

CT Trust Resource ID: 941

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): Murdock Hill; Lape-Reed House; Salt Meadow Unit, Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge

Other Name(s) (Historic): Murdock Hill; Lape-Reed House; Salt Meadow Unit, Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge/Salt Meadow National Wildlife Refuge

Street Address or Location: 733 Old Clinton Road, Westbrook

Town/City: Westbrook

Village:

County: Middlesex

Designation(s): SR

Owner(s): US FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE

Public/Private: Public

Latitude: 41.2866 Longitude: -72.4709

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: RECREATION & CULTURE: Wildlife refuge

Historic Use: Domestic: single dwelling; Agriculture/subsistence: Agricultural outbuilding

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

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: NA

Style of building: 20th century Craftsman Date of Construction: 1780s, 1929

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

Structural Systems(s): Post & Beam, Wood Frame

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

Number of Stories: 2 1/2 Approximate Dimensions: 28' x 62', 25' x 38'

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: No If yes, explain: NA

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Cottages, Shed

Surrounding Environment: Woodland

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The site is 141 acres on the south side of Old Clinton Road, bounded on the south by an Amtrak rail line right-of-way and on the west by the Menunketesuck River. A public access drive enters the site and runs southwest to a parking area near the buildings. A second private access drive for wildlife refuge staff enters the site further west and leads south to a service area and garage north of the buildings. The site is mainly forested, with an open meadow area extending south from the two main buildings.

Other notable features of building or site:

The two-and-one-half-story, plus basement, main house is rectangular in plan with a symmetrical five-bay facade. The main block is 40' x 24', and the one-story, L-shaped north and west additions together are approximately 10' x 20' in size. The fieldstone veneer walls rising from grade are approximately 12 inches thick and constructed of random coursed, mortared stone which may have been collected from the property. Detailing is restricted to window and door openings where long stones laid vertically create splayed lintels. The structural system of the main block is pegged post-and-beam, visible only in the basement, where it is exposed, and as cased corner posts. The additions are built of load-bearing masonry (Fitch 1989).

The older Murdock farmhouse, c. 1750-1800, is a center-chimney, five-room-plan building which remained essentially intact since its original construction. Stone veneer cladding was added in 1929 (Fitch 1989).

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

The significance of Murdock Hill lies in the architecture of its two principle buildings -- the Murdock House (circa 1750-1800; remodeled circa 1929) and the Lape-Read House (1929). The former possesses the fundamental design and construction characteristics of modest, rural, domestic architecture of the period. In addition, it represents, through later changes, an adaptation to a new design aesthetic and an unusual

approach to restoration. The latter is an excellent example of early twentieth century rustic architecture notable for its masonry and woodwork, as well as an unusual interior design, which is reflected in the arrangement of the façade (Fitch 1989).

Esther Everett Lape (1881-1981) and Elizabeth Fisher Read (1872-1943) were writers, intellectuals, and social activists who came to the Connecticut countryside in search of peaceful places to work. In 1927 the women bought the old farm known as Murdock Hill – the first of eleven parcels purchased by 1945, that make up the current Salt Meadow Unit. Lape and Read constructed a new house of rustic fieldstone with brick trim and wrought-iron balconies. The plan is unusual, lacking in formal living spaces. Apparently meals and socializing took place in the owners' bed-sitting rooms on the second story. Nearby to the east is the old Murdock farmhouse (probably 1750-1800), which Lape and Read covered in fieldstone facing to match the main house. It contained service quarters. Stone was also used for terraces, benches and a well; and extensive gardens surrounded the buildings (Wigren 2010).

Esther Lape was a graduate of Wellesley College. She taught English at the college level and was well known as a journalist, researcher, and publicist. Lape was associated with the Women's Trade Union League and was a founder of the League of Women Voters. Scholar and lawyer Elizabeth Read graduated from Smith College and the University of Pennsylvania Law School. She was Eleanor Roosevelt's personal attorney and financial advisor. Both women enjoyed life-long friendships with Roosevelt.

Esther Lape donated her land to form the first unit of what became the Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge protects areas of Connecticut shoreline that are part of the Atlantic Flyway, important to bird migrations.

Sources:

Town of Westbrook Assessor's Records and GIS viewer. Accessed at: <https://westbrookct.mapgeo.io/?latlng=41.301582%2C-72.465728&zoom=13>.

Connecticut SHPO files (no date) indicate approval for the State Register but an owner (US Fish and Wildlife Service) objection to listing on the National Register.

Murdock Hill, Westbrook, HABS No. CT-416. Historic American Building Survey. Photographs accessed at:

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/search/?q=murdock%20hill&co=hh&sg=true> . Fitch, Virginia A. 1989. Narrative. Accessed at Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation files. Eleanor Roosevelt National Historic Site web glossary. Accessed in 2010 at:

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/read-elizabeth.htm> , <http://www.nps.gov/archive/elro/glossary/lape-esther.htm> .

Stewart B. McKinney National Wildlife Refuge web site. Accessed at: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/Stewart_B_McKinney/about.html .

Wigren, Christopher. 2010. 'Salt Meadow, Westbrook.' Connecticut Preservation News, p. 16.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock Date: 6/12/2014

View: South view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock Printed On: June 1, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



Lape-Reed and Murdock Houses, south view

FOR OFFICE USE:

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