

HISTORIC RESOURCES — BUILDINGS AND SITES

Please send completed form to: National Register and State Register Coordinator,
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development,
One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford CT 06103

* Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Site / Building Name Chapman Farmstead / Kent, William, House and Barn-Studio
 Artist / Writer Name Kent (aka Williamson), William Theme: Connecticut as refuge
 Street Address or Location 269 Howd Road
 Town/City Durham Village _____ County Middlesex
 Owner(s) William Kent Charitable Foundation, 328 Tri Mountain Rd, Durham CT 06422 ☐ Public ☒ Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Domestic: single dwelling; Secondary structure: art studio

Historic Use: Domestic: single dwelling; Secondary structure: agricultural outbuilding

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

Interior accessible? ☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, explain By appointment

Style of building Vernacular Date of Construction Early 20th c.

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

☐ Clapboard ☐ Asbestos Siding ☐ Brick ☐ Wood Shingle ☒ Asphalt Siding
☐ Fieldstone ☐ Board & Batten ☐ Stucco ☐ Cobblestone ☐ Aluminum Siding
☒ Concrete (Type cast-in-place) ☐ Cut Stone (Type _____) ☐ Other _____

Structural System

☒ Wood Frame ☐ Post & Beam ☐ Balloon ☐ Load bearing masonry ☒ Structural iron or steel
☐ Other _____

Roof (Type)

☒ Gable ☐ Flat ☐ Mansard ☐ Monitor ☐ Sawtooth
☐ Gambrel ☐ Shed ☐ Hip ☐ Round ☐ Other _____

(Material)

☐ Wood Shingle ☐ Roll Asphalt ☐ Tin ☐ Slate ☒ Asphalt Shingle
☐ Built up ☐ Tile ☐ Other _____

Number of Stories: 1 1/2 Approximate Dimensions House: 20' x 46'; Barn/studio: 35' x 100'

Structural Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: ☐ Excellent ☐ Good ☒ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Location Integrity: ☒ On original site ☐ Moved When? _____

Alterations? ☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, explain: Demolition of north barn (c. 1964) and south silos (before 1964).

FOR OFFICE USE: Town # _____ Site # _____ UTM _____

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

PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)**Related outbuildings or landscape features:**

- ☒ Barn ☐ Shed ☐ Garage ☐ Carriage House ☐ Shop ☐ Garden
☒ Other landscape features or buildings: Stream along the west and north sides of the property

Surrounding Environment:

- ☒ Open land ☒ Woodland ☐ Residential ☐ Commercial ☐ Industrial ☒ Rural
☐ High building density ☒ Scattered buildings visible from site

- Interrelationship of building and surroundings, landscape description:

See continuation sheet.

- Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

See continuation sheet.

Architect/Designer _____ Builder/Maker _____

- Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

- Latitude, Longitude: 41.446808, -72.727358

- Sources:

See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 7/15/2014

View Multiple Views Negative on File CTHP

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 8/07/2014

Organization Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517

- Subsequent field evaluations:

Threats to the building or site:

- ☒ None known ☐ Highways ☐ Vandalism ☐ Developers ☐ Renewal ☐ Private
☐ Deterioration ☐ Zoning ☐ Other _____ ☐ Explanation _____

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269 Howd Road, Durham CT

Record No. 355.2360

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- Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The site is located near the western border of the town of Durham, a short distance northeast of Pistapaug Pond. Howd Road extends northeast from the town line with Wallingford (where it continues as Whirlwind Hill Road). It passes along the eastern edge of Trimountain State Park, then bends sharply toward the east and runs southeast to an intersection with New Haven Road (Route 17). The William Kent House and Studio are on the north side of the road at the bend. The property is slightly less than an acre and surrounded by farmland and residential subdivisions.

The center of Durham is approximately four miles northeast along Route 17. The town center is the site of the Durham Main Street National Register and Local Historic District. Also on the National Register is the Thomas Lyman House at 105 Middlefield Road. Several other farmsteads in Durham are listed on the State Register of Historic Places as part of the multiple resources Agricultural Heritage thematic nomination.

- Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/ or Exterior*):

Architectural description:

Inventory of structures (C – contributing, NC – non-contributing):

House	Early 20 th c.	C
Barn/studio	Early 20 th c.	C

House:

The house is a small 1 ½-story gable-roofed Cape-style building with its ridge-line oriented east-west and its south eave façade facing south toward the road. The wood-framed structure is approximately 20' x 46' and has five six-over-six double-hung windows irregularly spaced across the south eave-façade. The east gable-end has a similar window toward the left and a door to the right, with a modern wood deck and ramp leading to grade. There is a two-pane attic window above. The west side is covered by a partially-collapsed shed addition. A connecting passage from the northwest corner of the house leads to the southeast corner of the barn/studio. A brick chimney is off-center toward the east at the ridge-line. The roof has overhangs at the rakes and eaves. Windows are wood-trimmed while walls are covered with asphalt shingle siding. The interior is partitioned into several small rooms including a kitchen at the southeast corner and spaces that are now used for storage of artwork.

Barn/studio:

This is a 1 ½-story gable-roofed structure approximately 35' x 100' with its ridge-line oriented north-south, perpendicular to the road. The gable roof has overhangs at rakes and eaves, similar to the house. The form of this structure is typical of 1-story ground level stable barns that were commonly built in the early 1900s.

The south gable-end has a pass-through entrance door at the center, flanked by a pair of windows to the left and a single six-pane window to the right. Along the west eave-side is a series of windows, some of which are nine-pane sash of a type that was common in dairy barns of the early 20th century. Off-center toward the north, a gable-roofed wing extends westward. A historic aerial photograph shows that this formerly extended farther and connected to another long narrow structure (possibly a poultry house), of which a partial foundation remains. A concrete masonry exterior chimney is located off-center toward the right (south) and to the right of this are a multi-paned picture window and French door which appear to be non-original.

The east side is similar, with a corresponding 1-story gable-roofed addition, which may have been a milk room or feed room. Aerial photography shows that a taller barn with a cupola formerly stood to the north, attached at the north end of the existing building. Other structures formerly stood to the east and northeast. The barn/studio is covered with asphalt shingle siding and the window trim is painted wood; roofing is asphalt shingles.

The interior has two rows of steel columns, consistent with the design of typical dairy stable barns, and is finished with flush-board wood paneling at the walls and ceiling, also typical of the stable barn type. The remains of overhead track systems are visible suspended from the ceiling. The floor is concrete. Some interior partitions have been added, creating an entry area at the south end, a work space along the west side, and a gallery/office on the east side.

• Historical or Architectural importance:

Applicable Connecticut State Register Criteria:

1. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past;
2. Embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.

Theme: Connecticut as refuge.

The William Kent studio and house are significant as the work and living place of printmaker and sculptor Bill Kent for almost 50 years. The re-use of vacant agricultural structures allowed the artist to live inexpensively in a space that was ample enough for the creation of his wood sculptures, and to maintain a level of privacy which he desired.

Artist background:

William Kent (1919-2012) was born William Williamson in Kansas City Missouri. He grew up there, attended college in the Chicago area at Northwestern University and then served in the Navy during World War II. Following the war, he moved to New Haven as a graduate student of music, to study music theory with Paul Hindemith. He soon became fascinated by art and pursued printmaking as a self-taught artist. He retained his love of music and played the piano throughout his life. He adopted the name Kent as his professional persona.

During the early 1960s, Kent created for himself a position as curator at the John Slade Ely House Art Center on Trumbull Street in New Haven, bringing to life an institution that had not had a curatorial staff or frequent exhibits. He was able to use basement space as a studio, and began his series of prints from surplus slate blackboards. He began to exhibit and to receive favorable reviews for his work in a Pop art-related style. A controversy arose with the Ely House trustees in 1965 over the content of his work which incorporated violent and erotic imagery in service of messages of social protest.

At that point, Kent moved to Durham where he purchased the acre of property including the barn and small house. Here he spent the remainder of his life, much of it as a recluse, working intensively on his art. He continued printmaking, with pieces printed from slate onto fabric, and incorporating social commentary on the politics of the 1960s, Vietnam War era, and environmental issues.

