

**Written and Photographic Documentation
of the
Hopmeadow Street Tobacco Sheds
1503 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, Connecticut**

Prepared for

**GLN Construction Management, Inc.
March 2011**



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Prepared for

GLN Construction Management, Inc.

by

**Bruce Clouette, Ph.D.
Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc.
Storrs, Connecticut**

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HOPMEADOW STREET TOBACCO SHEDS
Simsbury, Connecticut

Location:	1503 Hopmeadow Street Simsbury, Connecticut
U.S.G.S. Quadrangle:	Tariffville
UTM Coordinates	18.683500.4641370
Date:	Early 20 th century
Significance:	<p>The five tobacco sheds, along with an associated pump house and storage building, are significant because of their connection with cigar-wrapper tobacco cultivation, a major aspect of Connecticut's early 20th-century economic history. The sheds also have architectural significance as examples of a distinctive and specialized type of agricultural outbuilding. Representing the early 20th-century culmination of the form, the sheds have concrete footings, balloon-framed walls of standard lumber, and post-and-beam interior framing. The sheds were ventilated with hinged horizontal siding boards (most now nailed shut) and a continuous ridge ventilator. With their ten tiers of cross-members for hanging tobacco leaves, the sheds were specifically intended for the curing of shade-grown tobacco. The former owner of the sheds, Cullman Brothers, Inc., was a major tobacco grower in the Connecticut River and Farmington River valleys, owning some 1,800 acres at its height, along with hundreds of acres more under lease. Generations of Hartford-area residents remember summers picking shade tobacco as part of their upbringing.</p>
Project Information:	<p>This documentation, completed in March 2011, was requested by GLN Construction Management, Inc., acting for the property owner.</p> <p>Bruce Clouette, Historian Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc. P.O. Box 543 Storrs, Connecticut 06268</p>

I. INTRODUCTION

This documentation records the buildings on a 75.4-acre parcel at 1503 Hopmeadow Street (Route 10) in Simsbury, Connecticut. A former tobacco farm most recently planted in corn, the property includes five large tobacco sheds ranged along the west side of the street, in an area that is predominantly characterized by small retail plazas containing shops and restaurants.

The five tobacco sheds that are the subject of this documentation appear to have been built in the early 20th century and are essentially identical, with the exception that the northernmost shed measures 40 feet by 146 feet in plan, whereas the other four measure 40 feet by 100 feet. All are located close to the street, with the ridgelines of their gable roofs oriented in an approximately north-south direction. The sheds are numbered from 90 to 94, north to south. The complex also includes a small concrete-block shed-roofed pump house and a gable-roofed storage building the size of a two-car garage.

A note about terminology: buildings of this type are called both “tobacco sheds” and “tobacco barns.” The term “tobacco shed” is in widespread use in the current local vernacular, and there are those who would insist that it is the more proper term. The terms “barn” and “shed” seem to have been used with about the same frequency in the historical sources. In this document, the term “tobacco shed” is used.

The methodology that was used to prepare this documentation is described in the next section, followed by a more detailed description of the five sheds, a capsule history of the property, and an assessment of the buildings’ historical and architectural importance. References to historical and secondary sources of information are at the end of the document. The bound version of this report includes prints of 54 captioned photographs as Appendix II, along with a photographic key for the exterior photographs.

This documentation was prepared by Bruce Clouette, Ph.D., Senior Historian with Archaeological and Historical Services, Inc. of Storrs, Connecticut, under contract with GLN Construction Management, Inc. The research, fieldwork, and photography were undertaken in February and March 2011. Copies of this report, as well as archival copies of the text and archival photographs, will be submitted to the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office to become part of the Connecticut Historic Preservation Collection housed at the Dodd Research Center at the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

II. METHODOLOGY

The products that make up this documentation include the following:

- Narrative text on acid-free, archival paper
- Digital color images on CD-ROM, .tif format, 300 dpi, minimum 2,000 by 3,000 pixels
- Detailed description the buildings
- Index of photograph numbers and captions
- Graphic photographic key
- Archival 5" by 7" color prints, labeled in soft pencil and placed in archival paper sleeves

In addition to the archival version deposited at the Dodd Center at the University of Connecticut, bound copies of the text and photographs have been compiled for GLN Construction Management, Inc. and the SHPO, and one copy of the bound version will be included as part of the archived materials.

Standards for written and photographic documentation have been issued by the SHPO (Saunders and Moore 2007), and the narrative text and photographs that make up this documentation meet or exceed all the specifications in the standards. The photographs were taken in late March 2011, using an 8-megapixel Canon Digital Rebel XT™. Digital color images were saved on CD-ROM as uncompressed .tif files, 300 dpi, 24-bit RGB color, at a resolution of 2000 by 3000 pixels or greater. The archival 5" by 7" color prints produced by the project meet National Park Service standards for permanency; they were printed using Epson archival Claria™ pigmented inks and Epson Premium Photo Paper™. The prints were labeled using soft pencil and numbered sequentially. Photographs were placed in 5" by 7" acid-free paper archival sleeves, which also were labeled with the photograph number.

The photographs were arranged as follows: overall views (3); exterior elevations and a general interior view of each of the five sheds (20); typical exterior details (12); typical interior details (7); and interior and exterior views of the two secondary buildings, the storage building and pump house (12). The photographs are accompanied by an index to photograph numbers and captions. A graphic photographic key is included that shows the building footprints and the locations from which the exterior photographs were taken at a scale of 1 inch = 100 feet.

In addition to the 54 photographs, this documentation includes narrative text that gives a brief history of the tobacco sheds and identifies their historical and architectural significance. To prepare the narrative text, the background research included consulting secondary histories, most notably Vibert's *Three Centuries of Simsbury* (1970), as well as contemporary descriptions of Connecticut tobacco cultivation. The project historian also researched deeds relating to the property in the Land Records of the Simsbury Town Clerk and examined historical maps and aerial photographs. The sources of information for the narrative are identified in the References section of this document (Section VI).

III. DESCRIPTION OF THE BUILDINGS

Tobacco Sheds

The five tobacco sheds included in this documentation all appear to date from the early 20th century. This date is based upon the poured-concrete post footings and foundation piers, balloon framing of the side and end walls, and use of unplanned lumber for the framing, i.e., 2 x 4s that actually measure two inches by four inches, unlike modern lumber which has been planed and is therefore smaller in cross-section. Prior to about 1905, brick or stone piers would have been used instead of concrete, and after World War II, modern dimensional lumber would have been more typical. Further evidence for the early 20th-century date of the sheds comes in the form of the 1934 aerial photograph of the site (Figure 3, Appendix I), on which all five sheds appear, along with a sixth shed to the south that is no longer standing; the storage building and pump house also appear.

