

568

(Expires 5/31/2012)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

1. Name of Property

historic name Lee, John Black House I

other names/site number n/a

2. Location

street & number 729 Laurel Road not for publication

city or town New Canaan vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06840

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

[Signature] SHPO
Signature of certifying official/Title

7-8-10
Date

CT / SHPO
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register

determined eligible for the National Register

determined not eligible for the National Register

removed from the National Register

other (explain:)

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

9/16/10
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	district
0	0	site
0	0	structure
0	0	object
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC - Single Dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC - Single Dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: WOOD – Posts

walls: WOOD – Weatherboard

roof: OTHER – Built-up Tar and Gravel

other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The John Black Lee House I is a simple, Bauhaus-reflective Modern style house designed by American architect John Black Lee in 1952 as his first family residence in the Modernist enclave of New Canaan, Connecticut. The house is an economic study in domestic efficiency and demonstrates the application of the early Modern, self-contained rectangular form to a compact, highly functional living space. It consists of a one-story, cantilevered, rectangular wood-frame box dramatically balanced on thin wood piers atop a steeply sloped natural rock ledge. The exterior and interior of the house are painted a pure white in contrast to the dark gray and green tones of the surrounding granite outcroppings and dense natural tree cover. Lee incorporated an innovative post-and-beam structural system with exposed rafters that pierce through the glazed south wall of the house above an exterior porch that is recessed within the boxed volume. The property occupies a peak in the northeast corner of New Canaan, set at an elevation of approximately 500 feet between Ruscoe and Smith ridges. The closest Modern houses nearby are the Murphy House (1964) on Briscoe Road to the north and the Lindstrom House (1964) on Sleepy Hollow Road to the south. The Lee property encompasses an unaltered natural woodland landscape and one non-contributing outbuilding, erected in 1993.

Narrative Description

Setting

The Lee House I is set back approximately 100 feet from Laurel Road at the west end of a secluded 3-acre lot. It occupies the highest point on the property and is oriented with the main entrance facing west, and its long elevations facing north and south. The façade is set at grade and appears to rise out of the layers of rock ledge below. The opposite elevation is cantilevered over the edge of a steep ravine that flattens toward the east side of the property. The flat plane of the house, which projects from the rock ledge, is dwarfed by the mature trees in the dense forest surrounding it. The structural system and glazed openings of the house frame expansive views of the pristine landscape, which is completely buffered from any glimpses of neighboring residential development. The property is accessed by an informal gravel driveway cut into the hill west of the house that extends parallel to the road. It ascends to a one-story garage and gravel parking area located near the northwest corner of the lot. Steps built into a low stone retaining wall surrounding the parking area lead to a curved footpath that approaches the house. Garden plantings and shrubs line the stone walls.

Exterior

The Lee House I is a minimalist, horizontal rectangular volume achieved through the use of an interlocking wood post-and-beam structural system intended to emulate the strength and flexibility of a contemporary mid-twentieth-century steel frame. Local contractor Ernest Rau erected the house under architect John Black Lee's supervision in 1952. The purity of the house's form is reinforced by a flat roof, pier foundation, recessed porches, and floor-to-ceiling glazing, which eliminate visual distractions from its underlying shape. The house is consequently interpreted as a single object set within the landscape, rather than a complex composition of patterns or forms. The load of the building shell is carried by 15 wood piers that are reinforced by steel bolts at their intersection with floor plate joists spanning north-south. Select piers incorporate a slender central dowel affixed to the rock below. A short section of mortared fieldstone wall, concealed from view beneath the house, provides additional support at its center. The house measures approximately 52 feet long by 36 feet wide and includes a 16 foot square deck added to one end of the south elevation in 1993. Vertically laid tongue-and-groove wood boards sheath the exterior and the roof is covered with built-up tar-and-gravel. Glazed walls typically contain single-pane plate-glass windows, metal awning sash, or aluminum sliding doors.

Lee's Modernist expression of the exterior as a continuation of framed space rather than an ornamented shell is clearly illustrated on each elevation. The facade (west elevation) is blank, with the exception of a 15 foot long, four foot deep

recessed void at its north end. The recess is sheltered by the walls and roof of the house and the floor serves as an entrance porch to a band of three sliding doors. Flush can lights inserted into the underside of the roof illuminate the main entrance. Late-twentieth-century modifications to the entrance consist of the installation of floor-to-ceiling glass block in the south wall of the recess and the construction of an approximately eight-foot-deep stepped wood patio set six inches below the recessed porch. The patio replaced the original open riser plank stairs that served the main entrance.

