

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism

Historic Preservation and Museum Division/State Historic Preservation Office

CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating individual properties and districts to the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places (C.G.S. Chapter 184b, Sec. 10-409(2). See instructions in *How to Complete the Connecticut State Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Thorsen, Lars, House and Studio

Other names/site number: _____

2. Location

street & number: 57 Front Street

city or town: Groton (Noank) vicinity

county: New London zip code: 06340 not for publication

3. State Agency Certification

I hereby certify that this nomination meets does not meet the documentation standards and criteria for registering properties in the Connecticut Register of Historic Places. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

4. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

private

public-local

public-state

public-federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

building(s)

district

site

structure

object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in count.)

Contributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

1

Total

Property Owner

name: Timothy D. & Deborah W. Bates

address: 57-65 Front Street.

city: Noank state code: CT

zip code: 06340 phone: _____

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable Connecticut Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for State Register listing.)

Levels of Significance (local, state)

Local: Criterion 1

1 That are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to our history and lives of persons significant in our past; or

2 That embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or

3 That have yielded, or may be likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ART

Significant Dates

c. 1850: House original construction

1923-1952: Home and workplace of Lars Thorsen

Significant Person

Thorsen, Lars (1876-1952)

Cultural Affiliation (Complete if Criterion 3 is marked)**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

Thorsen, Lars, House & Studio

Name of Property

Groton (Noank)

Municipality

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .318

Municipal Map, Block and Lot Number and UTM Coordinate (If possible)

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------------|
| | <u>31</u> | <u>_____</u> | <u>73, Bldg. 2</u> |
| | Map | Block | Lot |
| 1 | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 2 | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> |

| | | | |
|---|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| 3 | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> |
| | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| 4 | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> | <u>_____</u> |

See continuation sheet

Latitude, longitude: 41.327295, -71.98588

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

The boundaries are the legal limits of Map 31, Lot: 73, on which the nominated resource is located, per the Groton Assessor's records (Parcel ID: 260820908964, Building 2).

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

The boundaries encompass the extent of the historic resources associated with the artist Lars Thorsen.

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title: Charlotte Hitchcock, Researcher

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation Date: 8/28/2014

Street & number: 940 Whitney Avenue Telephone: (203) 562-6312

City or town: Hamden State: CT Zip code: 06517

CONNECTICUT STATE REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

REGISTRATION FORM – Continuation Form

Thorsen, Lars, House & Studio

Name of Property

Groton (Noank)

Municipality

Narrative Description

This property is a nineteenth-century residential resource associated with the life and work of an influential individual, Lars Thorsen, who was engaged in painting in Connecticut during the twentieth century. This nomination was prepared as part of the Creative Places – Arts and Letters Project.

Noank is a village in the Town of Groton. It is located in the southeast part of the town on a rocky peninsula jutting into Long Island Sound, at the western edge of the entrance to Mystic River Harbor and approximately four miles south of the I-95 interstate highway. With water on three sides and an Amtrak railroad corridor cutting it off on the northwest, Noank feels much like an island. The land is level and high at the center of the peninsula, but slopes down toward the water. The entire village is included in the Noank Historic District, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1979. The village at present is mostly residential, with a large stock of houses built from the 1840s on until the early twentieth century.

The longest street in Noank, Pearl Street, extends north-south along the height of land. Crossing it at the north end is Main Street, which runs east to the town dock on the waterfront. Front Street runs north from its intersection with the east end of Main and parallels the shore, which was formerly busy with ship-building and fishing activities, then bends inland to extend northwest to the railroad line. The property at 57-65 Front Street is on the west side of Front Street near the bend, across from the Ram Island Yacht Club, one of several remaining maritime-related businesses. The property includes two houses: 57 Front Street, the subject of this nomination, which is not itemized in the Noank Historic District inventory of resources; and adjacent to the north, 65 Front Street, c. 1804, which is identified as a Contributing Resource in the inventory. The Thorsen House at 57 Front Street occupies the southern portion of the parcel and is set back from the street behind a lawn area. The site slopes up toward the west. A walkway extends west from the street to the house; there is no off-street parking. To the south a new house has recently been erected on a formerly-empty lot.

Data Table (C – contributing, NC – non-contributing):

| | | |
|----------------|---------|---|
| House & Studio | c. 1850 | C |
|----------------|---------|---|

House:

The house is a rectangular, 1.5-story wood-frame, gable-roofed building constructed circa 1850. It measures 16 by 22 feet and is set on a full-height raised brick foundation that opens to grade on the west side. The house faces east toward the waterfront.