Kent also developed as a sculptor of stone and wood carved pieces; this increasingly became his dominant activity at the Durham studio. He incorporated scale shifts from small commonplace objects which he used as models to create his monumental pieces up to seven feet tall. As with his printmaking, the imagery often juxtaposes surprising objects, suggesting social commentary which can be humorous, satirical, or disquieting. The materials are stone or a variety of wood species, often locally-sourced and sometimes laminated for form larger blocks.

Bill Kent worked in the studio until his death in 2012 at the age of 93. In 2006 one of his legs was amputated as a result of illness, but he adjusted his lifestyle and continued working, with the help of a group of supportive friends. At the time of his death, the studio was stocked with a multitude of his wood pieces as well as thousands of prints. His work is represented, among other places, in the collection of the New Britain Museum of American Art.

Historical background:

The barn that became Bill Kent's studio appears to have been a dairy barn built in the early 20th century. The proportions, layout, and construction are typical of ground level stable barns of the early 1900s. The 40' x 100' dimensions, large windows, and interior construction with steel columns and fully-finished wood-paneled and painted interior, characterize dairy practice and hygiene at the time. The barn was attached as an ell to an older barn, as can be seen in the Fairchild aerial photograph of 1934 and the survey plan of 1964. This would have had a hay loft, while the southern addition would have provided space for two rows of dairy cows. The attached house is thought to have been used for feed storage or for farm worker housing at various times.

In the 1920s the property belonged to the Chapman family, who lived in the house east of the barn. The parcel containing the barns was sold by them to the Page family, who used the large barn for dairy and are thought to have used the extant barn for a slaughtering facility. Benjamin and Anna Miller purchased the Page farm including the

barns in 1929. Benjamin was born in Poland in 1897, Anna in 1907; their son Henry was seven in 1929. The Millers raised broiler chickens through the 1950s. The small house was a feed storage shed, and later worker housing.

The Millers' descendants, Bob and Alicia, continue to operate the Miller Tree Farm. In 1964 the Millers sold the small parcel to William Kent, and assisted him with demolition of the large older barn and a silo in the same area. Bill Kent converted the remaining barn to his studio, heated by a wood stove in the southeast corner. The western half became the woodworking shop while the eastern space was a gallery/office. The small house was his living space. For many years he kept tidy gardens around the buildings; recently the landscape has not been maintained.

Following Kent's death, the property is owned by the William Kent Charitable Foundation, with the mission of assistance to artists over the age of 60 in financial need.

Architectural and cultural significance:

The remaining farmstead buildings, the barn and small house, are typical examples of the dairy farm structures of the early 1900s, when the ground level stable barn became standardized.

Converted to the William Kent studio and house, the structures are significant as the work- and living-place of printmaker and sculptor Kent for almost 50 years. The re-use of the vacant agricultural structures allowed the artist to live inexpensively in a space that was ample enough for the creation of his wood sculptures, and to maintain a level of privacy which Kent desired when he left New Haven. Kent was a prolific artist, although not widely known or financially successful. His early work represents a variant of Pop art and reflects social and political themes of the 1960s and 1970s. His later wood sculptures combine elements of Pop art imagery, surrealism, and satire with a virtuosic skill in the woodcarver's craft. The place, which looks like a typical early 20th-century farmstead on the exterior, reveals an interior that was a refuge and a place that nurtured creativity.

• Sources (*continuation*):

Photographs and field notes by Charlotte Hitchcock 7/15/2014.

Interview with Joan Baer, Alicia Miller, and Marvin Beloff, 7/15/2014, at the site; and 8/15/2014 by email.

Map resources:

Town of Durham Assessor's Records <http://durham.univers-ct.com/index.php?reset=true> . Parcel ID: W0255800.

Aerial views from:

<http://maps.google.com/> and <http://www.bing.com/maps/> accessed 8/12/2014.

Historical aerial photography and maps accessed at UConn MAGIC:

http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934.html

http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/historical_maps_connecticut_towns.html .

USGS Historical Maps at <http://historical.mytopo.com/> accessed 8/12/2014.

UTM coordinates: <http://itouchmap.com/latlong.html> .

Print and internet resources:

Beach, Randall. "Durham's Hidden Treasure: the works of a prickly master wood carver." New Haven Register, 11/04/2012.

