### Millstream

**Smith, Winchell, House**

**Identification**

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<tr>
<th>Field</th>
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<td>Town</td>
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<tr>
<td>Village</td>
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<tr>
<td>County</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site No</td>
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<td>Connecticut</td>
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<td>Connect</td>
<td>Connecticut Historical Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Address</td>
<td>59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106</td>
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<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>(203) 566-3005</td>
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**Use (Present)**

Residence

**Ownership**

Fazzone, Peter R.

**Use (Future)**

Residence

**Material**

- Brick
- Other (Specify)

**Style of Building**

Neo-classical

**Date of Construction**

1916-17

**Approximate Dimensions**

2½

62 x 42; ellis 34 x 32; 16 x 26; 12 x 15; 12 x 15

**Condition (Structural)**

Excellent

**Integrity (Location)**

On original site

**Related Outbuildings or Landscape Features**

- Boat house, pool, bridge, patios

**Surrounding Environment**

- Open land

**Interrelationship of Building and Surroundings**

The Winchell Smith House sits on the east bank of the Farmington River off Garden Street. A private drive, also known as Winchell Smith Drive, leads to the house which is surrounded by trees and an iron fence. Two other modern houses are also located on the grounds.
This large, Neo-Classical-style building is perhaps one of Farmington's most beautiful houses. Its hip roofs, accented by three arched-window dormers and tall exterior chimneys, enhance the beauty of the facade. Comprised of nine bays, the front facade features a heavy pediment and cornice decorated with modillions. An oculus window marked with keystones lies above the large ten-over-twenty sash, center-hall window. The entry door is recessed and surrounded by classical columns and a heavy entablature with modillions. On either side of the entry way is a narrow, rectangular window. All other windows exhibit ten-over-fifteen sash and a keystone lintel. At the south corner of the building is a set of multi-paned French doors and two full-length sidelights. Highlighting the building are corner quoins, shutters, and trellises.

In 1915 Gustav Wollenberg sold a three acre-piece of land to Winchell Smith (FLR 77:564). Smith (1871-1933) was a noted playwright who loved Farmington but found no stimulation in suburban life. He brought D.W. Griffith and the company of "Way Down East" to town in 1920 to film several scenes. According to Historians Hurlburt and Lewis, Smith first commissioned architect Edward F. Hapgood, who died before the plans were finished. Cortlandt F. Luce completed the design. The house was erected in 1916 by R.F. Jones and Smith named it "Westward" and later "Millstream". Upon Smith's death in 1933 the estate was sold to Celia A. and John Hill Morgan (FLR 91:458). Smith was recognized as one of Farmington's leading citizens. He helped restore Riverside Cemetery and founded the Newington Home for Crippled Children.

The Winchell Smith House is architecturally significant due to its state of preservation and degree of detail.
OWNER'S NAME: Morgan, John Hill & Leila A.

ADDRESS: 8 Garden Street (rear) "Millstreams"

DATE BUILT: 1916 FOR: Winchell Smith

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

ARCHITECT: Edward F. Hapgood, who died, and was succeeded by Cortland F. Luce (C.A. Lillie)

MASTER-BUILDER: R.F. Jones

FORMER OWNERS: Morgan from Phoenix State Bank & Trust Co., Trustees


Winchell Smith bought the land from Gustave Wollenberg

REFERENCES: "Farmington, Conn., 1906"

"Farmington Town Clerks, 1943", p. 311
This house is not pictured in the Farmington Book, having been built ten years too late, but it seems appropriate to include it in these sketches, both as an outstanding house, and one which had been built for an outstanding man.

It was built in 1916, on land purchased the previous year from Gustave Wollenberg, for Winchell Smith. Winchell Smith was not a stranger to the area, having been born in Hartford on April 5, 1871, although his parents at that time were of Bloomfield. His father was William Brown Smith (which was Winchell Smith's given name also) and his mother was the former Virginia Thrall, perhaps of the tobacco Thralls of Windsor.

He was also the grand-nephew of John Brown of Torrington, of Harper's Ferry fame. It has been said that his ancestry leads back to John Cotton of Boston's seventeenth century, and also that there was some relationship with the Hadsworth families, but these have not been traced.

William B. Smith was working in Unionville in 1850, as said by Mrs. Hurlburt on page 332 of "Town Clerks", where she says:

"Samuel Dickinson and William Smith were employed at this time in the old canal warehouse at Unionville, which after the abandonment of the canal had been turned into a store, owned and operated by Chauncey Rowe, it being the first grocery store to be established in the village". She had already identified William Smith as "the father of Winchell Smith, the collaborator of 'Lightnin', which made Winchell Smith's name famous".

William B. Smith later owned the large acreage on which is now located Sunset Farms Road, which he used as a horse farm, for the breeding of riding and racing horses. He had purchased this around 1867. He specialized in the breeding of trotting horses, owning the famous stallion "Thomas Jefferson", which was exhibited in Philadelphia in 1876, and won a $10,000 cash award.

Mr. and Mrs. Smith lived near, and were acquainted with, many of the literary colony of Hartford.

Virginia Thrall Smith was a good and forceful woman, noted organizer of charities, and founder of the Children's Aid Society. A good friend, and interested in the same things, was Phoebe Hearst, mother of William Randolph Hearst. They exchanged ideas and assisted each other. Children had been housed in alms houses. County homes were then established, but had to be gotten rid of, as the administrators, fearful of the loss of their jobs, would not permit the children to be adopted. Mrs. Smith started the Newington Home in about 1892, in two old houses on the present site. A large sign at the roadside read, "Virginia Smith Home for Incurables".