A one-story shed-roofed addition that measures 10 x 16 feet is attached at the west gable end and is at grade at the west side. A long shed dormer is located on the south roof slope. A modern deck extends across the east gable-end and has steps along the south side to reach grade.

The east façade is three bays wide with the door in the right (north) bay and two six-over-six double-hung windows in the remaining bays. A double-hung window is in the attic above. This façade is clad in painted wood clapboards with simple corner board trim and window surrounds. The remaining sides are clad in wood shingle siding, stained dark with white trim. The roof is asphalt shingles and the brick basement is painted red. The interior was not accessible during this documentation project. Photographs were taken from the public right-of-way.

The house has a high level of integrity, being little changed from its appearance in the mid-twentieth century.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Criterion 1:

This property derives its primary significance from its association with the painter Lars Thorsen, a sailor and an immigrant from Norway who settled in the village of Noank and became a locally prominent Regionalist painter. He captured images of the sailing ships as they were being replaced by motorized shipping, much as other Regionalists portrayed the decline of agricultural landscape and buildings. Thorsen had a regional reputation, with shows in Hartford, but was primarily based in the local area of southeastern Connecticut.

Lars Thorsen (1876-1952) was born in Stavanger, Norway, and was fascinated by ships as a boy. He first went to sea as a cabin boy at age 14, and crewed on both sailing and steam-powered ships. By 1903 he had made at five trips around Cape Horn, and crewed on the *Columbia*, an America's Cup yacht designed by Nathaniel G. Herreshoff. A year later, Thorsen happened to sail into Noank, and chose to settle down there. Subsequently he worked as a rigger and sailed fishing boats to the Grand Banks. He had taught himself to paint while at sea, and now was able to continue painting during the winter seasons.

Thorsen had married in 1900 while at home in Norway, and by 1906 his wife and daughter had joined him in Noank. In 1923 they moved into their Front Street home, where they added the small addition, used first as a sunroom and then as a studio, in 1931. In those years, the house stood across the street from Potters Dock, a popular subject for artists, including Thorsen himself (Noank Historical Society Archives, Tracy 1938). The entire eastern waterfront of Noank was lined with maritime industries – ship-building yards and fishing docks.

Thorsen became known for his marine paintings. He exhibited locally and at the Wadsworth Atheneum in the late 1920s and won the Bunce Prize from the Connecticut Academy of Fine Arts in 1937. He began working for the WPA Federal Arts Project in 1939, completing 81 works, many allocated to schools and to state hospitals and other institutions (WPA Art Inventory). In later years, paintings were commissioned by the Mariners Savings Bank (a series of murals are now at Mystic Seaport) and by the Ram Island Yacht Club, located on Front Street across from the Thorsen house (Noank Historical Society archives).

Lars Thorsen's work is allied with Regionalism, the figurative art including images of urban social realism and the decline of rural landscapes and buildings in the industrial period. Thorsen painted portraits of historic sailing ships from the late nineteenth century, scenes of sailing ships and fishing fleets still in active use in the early twentieth century, and views of the gritty working waterfront of Noank. Thorsen's home was located in the midst of the maritime activity that was his subject matter.

The village of Noank depended on fishing and shipbuilding during the second half of the nineteenth century. Around 1900 summer visitors from New York and other cities began to spend time in Noank (Clouette, Section 8). Noank had an art colony, with the Palmer House hotel hosting visiting artists. Prominent figures who summered in Noank and owned their own homes included Henry Ward Ranger (1858-1916) whose home was at 28 Riverview Avenue, and Robert Brackman (1898-1980). Brackman lived at various locations including 100 Brook Street and 27 Smith Court, and ran a summer art school (Noank Historical Society archives).

The Thorsen house is a typical example of a small vernacular-type house situated in the maritime village of Noank and built for fishermen and boat workers. The Beers Ellis and Soule map of 1868 shows this property as one of several belonging to members of the Rathbun family. In 1923 Lars Thorsen and his family moved into the house, and the shed addition was added as a studio. Thorsen lived here for the remainder of his life.

Bibliographic References

Connecticut Trust Resource Database. 2015. Records: Site No. 2443. Artist No. 58 (Lars Thorsen).

Photographs and field notes by Charlotte Hitchcock 6/16/2014.

Interview with Mary Anderson, 6/16/2014, at the Noank Historical Society.