While the modest facade functions as the primary public side of the house, visible from the driveway, Lee molded the more private south elevation into a celebration of the glass box aesthetic. The south elevation is comprised of a full-width, plate-glass wall, divided only by the rhythm of engaged posts and wood beams that continue seamlessly through the glass wall plane. The wood structural members, roof, and interior finishes are painted white to appear as one volume and views from the yard extend clearly into the house. The glazed wall is recessed six feet into the frame of the house, enabling the creation of an exterior porch sheltered by the roof and walls of the structure. The south side of the house originally appeared as a floating box with exposed joists supporting the floor deck. A 1993 alteration involving the construction of a stepped, uncovered extension of the porch and new 16 foot square open deck at its east end concealed the previously exposed structural members and grounded the building closer to the natural grade. The added east deck is lined with a wood safety railing. Pairs of metal sliding doors near each end of the elevation provide access to the exterior living space. The sliding doors subtly replaced plate-glass panels and access to the porch was originally provided through a single glazed door east of the center of the elevation. Other minor changes involve the replacement of three stacked awning windows at either end of the elevation with a single, rectangular plate-glass window.

The treatment of the north and west elevations is simpler than the south elevation. A pair of expansive plate-glass windows flanked by three vertically stacked metal awning sash occupy the middle of the north elevation, which faces the parking area. The sloping terrain and foundation piers are visible beneath this side of the house and the cantilevered east elevation. A pair of wide sliding doors near the north end of the elevation replaced an original plate-glass window in the late twentieth century, which was originally the only opening in the east wall. Other simultaneous alterations to the east elevation involved the installation of a second pair of sliding doors and narrow fixed windows. The sliding doors open to late-twentieth century cantilevered decks surrounded by wood safety railings.

Interior

John Black Lee continued the minimalist aesthetic throughout the interior of the house, which is designed with a zoned program that maximizes the feeling of space while providing ample amenities for a growing family. The interior contains 1,500 square feet and five rooms. The plan is organized around an original, central utility core that conceals a bathroom, laundry closet, and storage space without limiting the layout of living and sleeping spaces. The remainder of the rectangular plan is divided in half, with the bedrooms to the north and social spaces organized along the glazed wall to the south. A linear, double-loaded corridor between the utility core and bedrooms extends west-east through the house. A second linear circulation passage extends along the south wall of the house. The interior incorporates the exposed structure of the building and limited, economic finishes including drywalled ceilings and walls, and original, darkly stained oak plank floors. The spans of floor-to-ceiling glazing eliminate the feeling of rigid edges in most rooms and invite fluid visual communication between the interior and expansive framed views of the natural landscape. The glazing provides the illusion that the rooms are open to the exterior.

The main entrance opens into an open foyer and living room spanning across the west edge of the house. A grid of nine square skylights illuminates the foyer, which is separated from the northernmost bedroom by a solid wall. The exposed structural system is clearly visible in the living room, where the transverse beams draw the eye toward the open south wall. A rectangular, drywalled fireplace with a circular flue is tucked behind a beam on the west wall of the living room. The fireplace was installed in 1977 and replaced Lee's original wood stove, which had been previously removed. Lee originally suspended a horizontally oriented, floating box shelf from the stove flue to provide storage.

Full height openings at either end of the living room provide access to the two hallways through the house. The south hall extends past a one-sided galley kitchen built along the south wall of the service core. The kitchen contains white cabinets and updated white appliances. The layout of the kitchen is unaltered and the cabinets appear to be nearly identical replacements. The hall terminates in a dining room, which originally functioned as a multi-purpose dining, living, and

play space. The dining room is open to the exterior on two sides and features a single, circular skylight in the center of the ceiling. Simple, wood double doors in the east wall of the utility core open to a laundry closet, which is adjacent to a storage space accessed by a single door.

The master bedroom occupies the northeast corner of the house and retains an original built-in closet with bifold doors on its south wall. The north half of the house historically contained four compact square bedrooms. The location and layout of the master bedroom is original but the adjacent bedroom was converted into a white tiled master bathroom in the late twentieth century. The identical children's bedroom to the converted bathroom is extant. Both rooms contain an open, glazed north wall. The fourth bedroom, which originally functioned as a study and guest room, was incorporated as part of the foyer contemporaneous to the other interior alterations. Forced hot air with unobtrusive floor vents and ceiling spot lights are located throughout the house.

