Agricultural Heritage Multiple Property Submission - State Register

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Please send completed form to: Stacey Vairo, 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

Building Name (Common)  Mills Farmstead  Record No. 35994

Building Name (Historic)  Mills, Hezekiah Allen and Charity / Mills, Betsy Taylor, Farmstead

Street Address or Location  29 North Avenue

Town/City  Westport  Village  Greens Farms/Coleytown  County  Fairfield

Owner(s)  Ellen Jones, 29 North Avenue, Westport CT 06880  ☐ Public  ☑ Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use:  Agriculture/Subsistence: agricultural outbuilding; Domestic: single dwelling

Historic Use:  Agriculture/Subsistence: agricultural outbuilding; Domestic: single dwelling

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

Interior accessible?  ☑ Yes  ☐ No  If yes, explain  __________________________

Style of building:  English barn, Vernacular style  Date of Construction  Mid-19th 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 ______________)  ☐ Cut Stone (Type ______________)  ☑ Other  vertical wood siding

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  20' x 24'

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:  South center post partially removed, wall dormer added.

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town #  ______ Site #  ______ UTM  ______

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

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PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT’D)

Related outbuildings or landscape features:
- Barn  - Shed  - Garage  - Carriage House  - Shop  - Garden
- Other landscape features or buildings: Stone walls

Surrounding Environment:
- Open land  - Woodland  ✔ Residential  - Commercial  - Industrial  - Rural
- High building density  - Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:
See continuation sheet.

• Other notable features of building or site (Interior and/or Exterior)
See continuation sheet.

Architect ______________________________________ Builder ______________________________________

• Historical or Architectural importance:
See continuation sheet.

• Sources:

See continuation sheet.

Photographer ______________________________________ Date 8/20/2012

View Multiple Views ✔ Negative on File CTHP

Name Todd Levine Date 9/18/2012

Organization Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517

• Subsequent field evaluations:
Latitude, Longitude: 41.149455, -73.328184

Threats to the building or site:
- None known  ✔ Highways  - Vandalism  - Developers  - Renewal  - Private
- Deterioration  - Zoning  - Other ________________  - Explanation ________________
• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The farmhouse and barn on a .26-acre rectangular sliver of land are the remnant of a larger farm at 29 North Avenue, Westport, CT. The site is on the west side of North Avenue, which runs approximately north-south. The barn is to the north of the 18th century Farmhouse, with the ridge-lines of both buildings running east-west, perpendicular to the road. A driveway enters the site from the road at the north end, terminating to the south of the barn. A winding brick path leads south from the driveway, past the west side of the Farmhouse, to the front door on the south side. A stone wall demarcates the west and north borders. Along the east boundary a low stone retaining wall borders the roadside and a wood stockade privacy fence is set a few feet in from the stone wall.

The house is a small 1 ½-story frame vernacular house set close to the road and oriented to the south [formerly] overlooking a cultivated field. Extended to the rear by a lean-to ell that may be original, the house has flush eaves, 6-over-6 windows and half windows on the façade, and is set into the hill on a fieldstone foundation. The 2-story, rear, gabled ell dates to the 1850s (McCahon).

The Farmhouse is covered with clapboards painted tan with maroon shutters and measures 23’ x 24’. The area surrounding the house is fully developed with 20th century residential structures.

North Avenue runs southward, trending southeast, to its intersection with Long Lots Road which is perpendicular to North Avenue and a series of parallel roads reflecting Colonial period land divisions. The area is north of the Boston Post Road (US Route 1) and south of the Merritt Parkway (Route 15). Westport has 14 historic districts and sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In addition the town has more than 20 Local Historic Properties and Districts (one is also National Register). The majority of these are to the west of the North Avenue site, and are clustered along the east and west sides of the Saugatuck River or south of the Boston Post Road in the Greens Farm section. Also included in the current thematic nomination of Agricultural Heritage sites to the State Register of Historic Places is the Gault Brothers Farmstead at 124 Compo Road South.

