

CT Trust Resource ID: 2229

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): Steichen Estate; Umpawaug Farm; Topstone ParkOther Name(s) (Historic): /Steichen Estate; Umpawaug Farm; Topstone ParkStreet Address or Location: 72 Topstone Road, ReddingTown/City: ReddingVillage: West ReddingCounty: Fairfield

Designation(s):

Owner(s): Town of ReddingPublic/Private: PublicLatitude: 41.3003 Longitude: -73.4516

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: SITE: Public ParkHistoric Use: Domestic: single dwellingAccessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? NoInterior accessible? If yes, explain: n/a - no buildingsStyle of building: n/a - no buildings Date of Construction: c. 1932

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

Structural Systems(s):

Roof(Type): (Material):

Number of Stories: Approximate Dimensions:Structural Condition: GoodExterior Condition: GoodLocational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NAAlterations?: If yes, explain: NARelated outbuildings or landscape features: Shed, Bathroom buildingSurrounding Environment: Residential, Residential, Residential, Residential

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The park comprises 270 acres of Edward Steichen's former estate now owned by the Town of Redding. Topstone Park includes parking lots, hiking trails, and a pond. The pond is in the center of the parcel, and is accessible by Topstone Road. A driveway extends to the south off Topstone Road and leads to a small parking area and public beach area. Directly northwest of the beach is Steichen's Dam, which separates Steichen's Pond from a more northern one. Hiking trails are found throughout the park.

Other notable features of building or site:

Topstone Park encompasses approximately 270 acres, bounded by Topstone Road to the northwest and Old Redding Road to the southeast. The park includes parking lots, hiking trails, and a local swimming pond with beach, called Steichen's Pond. The terrain includes hills forested with deciduous and coniferous trees, grassy knolls, and rocky areas. Edward Steichen had the 25-acre pond (along with a second pond that is now located on privately owned land) created when he owned this property. The public beach is located on the alcove of the curved arm-like section of the pond. It is reached from the parking lot by a dirt road and paved walkways.

Architect: Steichen, Edward Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

When Steichen purchased this property in 1929, it consisted of approximately 400 acres and was abandoned farmland. Steichen called it Umpawaug Farm, and had two ponds created before 1934, as shown by historic maps. In the 1940s he designed a Modernist-style house that he was built near the more northern of the two ponds. This house is still extant (now privately owned), and Steichen lived there until his death in 1973. The main façade faces east, and the west elevation of the house overlooks the pond and forested land. It is constructed of wood and stone, with large glass windows that act as glass walls in some areas. The house has a flat roof and what appears to be a greenhouse in the southeast corner. During Steichen's ownership of the property, it was not open to the public and the beach did not have the current picnic tables, grills, lifeguard chairs, and a bath house.

Edward Steichen (1879-1973), a renowned photographer during the 1920s to 1970s, photographed this property extensively throughout the period of his ownership. Steichen lived in Redding full-time in 1938 after selling his studio in New York City. In 1955, he began photographing a shadblow tree which he could see from his house. He photographed it during all hours of the day in all seasons of the year for four years in order 'to evoke life's cycles of change and growth.' Steichen was intrigued by nature, and flowers and trees were among his favorite photographic subjects, and he often used his own property as subject.

Edward Steichen was born in Luxembourg in 1879. In 1880, his father immigrated to the United States, settling in Milwaukee. At the age of 16,

Steichen purchased his first camera and became very interested in photography. At 21 Steichen moved to Paris; during this time he was both a painter and photographer. By 1903, Steichen returned to the United States, moved to New York City, and set up a studio at 291 Fifth Avenue. He partnered with Alfred Stieglitz and helped hold exhibits dedicated to photography and other genres of art. Steichen experimented with photography. After a raindrop fell on his lens and distorted the picture, he enjoyed the outcome of a slightly blurred image. He enjoyed the effects of accidents, and often re-created these effects (J. Steichen 2000, 30). Steichen served in both World Wars, applying his photographic expertise to the war effort. Following World War I, he devoted himself solely to photography. In 1923, he began working for Condé Nast as photographer of Vogue and Vanity Fair magazines. In 1932, Vogue published its first color magazine cover, a photograph by Steichen of a model wearing a red swimsuit. He resigned from Condé Nast in 1938, moving permanently to Redding. He spent much of his time photographing the trees and ponds on his property. In 1969, Steichen informed the Town of Redding that he planned to sell his property and wanted the town to purchase it for recreational use. Finally, in 1971, the Town of Redding purchased approximately 270 acres of Steichen's property to be used as a park with a public beach and hiking trails (Robinson 1971, 35).

Sources:

Minor, Henry A. 1912. Map of the Town of Redding, Conn. On file Mark Twain Library Collections. Redding, CT.
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 Aerial views from: <http://maps.google.com/> and <http://www.bing.com/maps> - accessed June 6, 2014.
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Photographer: Kristen Nietering **Date:** 5/13/2014

View:

Form completed by: Kristen Nietering **Printed On:** June 14, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



View of Steichen's Pond at Topstone Park

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____
District ☐ S ☐ NR **If NR, specify:** ☐ Actual ☐ Potential