

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FILE

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC **Rock Ledge**

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER **33, 40-42 Highland Avenue**

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY/TOWN **Norwalk** VICINITY OF **4th - Stewart B. McKinney**

STATE **Connecticut** CODE **09** COUNTY **Fairfield** CODE **001**

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC ACQUISITION	<input type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME **The Continental Group (Continental Can)**
Att: Edward McClure

STREET & NUMBER **633 Third Avenue**

CITY/TOWN **New York** VICINITY OF STATE **NY**

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. **Norwalk City Clerk**

STREET & NUMBER **North Main Street - City Hall**

CITY/TOWN **Norwalk** STATE **CT**

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE **Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Resources**

DATE **1975** FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS **Connecticut Historical Commission**

CITY/TOWN **Hartford** STATE **CT**

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Number 33 Highland Avenue is owned by the City of Norwalk, North Main Street, Norwalk, CT.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Rock Ledge is located at the southeastern corner of a level, 15-acre, fenced park with main gates to the north and west. The park is primarily lawn, widely spaced with trees. An avenue approaches the house from each gate, circling in front of the main, northwestern elevation. A formal garden opens to the southeast from the main floor of the mansion on a high, rocky outcropping some 25' above Hickory Bluff Road, which abuts the service entrance to the park.

At the western gate is a two-story, stone and half-timbered lodge built in 1911 at the time of the first Rock Ledge. Across Highland Avenue are an additional six acres. Here are three buildings which also date from the first estate: a half-timbered cottage-like gardener's shed with simple gable roof and adjacent (replaced) greenhouse; a larger stone-cottage ice house with attached henhouse and dovecote; and a U-shaped stables, whose two-story, jerkinhead-roofed wings are of rough stone with a half-timbered upper story. The latter has been modified for use as a library and community center.

The present Rock Ledge (1913) occupies the site of the earlier house. It is of granite random ashlar with light dressed stone trim, two and one half stories high, with a slated, ridge roof running uninterrupted for the full length of the building and parallel to the northwestern facade. Two full gables are irregularly spaced on this elevation, breaking the eave-line of the roof and enlarged by two-story bay windows which rise to crenellated parapets. Four small dormers and four large, compound chimneys, irregularly spaced and with clustered chimney pots, give a picturesque aspect to the essentially symmetrical design. The banked, leaded and mullioned windows of varied size and shape specifically evoke those of an Elizabethan manor.

A three-bay Gothic porch is centered on the main (northwestern) facade, opening within the plane of the walls. An elaborate set of glazed double doors in a special alloy of chrome, nickel and steel, designed by Philadelphia sculptor Gordon Youlte, provide the most notable feature of the exterior. These doors are ornamented with an elaborate and obscure Celtic iconographic program which scenes from Irish secular and religious history and portraits of the owner, Irish-American industrialist James A. Farrell, and his wife, Catherine McDermott.

The plan of the interior is a subtle adaptation of an Elizabethan great house, but with the public rooms placed on a single floor. An entrance hall opens from the porch, running parallel to the facade. From it open the principal rooms. This hall has a timbered ceiling, a marble floor and no fireplace. The high oak panelling, surmounted with obelisks, evokes the screens which subdivide the entrance halls of Elizabethan mansions. An elaborately carved staircase in two runs rises at the west end of the hall. The railing is composed of great pierced oak panels, carved with giant roses, while the newels and base are ornamented with strapwork and lozenge-shaped ornament in oak.

The formal rooms of the mansion, all on the first floor, are elaborately decorated in an Elizabethan style, each one having a richly plastered ornamental ceiling in a different design; the heavy oak panelling also differs from room to room. The great hall or drawing room focuses on a carved stone fireplace rising the full height of the northern wall. This is subdivided horizontally into three sections with a central heraldic cartouche flanked by four gables, and the entrance door has a complex iconographic relationship with the Farrells.

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Rock Ledge

two

Ornate metal lighting fixtures still remain in the room and the walls are panelled in oak, with strapwork pilasters above a dado of lozenge-shaped panels. To the west, the library has a wooden mantel with a broken pediment. The free-standing strapwork and the obelisks above the bookcases relate the design to the adjoining entrance hall. The diningroom, panelled in a linen-fold pattern, has a superb chimney piece with carved arches, gables and strapwork, all in oak. The adjacent breakfast room to the east is decorated with an elaborate set of murals showing the various parts of the Rock Ledge Estate; the artist is presently unknown. The billiard room, relating more closely to contemporary design, has a far more intimate scale. The inglenook fireplace and bay window are beautifully proportioned and richly ornamented. This room, as well as the entrance hall and the library, was designed by Tiffany Studios, who may also have done the other rooms on this floor.

The richly detailed chambers on the second floor are bright and spacious with adjoining dressing rooms and baths. The woodwork, plastering, mantels and other detailing are light and classical in inspiration. A catacomb-like spiral stairway leads directly to the third-floor chapel, whose Gothic-arched timbers seem to support a peaked roof. Nearby is Farrell's study, very similar to the chapel except for its menhir-like stone hearth. The rest of the top floor is totally plain: its many small rooms were occupied by the staff. Service rooms, including a large kitchen, pantry and second-story linen room, were located at the extreme northern end of the mansion (off the breakfast room). A detached small stone building, built somewhat later, contained the laundry.

