lyme Estate of Late Bird Artist Roger Tory Peterson. Grant, Steve. 11/29/1992. 'Naturalist finds satisfaction in his field-guide art.' Obituary. 7/30/1996.

Rosenthal, Elizabeth J. 2008. Birdwatcher: the Life of Roger Tory Peterson. Guilford: Lyons Press.

Woodside, Christine. Where Bird Guides Were Born, Soon a Refuge? 2/03/2002. New York Times.

Photographer: Vision Assessor photo Date:

View: North view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock Printed On: May 23, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



125 Neck Road, Old Lyme (Vision assessor photo)

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ Site# _____ UTM _____

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