

NEW JERSEY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, OFFICE OF CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
 HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION, 100 WEST STATE STREET, TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625 (609) 797-2023

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NEW JERSEY OFFICE OF CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
 HISTORIC PRESERVATION SECTION
 INDIVIDUAL STRUCTURE SURVEY FORM

HISTORIC SITES INVENTORY NO. **7**

HISTORIC NAME: Stillwell-Preston House
 LOCATION: 9 East Saddle River Road

COMMON NAME: "River Winds"
 BLOCK/LOT#9: 2002/44

MUNICIPALITY: Saddle River
 USGS QUAD: Park Ridge

COUNTY: Bergen
 UTM REFERENCES:

OWNER/ADDRESS: #9: Mr. & Mrs. Anthony Meltese,

Zone/Northing/Easting

DESCRIPTION

Construction Date: 1800, with 1915 remodel - Source of Date: visual; owner

Architect: 1915 work: Warren & Moore

Builder:

Style: vernacular Federal with eclectic
 20th century country house remodelling

Form/Plan Type:

Number of Stories: A: 1; B: 2; C: 2; D: 2; E: 1.

Foundation: A: partially cement covered, some rubble sandstone and field stone visible,
 B, C & D: ashlar stone, large blocks

Exterior Wall Fabric: A: clapboard, D: 1st story: ashlar stone, large blocks, upper:
 wood shingles; C: east side, 1st-story: ashlar stone, west side: shingle

Penetration: A: east end: 3 bays, altered (c. 1915) window sash
 B: shingles.

Roof/Chimneys: A: gambrel; B, C, D: gables; massive interior and exterior chimneys,
 c. 1915

Additional Architectural Description:

A: exterior appears c. 1800, east end has interesting window cornices with wide frieze, semi-circular louvered opening in gambrel, added porch at south with one open bay and rest glazed, paneled posts, and paneled balustrade; interior extensively remodelled c. 1915. 1st story has very handsome Medieval style, over-sized tiled fireplace with gargoyles of lions and over-mantel with tiled cityscape.

B: Possibly part is reworked earlier building. 1st story contains Colonial Revival style dining room. On west is jetty.

C: 5 bays on west, on east frame 2nd-story projects over stone lower story, has exterior glazed staircase to second story, on stair landing are French doors with decorative metal grills. West side: 5 bay portico with screened second-story balconies

(cont. p. 3)

PHOTO Negative File No. 8-19, slides

Map (Indicate North)



7 SITING, BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION, AND RELATED STRUCTURES:

#9: 2.83 acres

Very scenic site on edge of ridge overlooking Saddle River. Property drops steeply near west edge of the house. There is handsome landscaping. To south is large open yard enclosed by hedges to form rectangular courtyard which visually functions as a continuation of the series of spaces comprising the house's living room, sunporch, and patio. Brick and stone paved paths with landings lead down the steep, terraced slope west of the house to the flood plain of the Saddle River. The house is located about 25' from the road at a grade lower than the (cont. p. 3)

SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: Urban Suburban Scattered Buildings Open Space Woodland Residential Agricultural Village

To the south at 15 East Saddle River Road is the house's former barn-carriage house, which about 1940 was converted into a residence. Due to these modifications this property is omitted from the nomination. At 17 East Saddle River Road is a former tenant house of the Stillwell-Preston Estate. It is also omitted from the nomination as it has been greatly altered and enlarged.

SIGNIFICANCE:

The Stillwell-Preston House is important in Saddle River's architectural history as it is the most architecturally distinguished early 20th century house there. The house, which incorporates a circa 1800 farmhouse into its 1915 design, is associated with the borough's developmental history illustrating the evolution of a farmhouse associated with water-powered industries into a large country estate house.

The Stillwell (or Stilwell) family were early settlers in the Saddle River Valley and Richard Stillwell, according to tradition, was one of the men who named the Saddle River after the River Sadal in Scotland. A Stillwell house is believed to have been erected on this property by 1730. According to the Inskeep map, Blue Mill, a flax or woolen mill, was built nearby on the west bank of the Saddle River about 1760. This mill is believed to have been associated with Stillwell (Wilson, Saddle River Directory), although the Inskeep map states that it was built by Mathew Butler and destroyed during the Revolution. Unfortunately neither Kathryn P. Dubois, Old Mills of Bergen County nor A. Leiby's The Revolutionary War in Hackensack Valley (cont. p.4)

ORIGINAL USE: residential PRESENT USE: Residential
PHYSICAL CONDITION: Excellent Good Fair Poor
REGISTER ELIGIBILITY: Yes Possible No Part of District
THREATS TO SITE: Roads Development Zoning Deterioration
No Threat Other

COMMENTS:

The house is quite close to East Saddle River Road.

REFERENCES:

- NJHSI 0258-7
- 1778: Watkin's Revolutionary War map, seems to show a house in vicinity.
- 1840: U.S. Coast Survey, map #132: on.
- 1861: Hopkin's map; not legible.
- 1876: Walker Atlas, p. 112-113; R. E. Stilwell, two buildings.
- 1913: Bromley: V. Preston. - 1887 Driving Map: W.H. Hamlin
- 1964: Inskeep map: R. Stilwell (1730), R.E. Stilwell (1861). The Saddle River was named after the river Sadel in Scotland by Scotsmen Capt. Matthew Nicell & Richard

RECORDED BY: TRB ORGANIZATION: BCOC&HA

DATE: 10-1983

(cont. p. 3)

ADDITIONAL ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION: (continued)

projecting from sections B and D. First story contains large living room with Adamesque style plaster ceiling, French windows, and Colonial Revival embellishments. D: South side: 3 bays with French doors on 1st -story, 4 irregular bays on upper story, end gables of different sizes. East side: second-story oriel. West side: Jetty. 1st-story contains sunporch with medieval style fireplace. To south is outside patio visually extending the room's space.