Beloff, Marvin. "William Kent: the story of my friendship with the Master Sculptor." Marvin Beloff, 2013.

Bisbort, Alan. "How Prints Got an Artist in Hot Water." New York Times, 9/03/2000.

Connecticut State Library online: [iconn.org](http://www.cslib.org/iconnsitemap/staff/SiteIndex.aspx#directories) or <http://www.cslib.org/iconnsitemap/staff/SiteIndex.aspx#directories>

Carley, Rachel. Creative Places: Modern Arts and Letters in Connecticut. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation & State Historic Preservation Office, 2014.

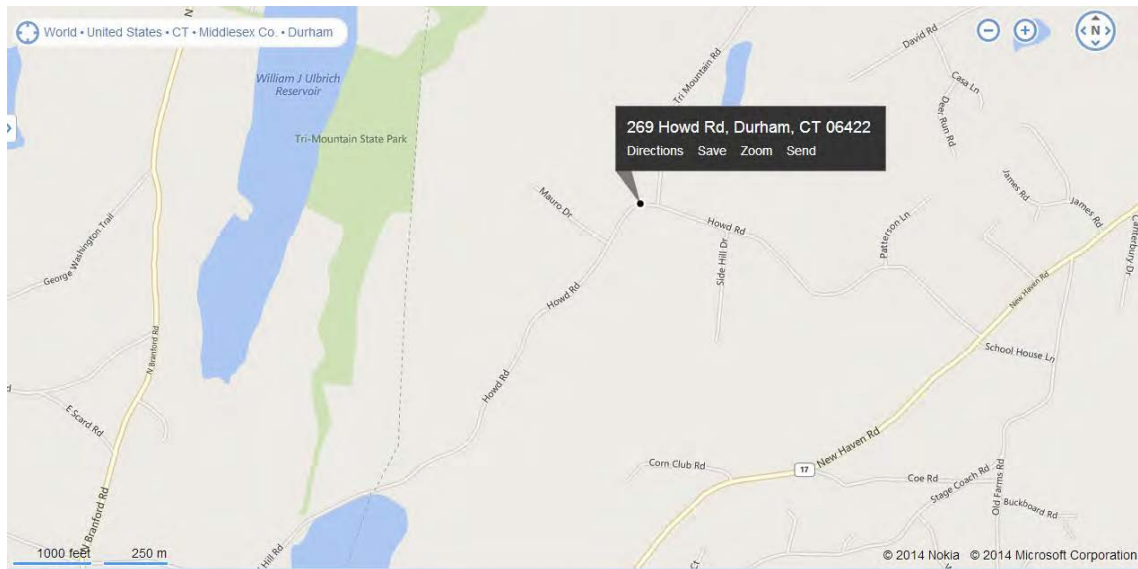
William Kent Charitable Trust web site. <http://www.williamkentfoundation.org/home.htm> accessed 8/12/2014.