The five sheds are virtually identical, with one exception: the northernmost shed, Shed No. 90, has about one-third more capacity, measuring 40' by 146' in plan. The others measure 40' by 100' in plan. In height, the sheds measure about 20' to the eaves and 34' to the peak of the gable roof. The sheds' siding consists of pairs of hinged horizontal boards with shiplap edges, the lower movable one measuring 11 1/2" wide and the upper fixed one 9 1/2" wide, with another 9 1/2"-wide fixed board between each pair of hinged boards. Except for the sill boards, all the movable boards are now nailed in place and no longer operate. Typically, a group of movable boards would have been opened together by means of a batten, like the tilt-rod of a window shutter, but no evidence of such an operating mechanism was observed. Originally, the shiplap edges of the boards would have provided a reasonable seal for the exterior, but because of shrinkage over time, there currently are gaps between most of the boards. Some of the siding, as indicated by white primer paint, has been replaced by ordinary boards.

The sheds all have double-door entrances, 13' wide by 8' high, centered on their end elevations, above which is a small plywood placard stenciled with the shed's number. The doors, which are hung on a set of three 24" by 2" strap hinges, are formed of 6"-wide tongue-and-groove vertical boards with 2 x 6 Z-braces on the inside. Each end elevation also has a 4'-wide doorway fitted with movable siding. With the exception of No. 90, the sheds had another 4'-wide doorway in the center of the west elevation; all are now boarded up.

The sheds' sills rest upon poured-concrete piers, 12" by 12" by 10" high. Typically, construction of tobacco sheds of this period began with the preparation of a compacted-earth platform, into which footings for the foundation piers were excavated and then filled with concrete. Because of erosion, most of the pier footings are now exposed to a greater or lesser extent. A number of piers at the north end of No. 90 have been replaced by 12" round piers poured using cardboard-tube forms.

Roofs are now covered with asphalt shingles; where there has been damage, the original wood-shingle roof is visible underneath. A peaked sheet-metal ventilator runs continuously along almost the entire length of the ridge. Rafter ends are exposed at the

eaves, and on the end elevations, the widely spaced roofing boards are carried out to form a protective overhang of about 10”.

Three of the sheds—No. 90, No. 93, and No. 94—are braced (on the west side only) with a set of five steel cables that extend from the eaves to the ground about 24’ out from the buildings.

With each shed, the framing for the exterior shell is exposed on the interior, though partly covered by a layer of paper that was probably intended to provide further control of air infiltration. The end and side walls, set on 6 x 6 sills, are framed with 2 x 4s set 2’ on center, with diagonal wind braces at the corners. The interior space is divided by two column lines that create 12’6”-wide side aisles and a 14’-wide center aisle. The columns consist of 4 x 4 posts resting on 18’ by 18” by 10” high concrete pedestals set into the dirt floor; 2 x 4 longitudinal braces connect the posts. The posts have been reinforced by the addition of 2 x 7s on two sides and joined by through bolts; the 2 x 7s serve to support a pair of longitudinal steel channels, 1 ¾” by 5”. The channels are joined by an 8” by 10” stay plate between each pair of posts. The columns are set 11’ 6” on center (12’ in the end bays) and start 3’ in from the ends of the building. The distance between columns is further divided by two additional posts resting on the steel channels. There are ten tiers of 2 x 4 cross-members reaching up to the underside of the roof; these were used to hang the tobacco leaves being cured. Every third set of cross-members is braced by a diagonal board running upward to the side walls.

Differences in surface color and dimension indicate that many cross-members, particularly on the lower levels, have been replaced over time with more modern lumber. In addition, Shed No. 90 has modern 2 x 6 wind braces added at the corners to supplement the original wind bracing, and both No. 90 and No. 93 have additional modern 2 x 6 diagonal bracing running from the posts to the side walls. No mechanical or utility fixtures are in place, other than gas pipes along the sills for the heating system. The gas entered the sheds from the midpoint of the west elevation.

Secondary Buildings

Situated close to the street between No. 91 and No. 92 is a small storage building measuring 20’ by 26’ in plan, with the ridge of its gable roof oriented in an east-west direction. The lower level, set into a slope and fully exposed only on the east elevation, is constructed of concrete blocks, and the upper level is of 2 x 4 frame construction. There is a small brick chimney emerging from the east end of the roof, just off-center to the north. The exterior of the frame part is covered with roll-asphalt siding carried over the window openings, all of which have been boarded up. The roof has asphalt shingles, and both soffits and eaves are boxed in. The west end elevation has an 8’ 10”-wide double-door entrance, and the east end, on the lower level, has two separate 6’-wide doors. There formerly were two small windows on the upper level of the east elevation, a single opening on each side elevation of the lower level, and two windows on the side elevations of the upper level.

The interior of the building contains material associated with tobacco cultivation. On the upper level, these remains include a small Fairbanks wheeled platform scale, a

quantity of nylon shade tenting, numerous wire baskets, and a few canvas baskets. Resting on 1 x 8 cross-ties (not all rafter pairs are so connected) are lengths of gas pipe. Additional canvas buckets are found on the lower level, along with wooden tent poles, two large fans mounted in sheet-metal housings, and the remnant of a propane space heater.

Just north of Saxton Brook, which runs between Sheds No. 90 and No. 91, just west of the line of tobacco sheds, is a concrete-block pump house, 9' by 11' in plan, with a concrete-slab shed roof. Inside is a 100 hp, 1800 rpm, 3-phase electric motor, manufactured by U.S. Electrical Motors of Milford, Connecticut, directly coupled to a Deming rotary pump. An Ashcroft pressure gauge and two mercury switches sit atop a small expansion tank. The cast-iron outlet pipe of the pump, which has a gate valve operated by a large hand wheel, exits the pump house on the south elevation and angles into the ground at that point.

IV. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE TOBACCO SHEDS

This vicinity was a tobacco-growing area from the middle of the 19th century onward, when the Hoskins and Holcomb families grew acres of broadleaf and Havana seed tobacco for America's burgeoning market for cigar wrappers. The sheds that are the subject of this documentation, however, probably date from the early 20th century, when Cullman Brothers, Inc. established itself not only as a major presence in Simsbury but also as one of the largest growers of cigar tobacco in the entire country. Despite the name, the company was a partnership of Joseph Cullman, Sr. (born in 1854) and his son, Joseph Cullman, Jr. (born in 1882), of New York City. The elder Cullman got his start in the tobacco business when he was just 14 years old, buying tobacco in Ohio and selling it on the New York market (Cullman 1994). Around 1906, the Cullmans started growing broadleaf in Connecticut, then quickly went into shade-grown tobacco. At its height, the company owned 1,800 acres, with hundred of acres more under lease from other property owners.