Map resources:

Town of Groton GIS Viewer and Assessor's Records. <http://maps.groton-ct.gov/apps/GrotonViewer/> Parcel ID: 260820908964 (Map/Block/Lot 132/288/4 per 1979 Historic District nomination).

Aerial views from:

<http://maps.google.com/> and <http://www.bing.com/maps/> accessed 8/28/2014.

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 8/28/2014.

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

Print and internet resources:

Connecticut Artists Project. UConn Library. Accessed 9/25/2015 at <http://lib.uconn.edu/services/collections/connecticut-artists-project/> .

Connecticut State Library:

WPA Art Inventory Project. Accessed 8/20/2015 at <http://ctstatelibrary.org/wpa-art-inventory/> .

Thorsen, Lars. WPA Art Project. Accessed 8/20/2015 at <http://ctstatelibrary.org/thorsen-lars/> .

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

Clouette, Bruce. 1979. Noank Historic District National Register Nomination No. 79002656. National Park Service.

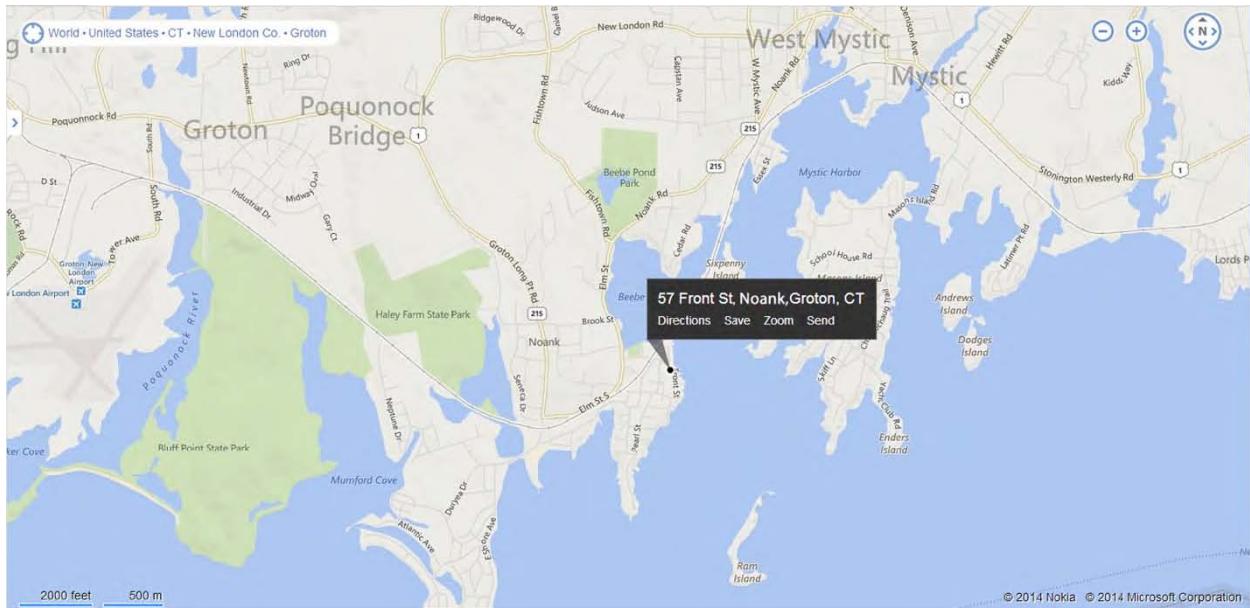
Falk, Peter Hastings. 1999. *Who Was Who in American Art 1564-1975*. Madison, CT: Sound View Press.

Noank Historical Society archives.