Alterations

Alterations to the Lee House are minimal. The porch was expanded in 1993 through the construction of a stepped, uncovered extension and a new 16 foot square open deck at the east end. Other exterior changes include the installation of glass block adjacent to the main entrance; replacement of stacked awning windows on the south elevation with a single, rectangular plate-glass window; and the installation of sliding doors on the east elevation in the late twentieth century. The interior was slightly modified through the enlargement of the master bedroom suite into an adjacent bedroom and the installation and relocation of the living room fireplace in 1977 that replaced the original wood stove.

Outbuildings

Garage, non-contributing (1993)

A one-story, wood-frame, two-car garage with a slightly pitched shed roof is located approximately 100 feet northwest of the house at a lower grade. The garage was constructed in 1993 with a poured concrete foundation and vertically laid, tongue-and-groove board sheathing, painted white to match the house. The garage faces south and incorporates two metal roll doors on the facade. A pedestrian door is located on the east elevation. The garage contains 672 square feet. The garage does not contribute to the historical and architectural significance of the property, and does not impact the understanding and feeling of the original house.

Integrity

The John Black Lee House I occupies its original steep rocky site within a remote, uninterrupted natural landscape. The retention of architect John Black Lee's progressive structural system and simple, geometric volume contribute to its feeling as a mid-twentieth-century Modern cantilevered box. Lee's original design intent is additionally evident in the extant zoned organization of the interior spaces. Despite minor alterations to the exterior porch, select glazed openings, and reduction of bedrooms, the overall design of the building is clearly discernable. Lee's massing, subtractive voids and interior program are completely intact. The majority of the original materials and color schemes of the house remain.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

SOCIAL HISTORY

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1952-1979

Significant Dates

1952: House constructed

1955: Original architect/occupant sells property

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Lee, John Black/

Rau, Ernest

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance for the Lee House 1 begins in 1952 when the house was completed and extends to 1979, the end of the mid-twentieth-century Modern architectural period as defined in the Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF).

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

The end date of the period of significance meets Criteria Consideration G as part of the exceptional significance of the development of mid-twentieth-century Modern style residential architecture in Connecticut as discussed in the MPDF.

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The Lee House I is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria A and C at the state level for its associations with the progressive architectural movement, development of functional and affordable single-family homes, and Modern style architecture during the mid-twentieth century. The building possesses significance under Criterion A in the category of Social History for its association with the emerging colony of Modern style architects who were living, networking and realizing their experimental designs in New Canaan. Under Criterion C, the building possesses significance in the area of Architecture as a transcendent expression of Bauhaus-inspired, minimalist Modern style design and as the first house local architect John Black Lee designed for himself. Upon completion, the house was featured in the 1953 Modern House Tour in New Canaan. The June 1954 issue of the nationally popular magazine, *House and Home* included an article acknowledging the innovative plan and structure of the compact building. The John Black Lee House I meets the requirements for listing under property type Number F.1 Box, as defined in the Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in Connecticut Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF), and considerably contributes to the Modern Architecture Movement in United States, 1920–1979 and Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residential Architecture in Connecticut, 1930–1979 historical context themes described in the MPDF.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

Areas of Significance: Criterion A

Social History

The unique network of master architects working in the Modern style and the availability of affordable land attracted emerging designer John Black Lee (b. 1924) and his young family to New Canaan in 1951. Lee's relocation and subsequent career development illustrate the magnetic, influential qualities of the renowned local architectural community, which incubated pioneering mid-twentieth-century Modern designs. Lee entered the architectural field through an engineering and construction background and cultivated an affinity for the Modern style throughout his life. Lee constructed his first house for his family in New Canaan in 1952, which exhibits the primarily Bauhaus-inspired minimalist design paradigms previously established in town by Marcel Breuer, Eliot Noyes, Philip Johnson, John Johansen, and Landis Gores, known as the "Harvard Five." Lee was working in town for Eliot Noyes when he designed the house.