Although Cullman Brothers purchased this parcel in 1947 from Hilda Westerberg (Simsbury Land Records [SLR], Vol. 84, p. 256), the company had been leasing acreage and tobacco sheds from the Westerberg family for many years (e.g., SLR 78-117, 1941). Axel F. and Hilda Westerberg were Swedish immigrants who lived in Bloomfield, where they owned and operated a general-purpose farm. Following the death of her husband ca. 1930, Hilda moved to a house on Hoskins Road in Simsbury, where she lived with her four adult sons, three of whom were farm laborers and one a veterinarian (U.S Bureau of the Census 1930). The 1931 Dolph & Stewart map shows the property where the tobacco sheds stand as the property of the Estate of Axel Westerberg (Figure 2) but it is likely that even at that date the acreage and sheds were leased to Cullman Brothers.

Broadleaf and the similar Havana seed tobacco, together referred to as field tobacco, dominated Connecticut cigar-leaf culture until the early years of the 20th century. Both were used for wrappers, one of the three parts of a cigar. Connecticut tobacco could also be used for the filler and the layer known as the binder, but it was especially suitable for the all-important wrapper, the part of the cigar most visible to the consumer. Although the wrapper does not impart much taste to the cigar (indeed, the ideal wrapper is completely neutral in taste), its color and texture defined the cigar.

In the late 1890s, Connecticut's field-tobacco wrappers were receiving stiff competition from a new entry to the market, a mild, light-colored leaf based upon Sumatra tobacco. Experiments in Florida and Connecticut showed that a variety of Sumatra tobacco could be successfully grown in this country under tents that shaded the tobacco from the sun, protected it from insect pests, and raised the humidity of the air surrounding the plants. Shade tobacco became the most valuable part of Connecticut's cigar-tobacco crop. It was several times more expensive to raise than field tobacco, however, and so favored corporate farmers such as Cullman Brothers who could best afford the extra expense for equipment and labor. Unlike field tobacco, the leaves of shade tobacco are picked several times in the growing season as they reach the proper size, meaning that the plants had to be harvested on a nearly continual basis. Shade tobacco also required constant cultivation, fertilization, and battle against the numerous diseases that, once allowed unchecked, could ruin an extremely valuable crop.

Cullman Brothers prospered throughout the first half of the 20th century, building additional sheds and bringing additional acreage under shade. In addition to purchasing and leasing land from individuals, Cullman Brothers acquired other Simsbury tobacco companies, including the Tariffville Tobacco Company and the Connecticut Tobacco Company, founded by Joseph Mitchelson, who had introduced shade tobacco to Simsbury in 1901. Even in the 1960s, the company undertook a major expansion, building eight large new sheds nearby on Hoskins Road. From the 1970s on, the market for cigar tobacco fluctuated greatly but generally declined, as American men came to regard cigar smoking as something from their father's generation.

In 1961, Joseph Cullman, Jr.'s son, Edgar Cullman, purchased the General Cigar Company, a major cigar manufacturer (White Owl and William Penn were two of their brands), and for a time the property was held in the name of General Cigar. In 1997, Culbro Corporation, a family holding company, sold the property to the present owner, River Bend Associates.

V. HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TOBACCO SHEDS

Tobacco sheds are important heritage resources for Connecticut because of the significance of cigar-leaf culture in the economic history of the state and of the many Central Valley communities, such as Simsbury, that participated in growing tobacco. Cigar-wrapper tobacco was the only agricultural specialty since the silkworm culture of the 1830s in which Connecticut farms played a major national role. It is estimated that at one time two-thirds of the wrappers used by American cigar manufacturers were grown in Connecticut (Vibert 1970: 159). Tobacco was a major economic enterprise in early 20th-century Connecticut; in 1933, some 11,600 acres in the state were devoted to tobacco, of which 3,800 acres were under shade. That year the Connecticut crop was worth \$4,037,000, of which \$3,253,000 was accounted for by shade tobacco (Anderson 1934: 802-804).

Tobacco culture is credited with adding to the ethnic diversity of the state and the communities in which it was grown. As early as the middle of the 19th century, Irish immigrants from the urban centers were attracted to the countryside to work as laborers for farmers specializing in tobacco, and by 1900 they were joined by immigrants from Poland and other East European places. A popular novelist of the period, Edna Ferber, even wrote a novel about Polish tobacco workers and their Connecticut Yankee neighbors, *American Beauty* (the setting of which was further to the west, in the Housatonic River Valley). In the World War II period, African Americans came to work on some of the state's tobacco farms, including those of Cullman Brothers, and in the postwar period, field workers from Puerto Rico were recruited by Hartford-area growers (Vibert 1970: 161).

Tobacco picking has a prominent place in the popular culture of central Connecticut. Because of the labor intensity of shade tobacco, many of the residents of the area spent at least part of their teen-aged years as summer tobacco workers. Even those residents who never worked in the fields recall the landscape of central Connecticut as one dominated by the billowing acres of shade tent surrounding the characteristic tobacco sheds. Today, the number of tobacco sheds grows fewer year by year. Although they are essentially redundant structures, at least within the major types, at some point there will be only a handful of survivors of this once ubiquitous and characteristically Connecticut form.

The sheds also have architectural significance as examples of the development of a specialized agricultural building type. Prior to about 1870, Connecticut farmers cured their tobacco by hanging the stalks up in ordinary barns or in ramshackle open sheds built for the purpose. The practice did not always result in acceptable quality in the cured tobacco leaves. In the last two decades of the 19th century, the special-purpose tobacco shed emerged as a particular type of agricultural outbuilding. The characteristics of the tobacco shed include a dirt floor; pole or post interior framing using brick, stone and, later, concrete footings; a complex interior network of transverse and longitudinal members from which to hang the tobacco being cured; and some way of controlling ventilation. Within these general parameters, the type was little changed after its initial development in the 1880s. The details changed, however, and several variants on the

general type can be distinguished, notably how the siding boards operated to provide ventilation. Period technical works recognized a number of possibilities, including side-hinged vertical boards, vertical boards with top hinges, hinged horizontal boards, and pivoting boards. Once balloon framing became the norm, hinged horizontal boards were the only practical system, since they provided essential bracing for the studs. Some provision was generally made for ventilation at the roof as well, including sheet-metal ridge vents (as in these sheds), ridge monitors, globe ventilators, and simple openings in the gable peaks. From an early date, some growers insisted that ventilation at the base of the side walls and at the ridge was all that was needed, other than the end doors. This theory was apparently adopted at some point for these sheds, since all but the bottom movable boards have been nailed shut.