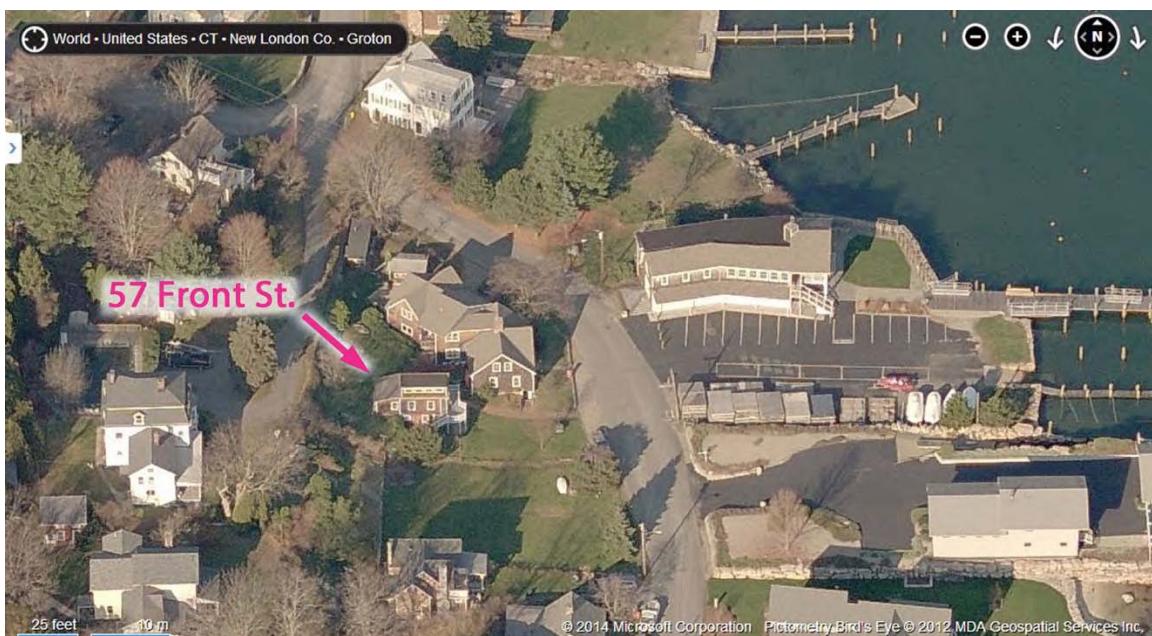
Photography of Thorsen's paintings used with permission of Noank Historical Society.

Tracy, Edward. 1938. "Lars Thorsen: Sailor, Fisherman, Artist." *Connecticut Circle, the Magazine of the Nutmeg State*, Vol. I, No. 11, December 1938.

U.S. Federal Census, accessed at <http://persi.heritagequestonline.com/hqoweb/library/do/census/search/basic>



1. Location map of 57 Front Street, Noank, Groton, CT – from <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 8/28/2014.



2. South view – aerial “bird’s-eye” map 57 Front Street, Noank, CT – <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 8/28/2014.



3. East view – aerial “bird’s-eye” map 57 Front Street, Noank, CT – <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 8/28/2014.

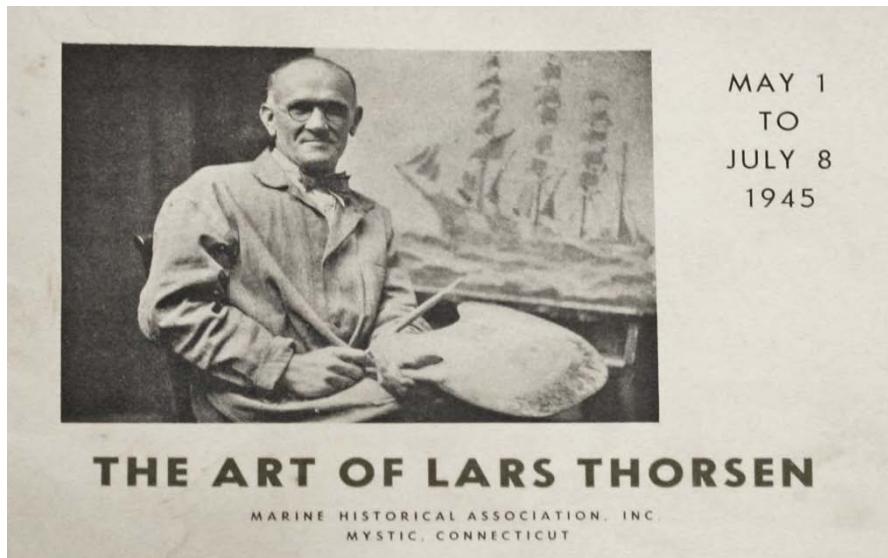




5. East view, camera facing west. Note 65 Front Street visible at right and located on the same parcel.



6. Southeast view, camera facing northwest.



7. Photograph of Lars Thorsen, from a 1945 exhibit announcement, courtesy of Noank Historical Society.



8. *Potters Dock*, oil, 1930, by Lars Thorsen, courtesy of Noank Historical Society. Potters or North Dock was located directly east of the Thorsen house, adjacent to the Ram Island Yacht Club.



9. *Potters Dock*, oil sketch, by Lars Thorsen, undated; courtesy of Noank Historical Society.



10. *Noank fishing schooner with two-man dories*, oil, by Lars Thorsen, undated; courtesy of Noank Historical Society.