John Black Lee was born in Chicago on October 31, 1924 and attended school in Lake Forest, Illinois, located 30 miles north of the city. During Lee's childhood, the greater Chicago area remained architecturally progressive with a rich collection of Frank Lloyd Wright's (1867–1959) early Modern houses. Lee's early interest in architecture was encouraged by his mother, who worked as an interior designer and served as a charter member of the American Home Designers (Lee 2010). Lee's mother decorated several Frank Lloyd Wright-designed houses in Lake Forest, some of which were built for her former classmates from Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania (Lee 2010). Lee always appreciated Wright's work, and noted that he attended one of Wright's lectures in Chicago (Lee 2010). Frank Lloyd Wright's work in the Chicago area was complemented by many other notable events and designers. Lee was nine years old when the city of Chicago hosted the Century of Progress International Exposition (World's Fair) in 1933. Chicago architect George Fred Keck (1895–1980) who designed the Crystal House and House of Tomorrow at the exhibition, developed several Modern style houses in Lake Forest in subsequent years. In his later professional career, Lee acknowledged his Modern architectural influences, which included admiration of the work of German Bauhaus architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969) who directed the architectural program at the Illinois Institute of Technology (then known as the Chicago Armor Institute of Technology) and operated a Chicago-based practice from 1938 to 1969. Lee had another connection with Mies van der Rohe through his mother, whose close college friend Dr. Edith Farnsworth commissioned Mies van der Rohe to design her now famous Modern style Farnsworth House in Plano, Illinois (conceived in 1945, completed in 1951). Lee visited the Farnsworth House in 1951, before designing his own residence in 1952. In Lee's opinion, the most important [Modern style] building in the world is Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona Pavilion (1929), which was constructed

with a plane supporting a roof. Lee believed that the Barcelona Pavilion displayed better “interpenetration of space” than Frank Lloyd Wright’s architecture of the time (Lee 2010).

Lee pursued an interest in construction at Rhode Island’s Brown University where he enrolled as a major in math, engineering, and naval studies in 1942 (*New Canaan Advertiser* 1975). He complemented this education with courses in drafting and graduated in 1947, following naval service in the South Pacific during World War II. Upon graduation, Lee sought professional advice regarding an architectural career from Bauhaus architect and Harvard professor Walter Gropius. Gropius (1883-1969), who then operated his own practice in Cambridge, Massachusetts, recommended that Lee further his education through apprenticeship rather than academic pursuits. Lee accepted a summer job as an apprentice carpenter for Illinois contractor Charlie Miller, who he noted was an excellent craftsman of wood-frame structures (Lee 2010). While working for Miller, Lee met Paul Schweiker (1903–1997), who then served as Dean of the Yale School of Architecture and maintained a private practice in Roselle, Illinois. Schweiker hired Lee as an apprentice in his firm Schweiker and Elting where he learned architecture by working directly in the field, drafting, building, and designing. Lee worked with the trained architects in the office during the day and attended classes at the Illinois Institute of Technology at night. He initially began designing small features such as stairways, then advanced to garages, studios and major outbuildings until Schweiker put him in charge of projects (Lee 2010). While working for Schweiker, Lee redesigned two existing houses, that unbeknownst to him, were located in Frank Lloyd Wright’s Usonia Homes development in Pleasantville, New York (Lee 2010).

Lee moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with his future wife after working for Schweiker for a couple years, and accepted a job with architect Oskar Stonorov (1905–1970), a former colleague of Louis Kahn’s. Stonorov put Lee in charge of design for all of his projects. Lee returned to the northeast in 1951, and sought employment with Marcel Breuer in New York City. Breuer, who did not have a position open at the time, referred Lee to Eliot Noyes, who hired him to work in his New Canaan practice (AIA 1970; *New Canaan Advertiser* 1975). Noyes put Lee in charge of three local commissions, including the Stackpole (1951), Ault (1952), and Noyes II (1953-1954) houses (Lee 2010). Noyes allowed Lee to work as an “architectural designer” while he pursued his architectural license. After moving to New Canaan, Lee noted that he immediately became involved with the dynamic local community of Modern architects, who were designing functional and experimental homes. Lee perceived this atmosphere as being part of “an off-campus school of architecture” formed by professional architects trained at Harvard, Yale, and Brown. He began teaching at Yale in the mid-1950s, where he explained structure to his students as the enframing of air, which was the cheapest building material. Lee and his contemporaries had offices in the same building or nearby and frequently collaborated. They often met for lunch, lectured in each other’s classes, and sparked debates amongst each other. He described their innovations, such as solar and structural experimentation and the creation of multi-use spaces as shared inventions (Lee 2010).