The sheds in this documentation represent the culmination of the type's structural framing in the early 20th century. Earlier tobacco sheds were of either post-and-beam or pole-barn construction, sometimes with the poles set directly in the earth. These sheds use balloon-framing for the side and end walls, with a self-supporting three-bay interior structure bearing the weight of the curing tobacco. The advantage of balloon framing was that it allowed the use of standard lumber and simple nailed connections. Instead of heavy timbers, 2 x 4s sufficed for all components except the sills, which typically were either 6 x 6s or multiple 2 x 6s nailed together. Poured concrete, introduced right after 1900, provided an easy way of making durable foundations for the piers and columns pedestals.

The purpose of tobacco sheds was not to dry the tobacco but rather to cure it, a fermentation process that allowed the desired light color of the leaf to appear and any off-tastes associated with the raw leaf to disappear. In the course of curing, a great deal of water was given off, and in fact the leaf became so dry that it had to be re-moistened (typically by opening all the doors on a humid or rainy day) prior to being sent to the warehouse, where it was further fermented.

Because shade tobacco was hung up as leaves rather than stalks, the tiers on which it was suspended were ideally much closer together than in sheds intended for field tobacco, and from the close spacing of the ten tiers in these sheds, it can be seen that they were specifically designed to cure shade-grown tobacco.

Shade tobacco was so much more valuable than field tobacco that growers found that they could not leave the control of temperature and humidity simply to the ventilator mechanisms but instead had to install some way to raise the temperature in the shed. Small charcoal fires, covered by a metal plate to more evenly distribute the heat, were the norm in shade-tobacco sheds in the late 19th and early 20th century, succeeded by propane-fired burners. Although only one propane burner was observed (in the lower level of the storage building), the gas pipes found in all the documented sheds indicate that such burners were at one time in use throughout the property.

Although their primary purpose was to store the tobacco while it was being cured, tobacco sheds also sheltered other, related activities. Considerable work was involved in sewing the shade-tobacco leaves to poles or "spearing" stalk tobacco for hanging in the shed. At the end of the curing period, typically two to four weeks, the tobacco had to be

taken down and then packed for shipping to a warehouse; packing also occurred within the shed.

It is clear that the successful curing of tobacco in sheds such as these required great experience and judgment on the part of the operators of these farms. Too much moisture, and the tobacco would suffer a form of rot known as “pole burn.” Too little moisture would result in the tobacco becoming dried out and useless. By opening the end doors, sill ventilators, and, at least initially, the hinged siding boards, the farm’s workers could control the flow of air around the curing crop (provided it was hung up properly). The tobacco sheds that remain in Connecticut are testaments not only to the importance of that crop in the state’s economy, but also to the hard work, skill, and diligence of those who supervised and worked on these farms.

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APPENDIX I: FIGURES

Figure 1: Location of documented tobacco sheds shown on USGS Tariffville Quadrangle, 7.5-Minute Series, scale 1:24000. On this 1984 photo-revision of the 1956 map, six sheds are shown.



Figure 2: Dolph & Stewart map of 1931, identifying the property owner as Estate of Axel Westerberg.

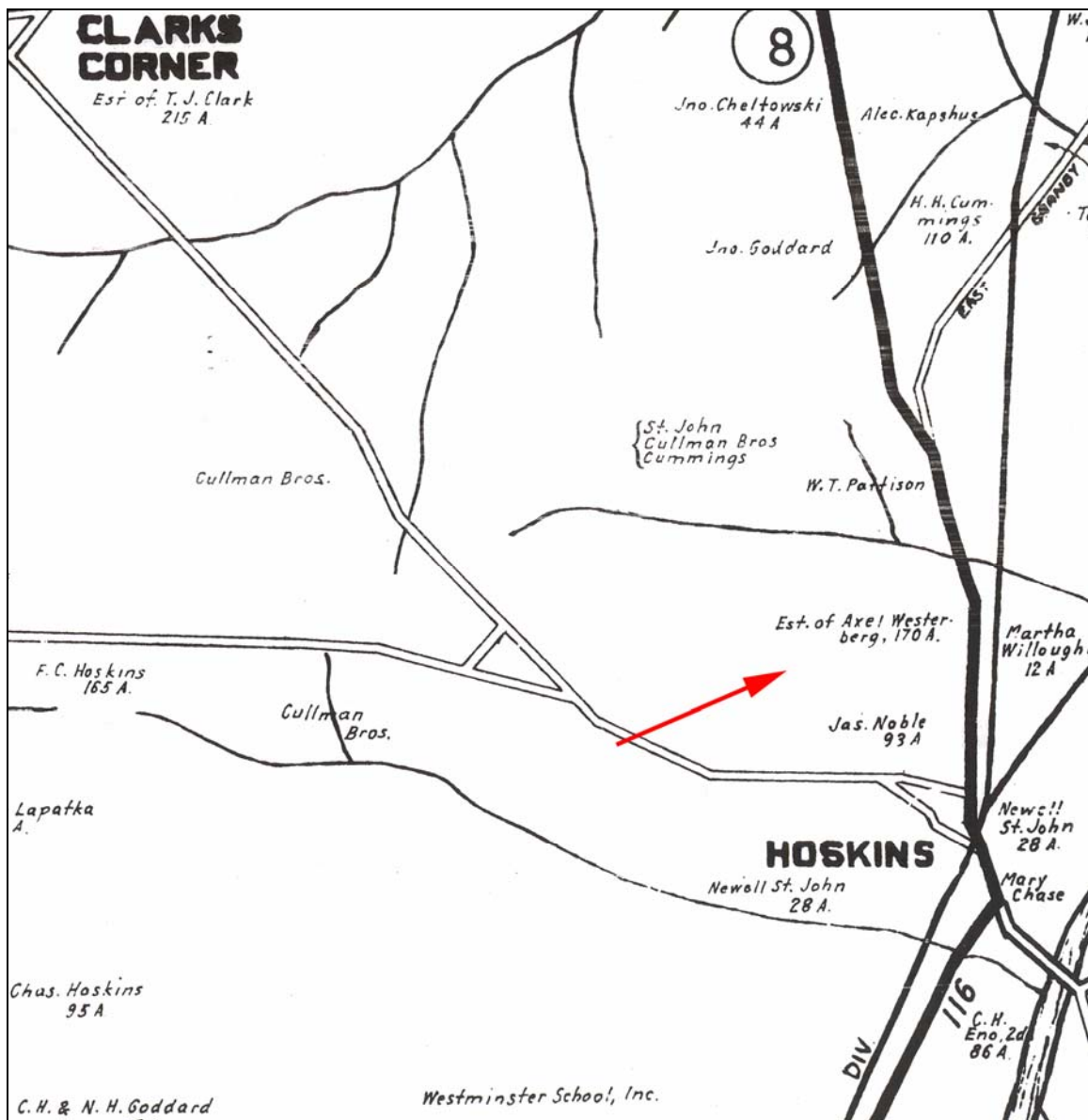


Figure 3: Area as shown on the 1934 Fairchild aerial survey. In addition to the six sheds along Hopmeadow Street, there are two more down a farm road at the southern end of the field.