The mansion is in an excellent state of preservation; even some of the original furniture remains. The exterior is unaltered except for the enclosure of a porch on the southwestern facade (done when the mansion was Douglas MacArthur's office) and the attachment of schoolrooms east of the service rooms (Rock Ledge until recently was a private day school). Some of the upper rooms were adapted with appliances for the use of faculty apartments but there has been very little interior alteration. Present planning calls for continued preservation as the estate is integrated into the corporate headquarters of The Continental Group.

8 SIGNIFICANCE,

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
__1800-1899	__COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1911, 1913

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Edward Moeller

Tracy Walker & LeRoy Ward

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Rock Ledge is both historically and architecturally significant. In scale and importance the estate is an early twentieth-century counterpart in South Norwalk of the Lockwood Mansion of the 1860's in Norwalk itself. The vast park, farm and outbuildings, still largely intact, have been a controlling factor in the development of Rowayton.

The original owner of Rock Ledge, James Augustus Farrell (1863-1941) was born in New Haven but moved to Pittsburgh, where he worked as a laborer in a wire mill. An embodiment of the American success story, he had risen by 1911 to the presidency of the United States Steel Corporation, as well as owning his own steamship line. Farrell was a leader of Irish-American "society," one of the First Irish Families (F.I.F.'s). One of the most interesting of social elites, this group was largely rejected by WASP society, while it in turn spurned nouveaux riches Irish like Joseph Kennedy. Proud of their Celtic heritage and loyal to the Church, America's Irish rich nevertheless developed a culture similar to that of the Protestant upper class.

Although it was primarily a summer residence, Rock Ledge is illustrative of the lifestyle of the F.I.F.'s. In its size and rich detail it provided tangible evidence of Farrell's financial success and international stature as an industrialist. The opulence of the decor, the many servants' rooms, the extensive grounds (reportedly, it took 15-20 men to do the outdoor work), all suggest that money was no object. At the same time, the repeated display of the family arms or motto indicates that wealth was not the sole component of status. Most importantly, however, Rock Ledge shows that the Farrells, like other F.I.F.'s, reached the top rung of America's economic ladder while maintaining an ethnic identity. The once fully-consecrated chapel (Farrell received several Papal honors) and the numerous decorative allusions to Celtic mythology and history express in mortar and stone their pride in Irish Catholic culture.

The first Rock Ledge was designed in 1911 by Edward Moeller. A Tudor, half-timbered building with many small dark rooms, it burned down in 1913. The western gate lodge and the buildings on the other side of Highland Avenue are all that remain of Moeller's work.

The present Rock Ledge, a building of considerably greater architectural merit, was designed and built in 1913 by Tracy Walker and LeRoy Ward to replace the burned structure. These recent graduates of Cornell University School of Architecture were sent to England by Farrell, at his expense, to research and develop the project. The result was this Jacobethan Revival manor, designed to replicate an English country home, right down to Elizabethan costumes in the murals

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Rock Ledge

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three

Rock Ledge is an example of the second phase of the eclectic revival. Whereas the first stage employed historical ornament in a free, original fashion, in the second stage, the American architect, often trained in Europe, adhered with a far more rigorous exactness and sophistication to the larger aspect of his models. Using contemporary materials, he was supported by a hoard of skilled artisans: mural painters, carvers in wood and stone and workers in stained glass. These artists provided the ornamental components of an opulent eclecticism, largely impossible to reproduce today. In its further evolution, the movement went from history to archaeology, incorporating actual architectural fragments into buildings such as The Cloisters.

While many houses of this period are disappointing either for their garishness or conversely for the weakness of their ornament, Rock Ledge is distinguished by an unusual qualitative balance between the scale of the spaces and the proportion of the ornament. The heavy richness, restraint and quality of the detail evoke the profuseness of an Elizabethan original. Beyond this, the iconographic originality of the superbly carved stone fireplace in the great drawing room and the metal portals by Gordon Youlte unite the historical and architectural significance of the home of James A. Farrell, giving it a particular importance as an example of a country house of its period.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Birmingham, Stephen. Real Lace: America's Irish Rich. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.

Interview with Joseph Cheh (Farrell's groundskeeper), May 5, 1976, Norwalk.

"A Door in Connecticut: Rock Ledge." Typescript, Rock Ledge.

Farrell, James A. Jr. "Rock Ledge: A Thumbnail Sketch." Typescript, Rowayton Historical Society.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 21

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	63,15,80	45,47,2,10	B	1,8	63,15,30	45,46,8,4,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	1,8	63,11,60	45,4,6,9,10	D	1,8	63,12,80	45,47,2,5,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property includes the 15-acre main estate at 40-42 Highland Avenue and across the street, 6 acres, the site of the Rowayton Library and Community Center, 33 Highland Avenue. The latter parcel is owned by the City of Norwalk, North Main Street, Norwalk, CT.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE	Margaret Henderson Floyd and Bruce Clouette, Consultants	DATE	May 12, 1976
ORGANIZATION	Connecticut Historical Commission	TELEPHONE	(203) 566-3005
STREET & NUMBER	50 South Prospect Street	STATE	CT
CITY OR TOWN	Hartford		

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

TITLE

SHPO

DATE

12/16/76

OR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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four

Interview with William Swallow (resident manager), May 5, 1976, Norwalk.