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

Architectural description:

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

- Farmhouse  Mid-18th c.  C
- Barn   Late 19th c.  C

Barn:

This is a 1 ½-story two-bay English barn. The barn measure 24’ wide by 20’ deep. The main façade is the south eave-side of the barn. The barn is sheathed in vertical wood siding painted red. The frame sits on stone piers, at the northwest corner where the foundation is visible; the rest of the foundation is beneath grade.

Exterior:

The south eave-side of the barn has three entries; two pairs of Z-braced hinged doors, each in front of a corresponding bay, and a centered pass-through door. Above the east pair of doors is a side-hinged hay door. The east gable-end of the barn has a four-pane window with trim in the main level towards the north corner, a dropped girt siding divide, and a four-pane window with trim just beneath the apex of the roof.

The north cave-side of the barn has a wide shed-roofed wall dormer that encompasses most of the north pitch of the roof. Within the wall dormer are two sets of two six-over-six double-hung windows. The rest of the side is blank except for a boarded over four-pane window with trim. The west gable-end of the barn has a stone pier for a foundation at the northwest corner and another beneath the barn. Loose brick are found in the crawl space beneath the barn. The west gable-end of the barn has a four-pane window with trim in the main level towards the south corner, a dropped girt siding divide, and a four-pane window with trim just beneath the apex of the roof.
Interior:
All three entries on the south eave-side of the barn enter into the main level of the barn, a single space measuring 24’ x 20’ with wood plank flooring. At some point in the past the centered pass-through door was added by removing the south structural wall post in the middle bent, resulting in a structurally compromised frame. Just north past the pass-through door is a set of 10 risers that lead to the attic level. The first level of the interior is constructed of square rule mortise and tenon timber framing, with 5” x 6” post and beams with circular saw marks. The wall girts and diagonals vary in size from 2’ x 4’, 3” x 3” and 4” x 4” with circular saw marks. The joinery is pegged. Access to the attic level is through the hay door above the southeast pair of exterior swinging doors or from the centered stairway.

The attic level has a wide wall dormer added to the north pitch of the roof and north eave-side of the barn. It has two sets of two six-over-six double-hung windows. The north rafter plate was partially removed to accommodate the dormer. The attic level is constructed of square rule mortise and tenon timber framing, with 5” x 6” post and beams with circular saw marks with dropped girts at the gable-ends. The ceiling has common rafters and tongue-and-groove ceiling boards mixed with random-width boards under asphalt shingles.

- Historical or Architectural importance:

Applicable Connecticut State Register Criteria:
1. Associated with the lives of persons significant in our past (women’s history);
2. Embodying the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction.

The barn is a typical example of a small English barn. The association with a possibly pre-Revolutionary War house, which was in the same family for five generations, adds to the significance.

Historical background:
Family tradition holds that the small house was built by Hezekiah Allen, a veteran of the War of 1812, before 1830, but some believe it was built in the 1850s for Betsy Taylor Mills, Hezekiah’s daughter-in-law to whom he quit claimed the property in 1849. Census returns for 1830 show that Hezekiah was living in the North Avenue area, but Evelyn Kerin, a researcher for the Westport Historical Society, has been unable to determine when Hezekiah Mills acquired this particular parcel. The simple vernacular house offers no exterior clues to differentiate its construction date from the 1820s and the 1850s. The property remained in the Mills family for five generations until being sold by Elizabeth Godfrey, a Mills cousin, in 1982. Betsy Taylor Mills left the house to her son Henry in 1895, and after Henry’s death, it passed to his son Elmer in 1944. Elmer sold it to his cousin James Godfrey in 1950 and moved to Naples, New York (McCahon).

There is some debate on the date of the house. A Westport newspaper in 1950 announced the Elmer to Godfrey sale and claimed the house was one of six built before the Revolutionary War.