Figure 4: State of Connecticut aerial photograph of March 1965, showing tobacco sheds.



Figure 5: Inside shade-grown tent, ca. 1910 (Connecticut Historical Society)



Figure 6: Youths picking shade-grown tobacco on a Connecticut farm, 1940s
(Connecticut Historical Society).



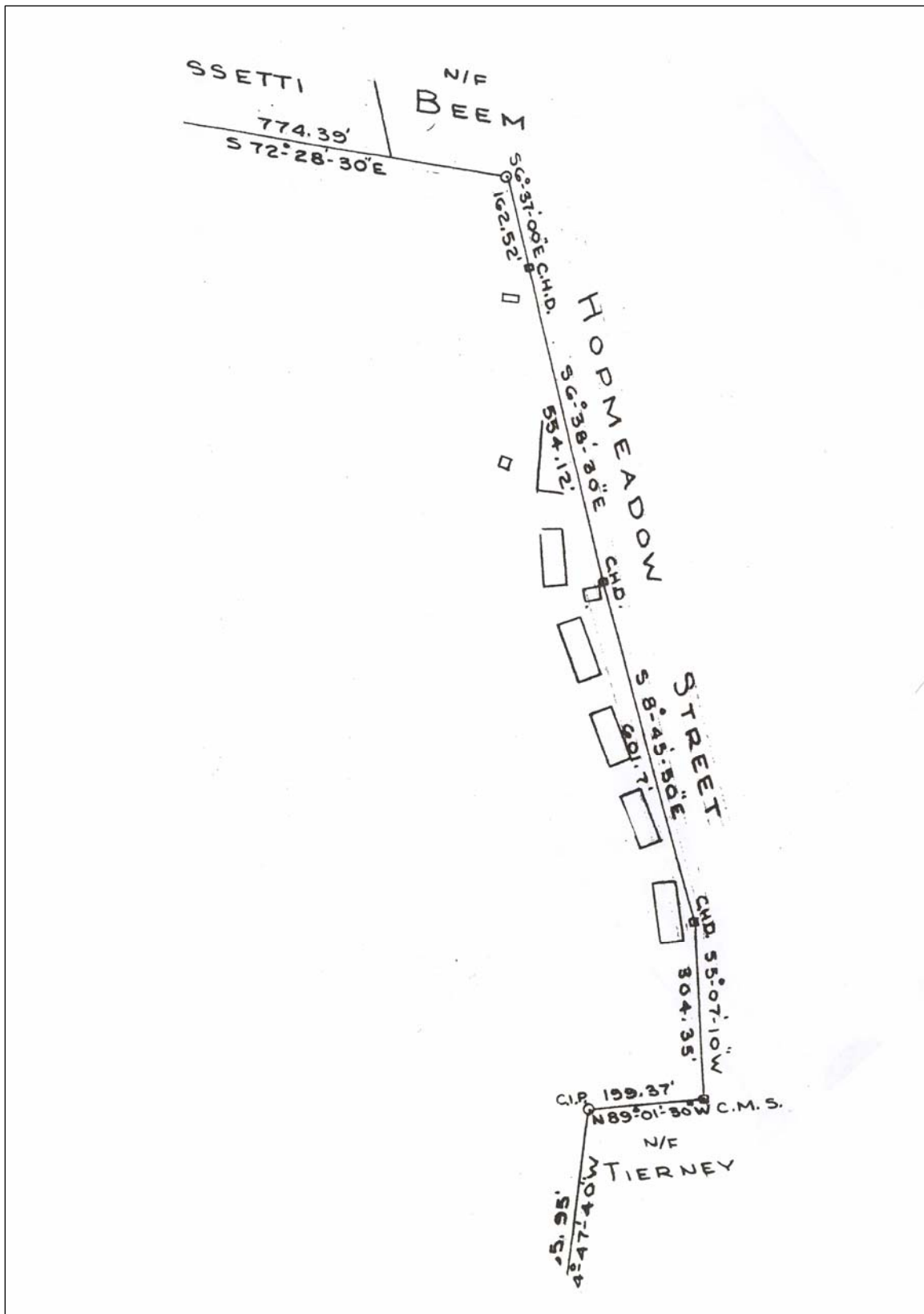
Figure 7: Sewing and stringing shade tobacco leaves preparatory to curing in the tobacco shed, 1940s (Connecticut Historical Society).



Figure 8: **Packing cured tobacco in the shed, 1948 (Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut).**



Figure 9: Tobacco sheds on Hopmeadow Street as shown on the Sanderson map of 1962, scale 1" = 200'.



APPENDIX II:
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Hopmeadow Street Tobacco Sheds
1503 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, Connecticut

Index to Photographs

All photographs: Bruce Clouette, AHS, Inc., March 2011

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- Photograph 33: Detail of typical concrete foundation piers (No. 94, east elevation, camera facing southwest).
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- Photograph 52: Outlet pipe exiting pump house, south elevation, camera facing east.
- Photograph 53: Pump house, interior, U.S. Electric Motors motor and Deming pump on right, camera facing northwest.