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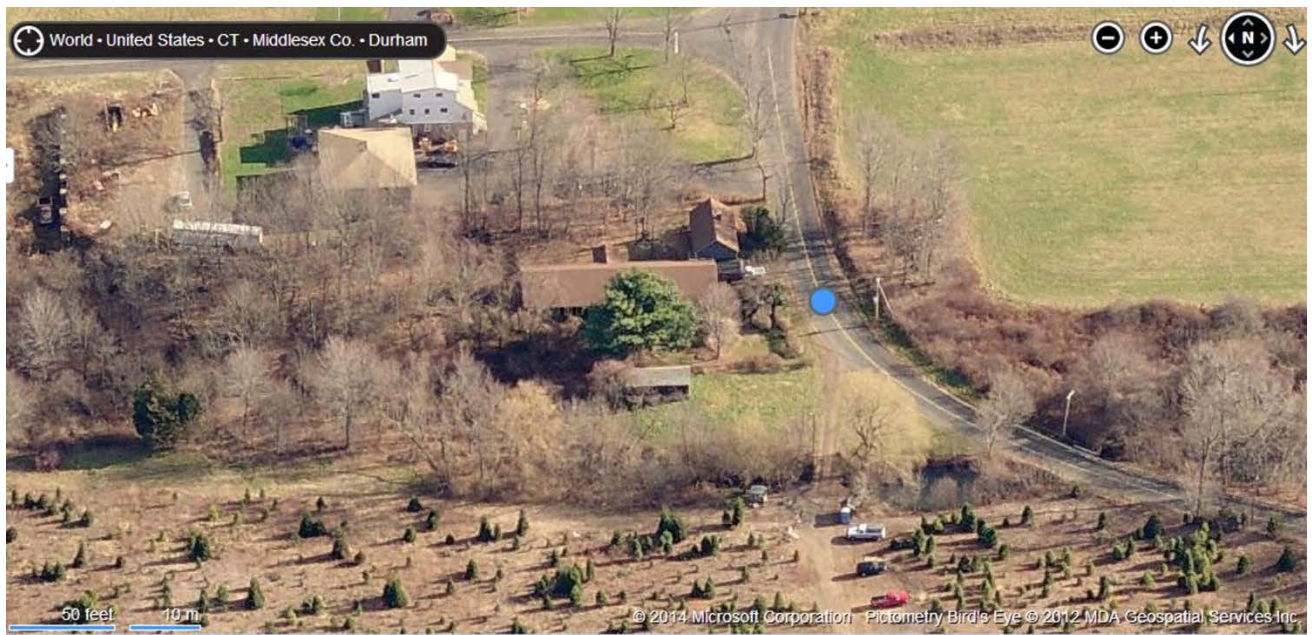
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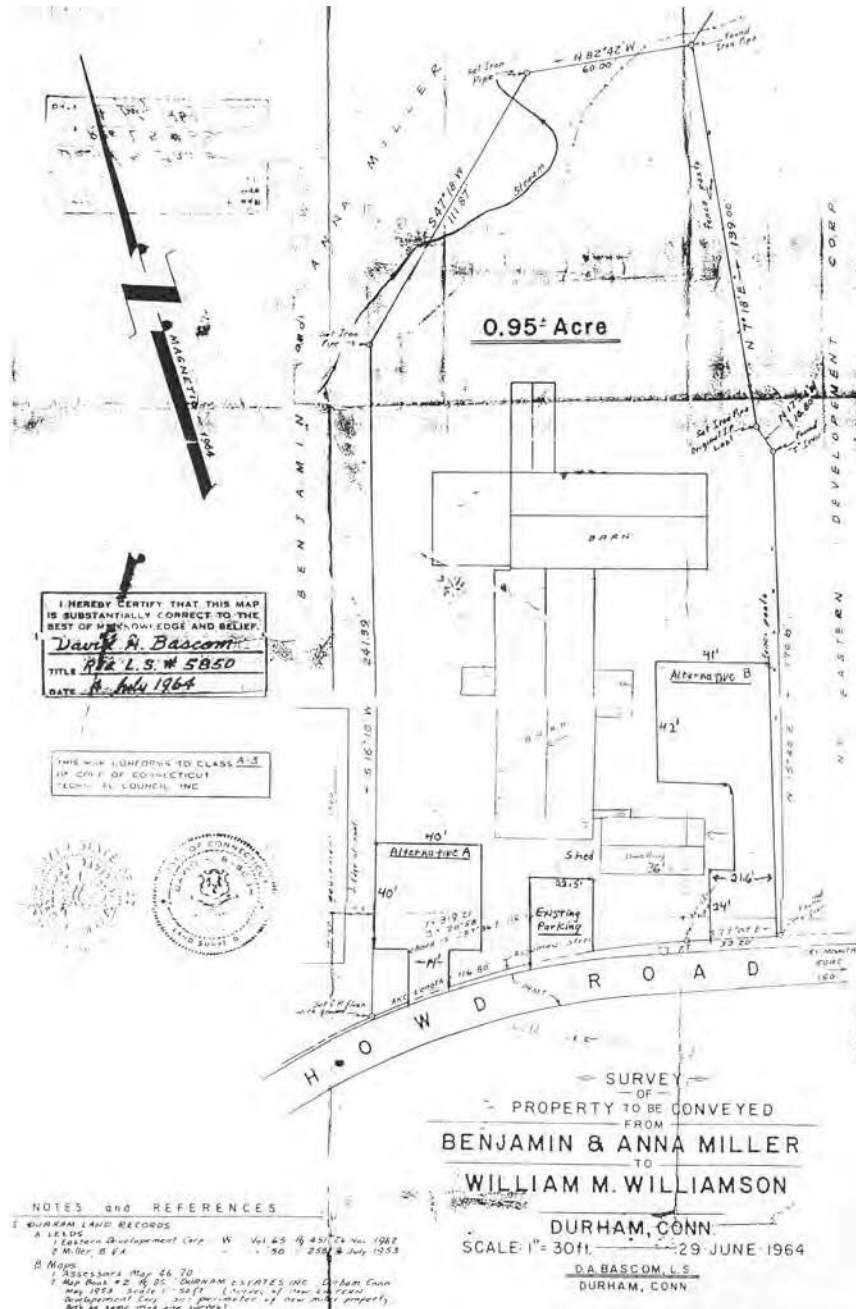
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1. Location map of 269 Howd Road, Durham CT – from <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 8/07/2014.