Lee created an opportunity to express his first individualized version of the Modern style by designing his own house in 1952, two years before he opened his own architectural practice in New Canaan. His firm, John Black Lee Associates was initially located in the same building as Eliot Noyes and Associates’ office at 96 Main Street and moved nearby to 36 Grove Street in about 1956 (Lee 2010). The cantilevered box of the Lee House I demonstrates Lee’s implementation of the “less is more” Bauhaus philosophy focused on achieving structural efficiency and maximum program functionality, while fulfilling the social need for affordable housing, attainable by all citizens. Lee built his first house following the completion of Mies Van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House (1950–1951) in Illinois and several grounded, floating, and glass box houses in New Canaan, including the Eliot Noyes (1947), Marcel Breuer II (1948), Phillip Johnson (1949) John Johansen (1949), Stackpole (1951), and Bremer (1951) houses (Earls 2006:25–75; Roth 2001:430–433).

John Black Lee designed his first house for his wife and two young children. Like the other New Canaan-based architects, he used his personal residence as a means of experimentation with programming and affordability solutions for single-family housing. Post-war American domestic culture developed out of an unprecedented emphasis on family life, individuality, and the ideal that average citizens, especially returning veterans, each deserved their own private utopia in the form of an economical single-family suburban house with a comfortable amount of interior and exterior space for enjoyment (Wright 1989:253). Lee’s structural system limited construction costs through the reduction of framing materials and inexpensive finishes. Upon completion, an article in *House and Home* magazine celebrated the efficient zoned layout of the house, which provided internal privacy, integration with the surrounding landscape, and promoted

child-rearing. The article notes the “remarkable” aspects of the compact interior plan, such as the concentration of “all services in a sky-lit utility core,” a multi-purpose family/dining/play room “placed so that it can be controlled from the kitchen,” and the inclusion of “four bedrooms in addition to the two living areas—all in 1,900 [actually 1,500] square foot house” (*House and Home* 1954:106).

John Black Lee passed his architectural licensing exam in 1954 and sold the Lee House I the following year after designing a second residence for his family in New Canaan. He continued to hire local general contractor Ernest Rau to construct his wood-frame houses and purchased 20 acres of land along Chichester Road in the mid-1950s. Lee hired Rau, who constructed several Modern houses in New Canaan, because of his ability to accurately compensate for the natural expansion and contraction of wood framing members (Lee 2010). Lee built his second house (1956) on the Chichester Road property, which he subdivided into six parcels and sold to other architects who intended to build Modern style houses. He subsequently built at least six other Modern style single-family houses in New Canaan, including the Rogers (1957), Teaze (1960), System (1961), Day (1965), Monroe (1968) houses and the Lee House 3 (1990) where he currently (2010) resides. Lee is a member of the American Institute of Architects, Connecticut Society of Architects, and served on the New Canaan Planning and Zoning Commission. He won several national honor awards for his residential designs and has served as a visiting architecture critic at Yale University. The New Canaan Field Club Warming House and Colorforms Toy Factory in Norwood, New Jersey are among his notable institutional and commercial commissions (AIA 1970).

Area of Significance: Criterion C

Architecture

The Lee House I is a key early example of architect John Black Lee’s residential work that demonstrates his applied skill in construction engineering and the transference of the Bauhaus Modern design legacy to American suburbia. The minimalist, rectangular form of the house with its integrated structural system that allows flexibly planned interior space to flow continuously toward the exterior strongly references Lee’s Bauhaus and Harvard Graduate School of Design trained mentors. Lee’s former employer, master architect Eliot Noyes noted that “an architect often expresses himself most clearly in a house designed for himself and his family” where he could explore methods to “expand the scope and richness of life within the house” through architectural means (Noyes n.d.).

The glass and floating box houses of the Harvard Five completed in New Canaan before Lee’s arrival employ manipulations of traditional and new construction materials to create shelters where the frame, sheathing, and finishes are presented as one unified, multi-purpose system. These structural innovations enabled the characteristic minimalist Modern aesthetic and expanses of open volumes within the wall planes and interior space. Lee derived an innovative, simple but sturdy post-and-beam frame that blends traditional American wood-frame construction with many of the benefits provided by steel frames. Lee’s post-and-beam framing system, with its lack of structural walls facilitates the characteristically mid-twentieth-century Modern flexible plan and use of extensive glazing. The 1954 *House and Home* article about the building describes the frame as “logical” and commends Lee’s achievement of a minimal foundation and maximized cantilevered space enabled by his “closely integrated plan and structure” that use interior partitions and solid exterior wall panels to brace some of the bays is his open grid frame” (*House and Home* 1954).