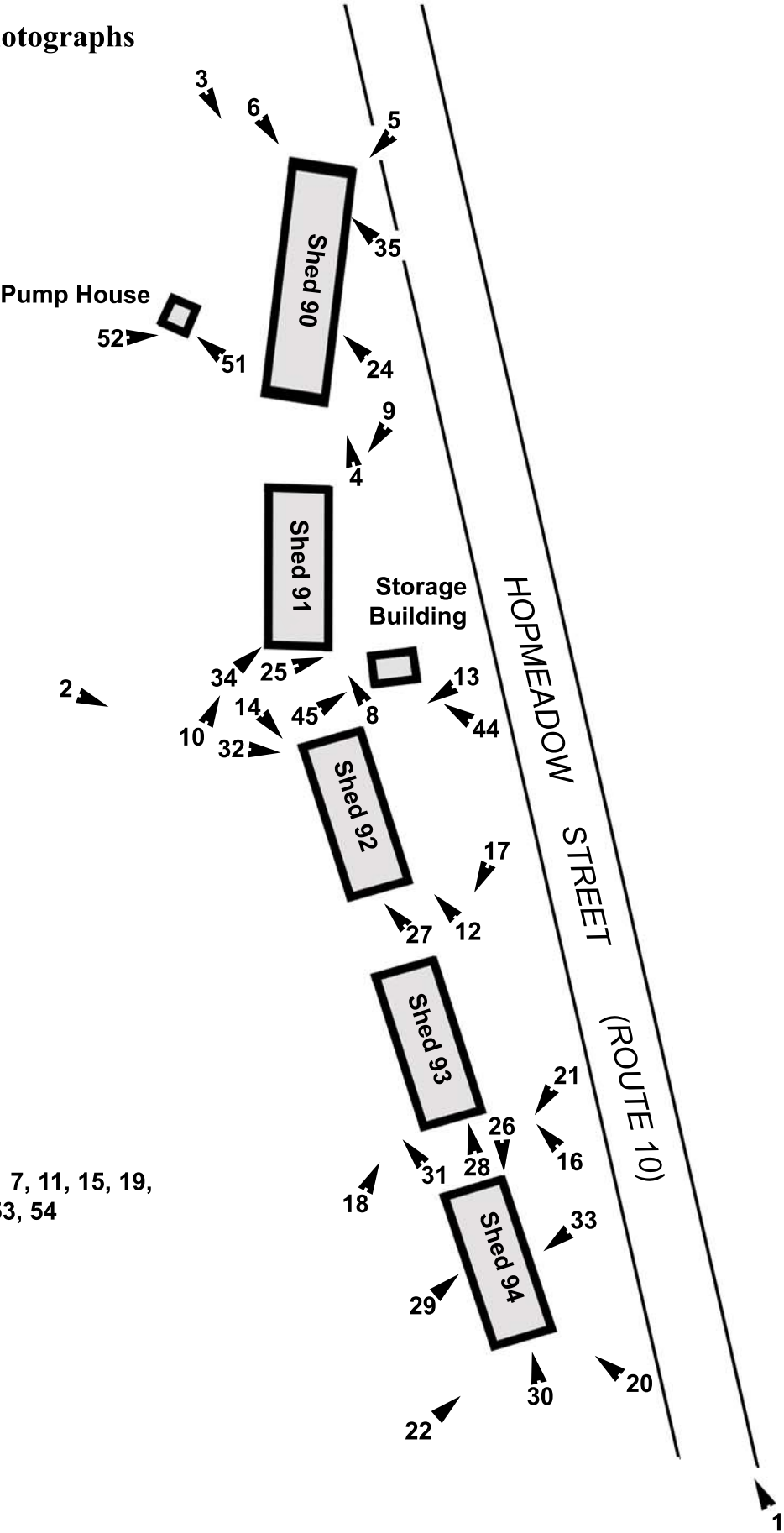
Photograph 54: Pump house, interior, shut-off valve on left, Ashcroft pressure gauge and mercury switches on right, camera facing northwest.

Hopmeadow Street Tobacco Sheds

*1503 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, Connecticut*



Key to Photographs



Interior photographs: 7, 11, 15, 19,
23, 36-43, 46-50, 53, 54

100 FEET

Hopmeadow Street Tobacco Sheds
1503 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, Connecticut

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All photographs: Bruce Clouette, AHS, Inc., March 2011

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Archaeological Site Sensitivity Analysis Of the Town of Simsbury

Prepared for:
The Simsbury Planning Department
933 Hopmeadow Street
Simsbury, Connecticut 06070-0495

Prepared by:
Dr. Marc L. Banks
And
Dr. Lucianne S. Lavin

October, 2002



The Simsbury Historical Society, Simsbury, CT

Martin Luther King Jr.'s Summers in Simsbury

Information regarding Martin Luther King Jr. is included in this report because of the impact his time in Simsbury had on his later life. The wooden dormitory on Hoskins Road where Dr. King stayed should be considered as a possible historic place based on his prominent role in American history. The following is extracted from a report by the authors of the present analysis (Lavin and Banks 2001).

During the summers of 1944 and 1947, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was among students from Morehouse College in Georgia who came to Connecticut to work on tobacco for Cullman Brothers, Inc. In letters King wrote to his family during these stays, he remarked on how well he was treated by the people in Connecticut and about the freedoms he enjoyed while here. King would later state that the summer he spent in Connecticut in 1944 played an important part in his decision to enter the ministry.

A 1991 *Hartford Courant* article states that King stayed at a wooden dormitory on Firetown Road in Simsbury. This article included in **Appendix 3** outlines King's experience on the tobacco farm and the many freedoms he enjoyed while in Connecticut. *Yankee Magazine* (June 1992) included excerpts from King's letter home to his family during the summer of 1944. These excerpts were taken from letters in *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Volume I: Called to Serve, January 1929-June 1951*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992 (letters can be found at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/king/papers>). In these letters written from Simsbury, he remarks about the lack of discrimination and freedoms he was able to enjoy in the North. Once again reference is made to his working on a tobacco farm in Simsbury. The *Quarterly Dividend, Your Newsletter from The Simsbury Bank* (Vol. 2 No.2 c.1997) captions a photo of the burned ruins of the Cullman Brothers dormitory on Barndoor Hills Road just off of Firetown Road as the one where King stayed. Ms. Dawn Bobryk, President of the Simsbury Historical Society, stated that her research into King's time in Connecticut revealed that he worked at the Cullman Plantation in Simsbury. She found no evidence to substantiate claims that King attended local churches to sing in their choirs or was invited to participate socially with the local residents (Dawn Bobryk, personal communication 2002).

Ms. Pamela McDonald, a librarian at the Westminster School in Simsbury, has done extensive research on King's time in Connecticut. The vast material she compiled on the subject as part of her Master's thesis are in the archives at the Simsbury Historical Society. McDonalds stated that she had not found any evidence in her research to indicate that King spent time at the Floydville Dormitory in East Granby. Further, she indicated that she feels that it is more likely that he roomed at the dormitory on Hoskins Road in Simsbury and not the one on Barndoor Hills Road. She bases this view on the fact that the choir of which King was a member while in Simsbury (The

Hartford Courant
1991

Martin Luther King, Jr., was one of 300 high school and college students who came to Connecticut during the summers of 1944 and 1947 to pick tobacco. The students, working to earn money to defray tuition costs or help support their families, were participating in a summer work program arranged by Cullman Brothers, Inc. and Morehouse College, an historically black college in Atlanta, Georgia. Morehouse College administered the program.