2. West aerial "birds-eye" view of 269 Howd Road, Durham CT – from <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 8/07/2014. Buildings on the property: the long barn perpendicular to the road and small house facing the road.



3. Survey map of 269 Howd Road property, 1964. The Miller family continues to own and farm a larger surrounding acreage, now Miller Tree Farm. The northern barn, oriented east-west, is no longer extant.



4. 1934 Fairchild aerial photograph – detail showing the property at 269 Howd Road. From UConn MAGIC, http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934_aerial_index.html, accessed 8/12/2014. Note the twin silos against the south end of the extant barn, a taller barn with cupola to the north, and other farmstead structures.



5. Detail Site Plan showing contributing resources. Base image from Google maps.

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6. Southwest view of Barn/studio (left) and House (right rear), camera facing northeast. Photographs from the 1990s, courtesy of the Willam Kent Charitable Foundation.



7. East context view of House, camera facing west.



8. South view of House, camera facing north.



9. Southeast view of House, camera facing northwest.



10. East detail view of Barn/studio, camera facing west. Note nine=pane dairy barn windows and attached shed.



11. Interior view of Barn/studio, camera facing northwest, showing the workbench at left with artworks.



12. Interior detail view of Barn/studio work area, camera facing west.



13. Interior detail view of Barn/studio, camera facing northwest.

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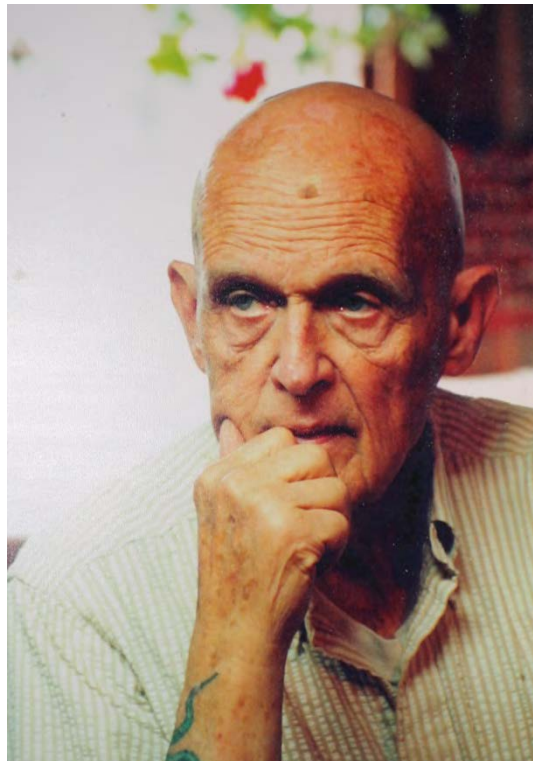
14. Interior detail view of Barn/studio, camera facing northwest.



15. Interior detail view of Barn/studio, camera facing south, showing prints and small objects used as models.



16. Interior detail view of Barn/studio, camera facing east. Note wall finishes typical of dairy design, and overhead tracks left from dairy or slaughtering functions.



17. Photographic portrait of William Kent, courtesy of William Kent Charitable Foundation.