Lee incorporated a full-width glazed wall on one side of the house that replicates the aesthetic effect of Mies Van der Rohe’s and Philip Johnson’s, purist single-volume houses. Lee, who had visited Mies van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House and Johnson’s Glass House before designing his own house; felt that he could build a considerably less expensive structure with wood that would achieve the same aesthetic and functionality (Lee 2010). Johnson had developed a low, rectangular house with one glass wall by 1942. The visible floor and ceiling planes of the Lee House I, the wide grid of exposed vertical structural members, and views through the glazed wall of a central utility core with a one-sided galley kitchen closely resemble Mies Van der Rohe’s Farnsworth House. Lee’s use of exposed roof beams that pierce the exterior wall slightly predates the widespread use of this architectural feature in the Techbuilt prefabricated system developed by Boston architect Carl Koch in 1953. The organization of the Lee House I plan, with its halved division of

linearly arranged rectangular bedrooms separated from the more open living, dining, and kitchen areas is compatible with domestic plans designed by Eliot Noyes (Earls 2006:25; Noyes n.d.). Eliot Noyes, born in Boston in 1910, graduated from the Harvard GSD in 1938 and apprenticed with Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer in Cambridge before working as the Director of Industrial Design at MOMA and subsequently settling in New Canaan in 1947. Both Noyes and Breuer highly regarded the clear separation of social and private spaces, located either on opposite ends or sides of a house or further separated on multiple levels. A similar plan to the Lee House I is also illustrated in John Johansen's Dunham House completed in 1950 (Earls 2006:67). Lee's central utility core illustrates the mid-twentieth-century Modern emphasis on rational, economical design planning by consolidating essential utilities in a single, compact area.

The Lee House I, John Black Lee's first completed, independently-designed building, holds an important place in the continuum of his residential work, which extends up to the twenty-first century. The Lee House I most closely displays the influences of the first generation of Modernist architects on Lee, who inspired his early interests in architecture and Modern style design. Lee continued to cultivate his interests in the form possibilities of highly-affordable, wood-frame structural systems and the arrangements of domestic space with central or prominent living areas through the following decades, which resulted in a progression of more individualized Modern style designs. John Black Lee is currently retired from active architectural practice.

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

Property Ownership History

John Black Lee sold his first house to John Morton Poole IV in 1955. After Kathlyn C. Thurrott purchased it in 1964, the house changed ownership numerous times. Tyrus L. and Kathryn V. Homewood sold the property to C. Kleinsinger in 1971 and Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill architect Donald Swisher acquired it in 1977. Swisher reversed minor interior alterations that occurred over time and restored house to Lee's original design. One year later, he resold property to Katrina Giuriati on August 1, 1978. It was subsequently transferred to Suzanne Cerny on October 31, 1991, and Peggy S. McConnell on July 30, 1993. The current owner, Roseanne Diserio, purchased it on July 31, 1997 (Town of New Canaan 2010).

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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2006 *The Harvard Five in New Canaan*. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, NY.

House and Home

1954 "Post and Beam: Its frame must be braced and balanced." *House and Home*, June 1954:106–110.

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1975 "Designs Began With Own Career." New Canaan Architects column, *New Canaan Advertiser*, April 10, 1975.

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2010 Property and architect files. New Canaan Historical Society, New Canaan, CT.

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n.d. "Moods Are Not Accidents." Article in New Canaan Historical Society's architect files, New Canaan, CT.

Lee, John Black

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Roth, Leland M.

2001 *American Architecture: A History*. Icon Editions, Westview Press, Cambridge, MA.

Town of New Canaan

2010 Assessor's Records. On file, Town Hall, New Canaan, CT.

Wright, Gwendolyn

1983 *Building the Dream A Social History of Housing in America*. Pantheon Books, NY.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 3.01 acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 18 0625821 4560674
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____
Zone Easting Northing

4 _____
Zone Easting Northing

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The property boundaries encompass the legally recorded lines of Lot 9, shown on Map 40, containing 3.01 acres in New Canaan, Connecticut.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries include the house and full extent of the associated landscape features that contribute to the historic setting and appearance of the property.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jenny Fields Scofield, AICP/Architectural Historian; and Virginia H. Adams, Sr. Architectural Historian
organization PAL date May 2010
street & number 210 Lonsdale Avenue telephone 401.728.8780
city or town Pawtucket state RI zip code 02860
e-mail jscofield@palinc.com; vadams@palinc.com

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: Lee House I

City or Vicinity: New Canaan

County: Fairfield **State:** Connecticut

Photographer: Jenny Fields Scofield, PAL, Pawtucket, RI

Date Photographed: February 4, 2010

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 1 of 6. View of facade looking east from driveway.
- 2 of 6. View of north elevation looking south from garage and parking area.
- 3 of 6. View of south elevation looking northeast.
- 4 of 6. View of east and south elevations, looking northwest.
- 5 of 6. View looking south in living room, showing post and beam structure.
- 6 of 6. View looking east in south hallway.

Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Eugene A. Diserio, Trustee – Estate of Roseanne C. Diserio
street & number 729 Laurel Road telephone _____
city or town New Canaan state CT zip code 06840

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Lee, John Black House I

Fairfield County, Connecticut

Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in
Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

Town of New Canaan Assessor's Map Number 40.



(Assessor's Map source: New Canaan Tax Assessor 2010).

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Lee, John Black House I

Fairfield County, Connecticut

Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in
Connecticut, 1930 – 1979

Site Plan of the Lee House I Property



(Base map source: www.bing.com. Accessed March 2010).

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Lee, John Black, House I

MULTIPLE NAME: Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut 1930-1979, MPS

STATE & COUNTY: CONNECTICUT, Fairfield

DATE RECEIVED: 7/12/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/18/10
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 9/02/10 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 8/26/10
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000568

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS:
OTHER: Y PDIL: PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N
REQUEST: Y SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: Y NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

See attached sheet

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER *[Signature]*

DISCIPLINE *Historian*

TELEPHONE *202-354-2278*

DATE *Sept 25, 2010*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: RESUBMISSION

PROPERTY NAME: Lee, John Black, House I

MULTIPLE NAME: Mid-Twentieth-Century Modern Residences in Connecticut 1930-1979, MPS

STATE & COUNTY: CONNECTICUT, Fairfield

DATE RECEIVED: 9/14/10 DATE OF PENDING LIST:
DATE OF 16TH DAY: DATE OF 45TH DAY: 10/29/10
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 10000568

DETAILED EVALUATION:

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT _____ DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

Although the architect is still living, this house was built while Lee worked for architect Eliot Noyes. It is significant for its high level of integrity and as one of the earliest works of the second generation of New Canaan architects.