King lived in a wooden workers' dormitory off Firetown Road in Simsbury, which was owned by Cullman Brothers. The camp had a healthy atmosphere and the college ensured that the students were not overworked. The food was plain but hearty. For breakfast, there were grits and sausages, and the students each received a bag lunch that included a piece of fruit and three sandwiches: cheese, bologna, and peanut butter. A hot dinner was waiting when they came in from the fields at 5:00 p.m. King helped in the kitchen where a crew of seven cooks turned out meals on two large wood-fired stoves.

In the fields, the students had their own supervisors, many of them teachers or graduates of the college. They worked an eight-hour day, beginning at 8:00 a.m. Under the sweltering canvas tobacco tents in Simsbury and Granby, they hoed the soil, planted tobacco, and sat in the dirt to pick tobacco leaves from the bottom of mature plants. The latter task had to be done by hand so the delicate leaves would not be ripped before they became cigar wrappers. The students would place the leaves in piles between the rows of tobacco, to be gathered and hung to dry in a nearby barn. By the end of the day, their hands were stained with dark, sticky tobacco fluid.

Socially, the students mingled with those townspeople who worked with them in the tobacco fields. Eno Memorial Hall on Hopmeadow Street served as a movie theater. The Simsbury Grange, on Farms Village Road in West Simsbury, conducted social functions. The bowling alley that was attached to the Community Club on Hopmeadow Street was a popular meeting spot.

On Sundays the Morehouse students were bused to churches of their choice in Simsbury and Hartford. They also travelled to Forest Park in Springfield, Massachusetts, where they played baseball and took part in other recreational activities.

In a letter to his mother dated June 11, 1944, King wrote about attending a church in Simsbury with other students from the camp and remarked that they were the only black people there. The church was the First Church of Christ on Hopmeadow Street in the center of town. The workers arrived at the church in an old pickup truck with benches mounted in the truck's bed.

The letters King wrote home during his stay in Connecticut show that his time in New England was an important chapter in his life. Coming from an environment where Jim Crow segregationist policies were in full force, he marvelled at the freedom he experienced to move throughout the community without being challenged. During these summers he visited for the first time churches, restaurants, and movie theaters that were not closed to him because of the color of his skin. In one letter to his mother dated June 18, 1944, King wrote that he had been in Hartford. He told her that he had eaten in some of the finest restaurants and had gone to some of the largest shows. He was surprised most of all that black people could eat anywhere they wanted.

King's Connecticut experience also played an important role in his decision to enter the ministry. In the recreation room of the tobacco workers' dormitory in Simsbury, King, then 15 years old, led fellow workers in worship services, reading scriptures and delivering sermons. These experiences helped King realize that he had an aptitude for leading religious services. King's sister, Mrs. Christine King Farris, and King biographer David Garrow reported that King decided during the summer of 1947 in Connecticut that he would go into the ministry.

IF 82

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY—BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to:

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) _____
 Building Name (Historic) Asa Hoskins House
 Street Address or Location 85 Hoskins Road
 Town/City: Simsbury Village Hoskins Station County: Hartford
 Owner(s) Josefa Kilbourn and Christine Jones ☐ Public ☒ Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use Residential
 Historic Use Residential

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

Interior accessible? ☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, explain _____

Style of building: Greek Revival Date of Construction 1840

Materials (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: _____

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: 2/a Approximate Dimensions 26 x 30; 25 x 18; 29 x 12; 12 x 16; 10 x 16

Structural Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Alterations? ☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, explain: Porch on ell enclosed; glass door; window sash

FOR OFFICE USE

Town # _____ Site _____ UTM _____

☐ District ☐ S ☐ 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: Cottage

Surrounding Environment:

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

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

House stands on the south side of the road on a flat, open site opposite Kilbourn Road. A cottage and barn are located directly to the rear.

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

The core of this house is an L-shaped structure consisting of a gable-front block and a wing extending to the east. The north gable functions as the primary elevation, displaying a side-hall plan with the entry set to the left of two parlor windows. The door frame has a trabeated design distinguished by carved pyramidal blocks at the corners, set over a transom. The gable is enclosed by a fully returning cornice with a triangular inset; a wide fascia board runs under the eaves. A porch on the east ell has been enclosed, and a dormer appears above. A three-sided bay (Victorian era) has been added to the west elevation.

Architect _____ Builder _____

• Historical or Architectural Importance:

This house is a fine example of the Greek Revival style, featuring the characteristic gable-front design and an elegant entry treatment. It was built by Asa Hoskins, and was a model for the later dwelling of his half brother, Noah Hoskins, at 100 Hoskins Rd. This farmhouse appears to have been the work of the same builder, John Shaw. The area is known as Hoskins Station for the stage and rail stops once located near the Hopmeadow end of the road. An interesting and unusual feature is the recessed gable panel, whose shape echoes the triangular profile of the returning cornice. The same design element may also be found at 100 Hoskins Road; the pyramidal door blocks appear on a similar dwelling at 533 Firetown Road. The cottage is said to date from 1883; the barn may be contemporaneous with the house.

• Sources:

Town of Simsbury Tax Assessor Records
 Historic maps

Photographer: Rachel Carley **Date:** 1/13; 4/13

View: From the north Negative on file

Name: Rachel Carley **Date:** 1/13

Organization: Preservation Consultant
 10 Camp Dutton Road
 Litchfield, CT 06759

• Subsequent field evaluations:

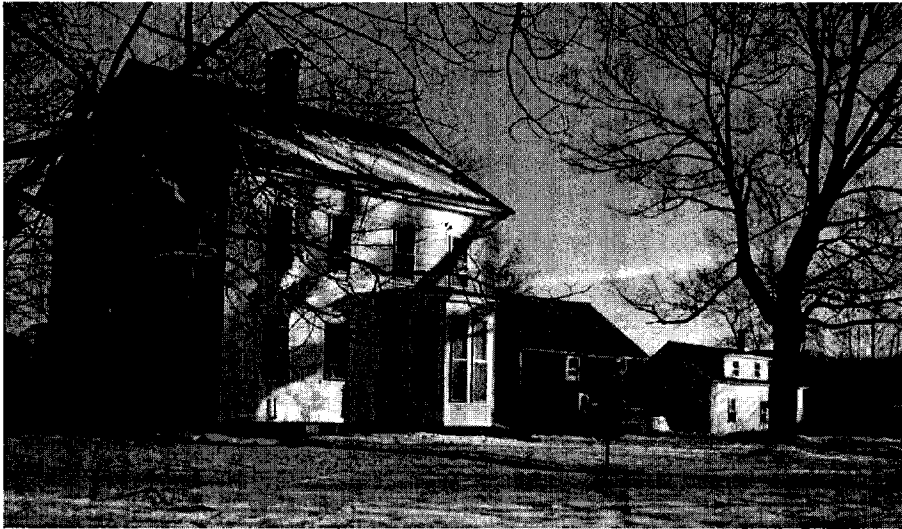


Threats to building or site:

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

PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

85 Hoskins Road



HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY—BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to:

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) _____
 Building Name (Historic) Noah Hoskins House
 Street Address or Location 100 Hoskins Road
 Town/City: Simsbury Village Hoskins Station County: Hartford
 Owner(s) Carol and Edward Wrobel Jr. Trustees ☐ Public ☒ Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use Residential

Historic Use Residential

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

Interior accessible? ☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, explain _____

Style of building Greek Revival Date of Construction 1851

Materials (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 _____

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: 2/a Approximate Dimensions 26 x 30; 34 x 18; 18 x 31

Structural Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated

Alterations? ☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, explain: Rear addition; porch posts

FOR OFFICE USE

Town # _____ Site _____ UTM _____

☐ District ☐ S ☐ 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: See related form for barn

Surrounding Environment:

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

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

House stands in an open lawn on the north side of the road; mature shade trees; drive passes on the west to rear barn; garage to northeast.

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

The original, south section of this handsome Greek Revival farmhouse consists of an L-shaped format, with its main block built on a sandstone foundation and turned gable end to the street. Situated on this gable, the front entry is positioned to the right of two tall parlor windows to its west; three windows echo this placement at second story. The distinguishing feature of this façade is the molded triangular panel recessed into the gable peak, which is framed by a molded cornice. The door is flanked by four-paned sidelights and topped by a transom. An entry porch mounted on posts features a simple flat-arched opening. Corner pilasters rise to a broad fascia board. A 1 1/2 story porch wing extends to the east. Three asymmetrically placed half windows appear above a narrow porch mounted on Tuscan posts. Windows and doors feature eared window frames; original paneled doors.

Architect _____ Builder John Shaw

• Historical or Architectural Importance:

This area is known as Hoskins Station for the stage and rail stops once located near the Hopmeadow end of the road. No. 100 Hoskins Road is a very fine example of a rural Greek Revival farmhouse, noteworthy for many elements that exemplify the style, including its eared window and door frames, gable-front design, and porch wing. The house is identified on the 1855 Woodford map with the name Noah Hoskins, a member of the family for whom this road is named. Hoskins contracted with carpenter and joiner John Shaw, an Irish immigrant, to build the house in 1851 at a cost of \$150, plus materials and window sash (which Hoskins supplied). Shaw agreed to board his workers while at work on the project. Specifications called for a near replica of the nearby dwelling (85 Hoskins Road) of Noah's half brother, Asa Hoskins, but with a slightly larger porch and woodshed, and a veranda instead of pillars. A particularly interesting feature is the recessed gable panel, whose shape echoes the triangular profile of the returning cornice. A c. 1885 photo shows the distinctive openwork tracery that originally ornamented the veranda (the existing posts are not original) and a barn immediately adjacent to the north. See also 533 Firetown Road.

• Sources:

Town of Simsbury Tax Assessor Records
1855 Map of Hartford County
Research files, Simsbury Historical Society

Photographer: Rachel Carley Date: 12/12

View: From the south Negative on file

Name: Rachel Carley Date: 12/12

Organization: Preservation Consultant
10 Camp Dutton Road
Litchfield, CT 06759

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Threats to building or site:

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





State of Connecticut
Department of Economic and Community
Development

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY—BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to:

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) _____
 Building Name (Historic) Hoskins Homestead
 Street Address or Location 100 Hoskins Road
 Town/City: Simsbury Village Hoskins Station County: Hartford
 Owner(s) Carol and Edward Wrobel Jr. Trustees ☐ Public ☒ Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use Storage/entertaining
 Historic Use Hay barn
 Accessibility to Public: Exterior visible from public road? ☒ Yes ☐ No
 Interior accessible? ☐ Yes ☒ No If yes, explain _____
 Style of building Victorian vernacular Date of Construction c. 1875

Materials (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 barn
 board

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 plus loft Approximate Dimensions n/a
 Structural Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated
 Exterior Condition: ☐ Excellent ☒ Good ☐ Fair ☐ Deteriorated
 Alterations? ☒ Yes ☐ No If yes, explain: Rear addition

FOR OFFICE USE

Town # _____ Site _____ UTM _____
☐ District ☐ S ☐ 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: See related form for house

Surrounding Environment:

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

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

Barn stands on the north side of the road, to the northwest of the Greek Revival house on the same site. Drive passes to the west of the house to this rear outbuilding.

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

The main section of this barn is a simply massed rectangular timber-framed structure, with deep, overhanging eaves, oriented with its gables to the north and south; a small peak-roofed wing extends from the northeast corner. The main entry is located in the south-facing gable, where a pair of horizontally braced doors, mounted on rollers, is centered under a hinged loft door. A multi-paned window trimmed with a canted lintel lights the gable peak.

Architect _____ Builder John Shaw

• Historical or Architectural Importance:

No. 100 Hoskins Road was built in 1851 for Noah Hoskins, a member of the family for whom this road is named. The barn is said to date from 1875, but a c. 1885 photo show a barn much closer to the road and house; it may be that this is the same structure, moved to the northwest. The building is an excellent example of the gable-entry barn, a very traditional New England type that began to appear in the 1800s. For many years, it was used as a collection site for the library book drive.

• Sources:

Town of Simsbury Tax Assessor Records
1855 Map of Hartford County
Research files, Simsbury Historical Society

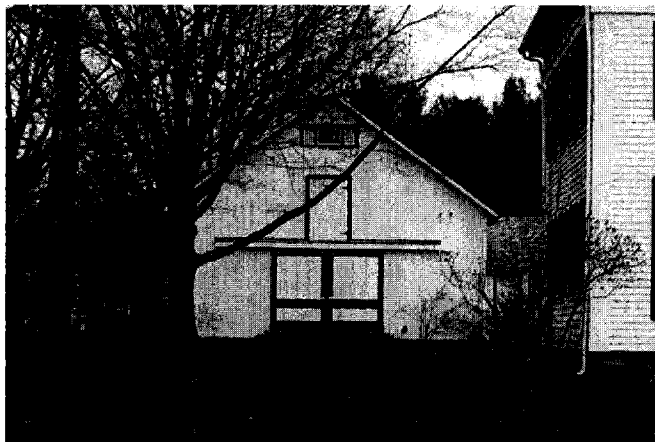
Photographer: Rachel Carley Date: 12/12

View: From the south Negative on file

Name: Rachel Carley Date: 12/12

Organization: Preservation Consultant
10 Camp Dutton Road
Litchfield, CT 06759

• Subsequent field evaluations:



Threats to building or site:

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