So Mr. Mills’ great-great-grandfather built a huge chimney which served both for heating and baking and had a spit for roasting the Family’s meat, and he built the large kitchen around it. The exterior was log-cabin effect. There were no windows; a buffalo robe was thrown over the open doorway. Often the earlier Mills would return home to find Indians seated before the open fireplace.

Mr. Mills’ great-great-grandmother, Charity Mills, lived to be over 100 years old and had Indian blood in her veins. She had 13 children. All born in that Mills homestead on North Avenue – then known as the Eleven O’clock Highway. There have been 5 generations of Mills living in that homestead since those pre-Revolutionary days – and each generation had seven or eight in the family (Ferris).

A solution may be that the house on the site was indeed built around 1830 from materials from an older house on the same site:

… Grampa’s grandfather built the house in the 1830s, and used the same timbers from the older family house which used to stand on the same site, so the beams in the kitchen are two hundred years old (Mills-Shipley).
The land that this parcel sits in is called Greens Farms and was owned by one of the largest landowners in Fairfield, John Green in the mid-17th century. By the end of 1648, five pioneers including John Green – who came to be known as the Banksie Farmers – had been officially sanctioned by Fairfield to settle the area, creating the first European settlement in the Greens Farms area. John Green was the largest land owner, and the area was officially named Greens Farms in 1732. The town of Westport was incorporated in 1835 and Greens Farms was the first neighborhood. The house appears to have been the first on North Avenue and the site included a blacksmith, which was across the street to the east. The types of crops grown at and around this site are unknown except they included onions.

Grampa (Henry) Mills was a farmer and onion grower. Across the road from his house he had 12 acres of land which was once his onion field which raised as much as 1000 barrels of onions, white and yellow, and he often hired 9 men to work the fields (Mills-Shipley).

As late as 1971, the land to the west still consisted of orchard trees and open fields. The property was subdivided and built out in the late 1990s. The barn at 29 North Avenue has been used for storage and an automobile garage for the last few decades.

Architectural significance:

The barn is a typical example of a small English barn once used for agriculture. Its circular-sawn timbers suggest its construction in the second half of the 19th century, later than the Farmhouse. The association with a possibly pre-Revolutionary War house, which was in the same family for five generations, adds to the significance. The barn is built using square rule timber framing construction, with pegged mortise and tenon joinery, and dropped girts. Most of the barn, except the wall dormer, south eave-side doors and added center pass-through door are original. The Farmhouse and Barn are survivors in an area that has been heavily developed.

• Sources (continuation):

Photographs and field notes by Todd Levine, 8/20/2012.
Interview with Sheila Shupack, realtor, 8/20/2012, 29 North Avenue, Westport, CT.

Map resources:
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
UTM coordinates: http://itouchmap.com/latlong.html

Print and internet resources:
Connecticut State Library online: iconn.org or http://www.cslib.org/iconnsitemap/staff/SiteIndex.aspx#directories
Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation, Historic Barns of Connecticut Resource Inventory, 2010,
http://www.connecticutbarns.org/35994
Mills-Shipley, Mildred, Grampa & Grampa, personal manuscript, date written unknown.


4. South view of Farmhouse, camera facing north.
5. North view of Farmhouse and yard from barn, camera facing south.

7. Southeast corner view of Barn, camera facing northwest.

8. East gable-end view of Barn, camera facing west.

10. Detail of the exterior, north eave-side wall dormer, east corner, camera facing south.
11. West gable-end view of the barn with stone wall on the west property line, camera facing east.

12. Detail of the exterior, northwest corner of the barn. Note the single stone pier at the corner.
13. Detail of the interior, north wall, main level, square rule construction and circular sawn posts, camera facing east.

15. Detail of the interior, northwest corner, showing dropped tie-girt in end wall. Note how the rafter plate is truncated for the shed dormer.

16. Detail of interior, severed post where center entry on south eave-side now is, camera facing south.
17. Fairchild 1934 aerial photograph of the site compared with modern Google Map view, showing the extent of farmland remaining in 1934 and the fully developed residential neighborhood of the present.