RECOM./CRITERIA _____

REVIEWER _____

DISCIPLINE *Historic*

TELEPHONE _____

DATE *9/16/10*

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N



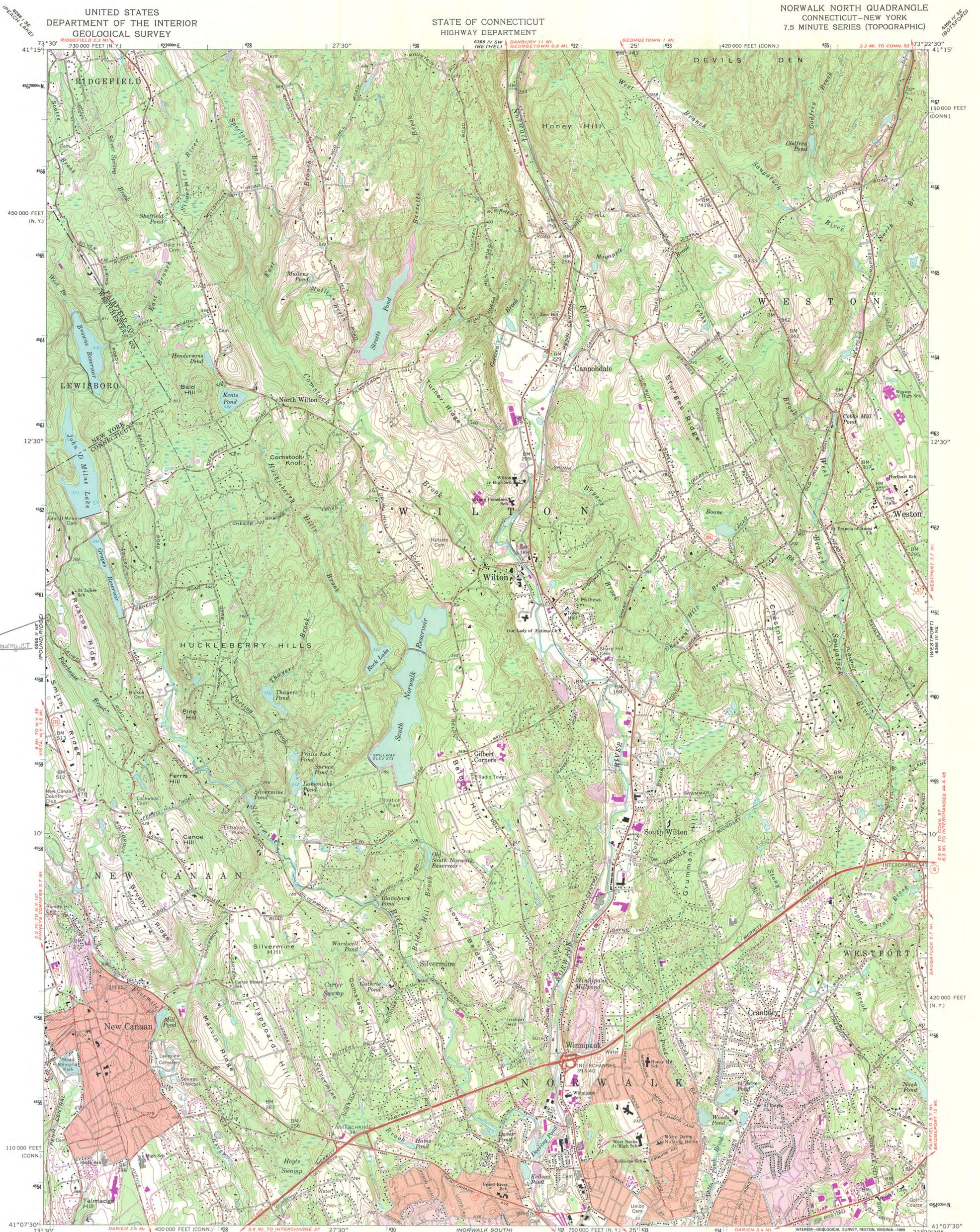










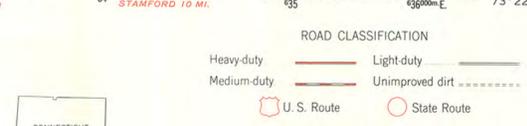
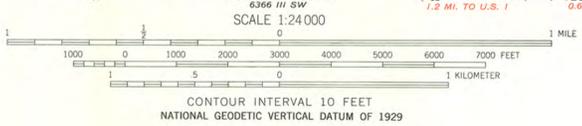
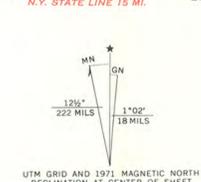


Lee House I
New Canaan Fairfield County, CT
UTM Reference:
18 0625821E
4560674N

Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Control by USGS, USC&GS, and Connecticut Geodetic Survey
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial
photographs taken 1949. Field checked 1950 and 1951
Revised 1960

Polyconic projection, 1927 North American datum
10,000-foot grids based on Connecticut coordinate system,
and New York coordinate system, east zone
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,
zone 18, shown in blue

Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked
Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown
To place on the predicted North American Datum 1983
move the projection lines 6 meters south and
36 meters west as shown by dashed corner ticks



NORWALK NORTH, CONN.-N. Y.

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY
DENVER, COLORADO 80225, OR RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Revisions shown in purple compiled in cooperation with
Connecticut Highway Department from aerial photographs
taken 1971. This information not field checked
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas

41073-B4-TF-024
PHOTOINSPECTED 1975
1960
PHOTOREVISED 1971
DMA 6566 III NW-SERIES V816





Arts
Tourism
Film
History

One Constitution Plaza
Second Floor
Hartford, Connecticut
06103

860.256.2800
860.256.2811 (f)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Roger Reed
National Register of Historic Places

FROM: Stacey Vairo, National Register Coordinator

DATE: July 9, 2010

SUBJECT: Mid-Twentieth Century Modern Residences in CT, 1930-1979

The following materials are submitted for nomination of the **Lee, John Black House I, New Canaan, Fairfield County, CT** to the National Register of Historic Places:

- National Register of Historic Places nomination form
- Multiple Property Nomination form
- Photographs
- Original USGS maps
- Sketch map(s)/figure(s)/exhibit(s)
- Pieces of correspondence
- Other _____

COMMENTS:

- Please review
- This property has been certified under 36 CFR 67
- The enclosed owner objections do _____ do not _____ constitute a majority of property owners.
- Other: __



Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism

Film Division

One Constitution Plaza
Second Floor
Hartford, Connecticut
06103

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www.cultureandtourism.org

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