E: one story with attached garage. Part of this section in the mid 20th century was removed. The demolished wing contained former kitchen and servants' quarters.

SITING, BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION, AND RELATED STRUCTURES: (continued)

road. The east side of the house faces the Road.
Trees provide a visual buffer along the road. On the east side of the house is a small formal garden.

REFERENCES: (continued)

- Stillwell about 1700. Tenant house, R. E. Stillwell (1861). Blue Mill (flaxwoolen) built by Mathew Butler, c. 1760, destroyed during Revolution.
Interview with Mrs. Passaglia, October 1983.
Interview with Mrs. Maltese, October 1983.
Blueprints of carriage house/barn remodelling and 1939 photographs. In collection of Mrs. Passaglia.
Lynn Wilson, "Introduction to History", Saddle River Directory.
Sites before 1880 Inventory,
Junior League Inventory.
CKT List.
"Church and Old Homes in Saddle River, NJ" #10.
Henry F. Withey and Elsie R. Withey, Biographical Dictionary of American Architects, (Deceased), 1956, reprint Los Angeles: Hennessey + Ingalls, 1970, p. 647, 636-7.
James Marston Fitch and Diana S-Waite, Grand Central Terminal and Rockefeller Center, Albany: NYS Parks and Recreation, 1974.
Deborah Nevins, in Nevins and David Gebhard, 200 Years of American Architectural Drawings, Whitney Library of Design, New York: Watson-Guptill, 1977, pp. 57, 188-190.
Interview with Al Zecher, 11/18/83.
SRHC files.



Looking north showing
river side of the
house.
Neg. file # 5-20.

7 Stillwell-Preston House, 9 East Saddle River Road
Saddle River, Bergen County, NJ

SIGNIFICANCE: (Continued)

mention this mill. The 1840 U. S. Coast Survey map shows three buildings along the west side of the East Saddle River Road in this vicinity and a building near the river. Unfortunately the 1861 Hopkin's map is unclear for this area. The mill is not present on the 1876 map which shows two buildings here associated with "R. E. Stilwell" probably Section A of the main house and the tenant house, since this map generally does not show barns.

Apparently the Stillwell property remained a farmstead as late as 1888 when an advertisement for its sale described it as a "farm and mill seat". By this date Saddle River's scenic beauty was attracting country estate owners. Veryl Preston, president of Eastern Steel, acquired the Stillwell property for his country estate.

The 1913 Bromley map shows Preston as owning three buildings and considerable acreage between the Saddle River and Ridgewood Road (today's Chestnut Ridge Road). According to the current owner, Preston had the main house enlarged and remodelled in 1915 to the designs of Warren and Wetmore.

The 1915 enlargement transformed the farm house into a gracious country house with large, handsomely appointed public rooms opening into each other providing a gallery stretching the full length of the newly erected south sections (C and D on the plan). From these rooms and their adjacent portico and patio, picturesque views of the Saddle River and the house's landscaped grounds are afforded. The house is built on the edge of a high bank of the river valley and so has unobstructed views of the river. The gambrel-roofed, 1½ story, frame Stillwell House, which appears to have been built around 1800, was incorporated into the 1915 design so that the mass of the older building is clearly visible and its redesigned south porch functions as the main entrance to the house. The 1915 building is not symmetrically planned and has an informal character enhanced by a mix of materials. While it is difficult to define its architectural style, it does have a number of Shingle Style features such as shingle sheathing on upper stories, large scale masonry on lower story, and a relative absence of applied exterior ornamentation. The remodelling displays careful handling of details, such as the glazed exterior staircase to the second-story and the design of fireplaces, as well as overall planning. Interior spaces have a more formal character than the exterior with some rooms having a Colonial Revival character and others more Medieval Revival in styling. This mix of architectural styles is typical in homes of the wealthy in the early 20th century.

The association of the Stillwell-Preston House with Warren & Wetmore is of interest. The New York City architectural firm was frequently employed by wealthy New Yorkers and by corporations. Whitney Warren (1864-1943), a cousin of William K. Vanderbilt, studied architecture at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. In 1896 he established an architectural firm with Charles Wetmore (1876-1941), a former lawyer. Their firm became known when they won the competition for the New York Yacht Club's building in 1899. Their best known work is Grand Central Terminal building in New York City which they designed with Reed & Stern. In addition to gaining a reputation for railroad station design, the firm was known as a designer of hotels. Grand hostleries they designed include the Vanderbilt, Biltmore, Ritz Carlton, and Commodore in New York City, the Broadmore in Colorado Springs, and the Royal Hawaiian in Honolulu. Warren was a founder of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design and originated the Beaux Arts Balls given by this group from 1913 to 1937. Warren & Wetmore's work typically display elegant detailing and Beaux-Arts planning, both found at the Stilwell-Preston House. The house is the only known Warren & Wetmore design in Bergen County.

Apparently the Stillwell-Preston estate was divided during the Depression. The main house, known as "River Winds", the carriage house-barn and the tenant house now have different owners. Al Zecker purchased the carriage house-barn and in 1939-40 converted it into a residence for Arnold J. Oehler. The north wing of the main house, the service wing, was demolished in the mid-20th century. Fortunately the major spaces of the house are intact and the exterior does not appear truncated.