June 25, 1974
Another son of Mr. and Mrs. William B. Smith was Dr. Oliver Cotton Smith, a famous surgeon of Hartford.


Winchell Smith attended Quaker Lane school in West Hartford and entered Hartford Public High School in 1883. He left home at an early age, became interested in the stage, and was an actor in New York by 1892. His first real publicity was given him after his appearance in "Prodigal Daughter" in 1893. On December 18, 1895, he married Grace Spencer of Troy, Pennsylvania, a New York journalist at that time.

The Winchell Smiths lived in New York City and he left the stage around 1905 to become a playwright and producer, having decided his forte was not acting. His own first play to be produced was "The Fortune Hunter", shortly after 1905.

Mr. Winchell and his wife came to Farmington, perhaps around 1910, and stopped at the Elm Tree Inn for a time. Having lived in the Hartford area as a youth he of course knew of Farmington, and now that he was in the mood for a country home, it pleased him to choose this as its site.

He rented for a few years from Noah Wallace, whom he perhaps had already known, the house at 22 Waterville Road. He then bought up considerable land from the Wollenbergs and the Barbours, and planned the construction of Millstreams just to the south of the grist mill (which was part of his purchase), and on the west side of the old bed of the Farmington Canal. For greater effect he preserved the portion of canal bed which ran in front of his house, and spanned it with a small bridge which carried his driveway over it.

Many arrowheads and Indian bones were found while excavating for the foundation of the new house, as the former home of the Tunxis Indians had been right here and on the site of Riverside Cemetery.

On page 107 of the Farmington Book is shown the photo of the Canoe Club House. Paul Butterworth of West Hartford had just joined the Pequabuck Canoe Club shortly before Winchell Smith bought this property for his house, and the canoe house had to come down. Mr. Smith is quoted as saying "It's in the way, and you don't use it often enough to be worthwhile anyway", so down it came.

The Winchell Smith property was quite extensive and included the Barbour and Wollenberg land all the way from Main Street to the Pequabuck and Farmington Rivers, about 25 acres, and including four houses. These were the two little ones at 138-140 Main Street, the Barbour house at 144 Main Street, and the Wollenberg house at 180 Garden Street. His driveway, leading from Main Street, Winchell Smith Drive, ultimately became a public street.

June 25, 1974
The writer had hoped to be able to quote the following, from page 51 of the Farmington Book, as descriptive of the site of Winchell Smith Drive:

"During a brief period after the Revolutionary War, while for one, or at most two generations, the merchant princes of Farmington retained their wealth, the river bank just below the bend was covered with boat houses and pleasure-grounds, and a path led down to them through a double line of Lombardy poplars from the newly built house of General George Coles".

Old residents however, state that Winchell Smith did definitely put in this driveway -- so the Lombardy poplars must have been somewhere else, perhaps at what is now Pearl Street.

About three years after building his house, Winchell Smith built what is now the building housing the McCallum Motors parts department warehouse, on Farmington Avenue near the railroad overpass almost to Unionville. It was built to house a hay, grain and feed business to supply the area farmers, and was successful for some years.

Mr. Smith re-activated the old grist mill which had been idle for a while after the Hollenbergs sold the property to him. It was probably opened more as a hobby and a publicity venture rather than a money maker, but it did return some profit. Jesse Saunders managed it for Mr. Smith, living at 199 Garden Street, which Mr. Smith purchased to be his home. Manager of the grain and feed business was Arthur W. Hall, for whom Mr. Smith purchased the residence at 72 Garden Street.

The house at 180 Garden Street was occupied by Mr. Smith's gardener, Mr. Lostocco, and the larger of the two small houses at 138-140 Main Street was occupied by Mr. and Mrs. William Hoppkinson, both of them part of the household staff at Millstreams. The house at 144 Main Street was rented for a time to the Richard Bissells, and it was their guest house while living at 130 Main Street. Number 144 was then rented for five years to the newly-wed Mr. and Mrs. William Sheffield Coyles, now of Oldgate.

Winchell Smith had his garage, large enough to house several cars, up near Garden Street. It was well equipped with machine tools, lathes, grease pits etc. Mr. Smith was a golfer, and James Wright of Wright's Liquor Store, was one of his caddies, Mr. Smith being a member of the Farmington Country Club.

During World War I Farmington's Cavalry Troop B, which had been more of a social group prior to the war, trained on Mr. Smith's grounds, but were later converted to a machine gun company and sent overseas, suffering some casualties.

Mrs. Hurlburt wrote extensively of Winchell Smith in her book "Town Clerks", and since everyone perhaps does not have her book immediately available, this will be quoted fully on the next page.

June 25, 1974
"When Winchell Smith built his beautiful new home at the junction of the Pequabuc and Farmington Rivers, he brought a new influence, a new manner of living, to Farmington. His great success with stage productions and motion pictures, his financial independence and his cosmopolitanism never failed to interest Farmington. But with it all, Mr. Smith was glad to be a country squire, glad to return to the home of his Yankee ancestors. He purchased the old mill and continued milling flour with the ancient stones, thereby finding the appropriate name for his home --- "Millstreams". Mr. Smith was generous with time and money when he approved of the request. He was most generous and interested in people whom he considered worth helping, and loved to surround himself with those who could in some way, make their own contribution to life. He would discuss any subject at any time, and was my mainstay in the early days at the Hartford Times, when a special story was wanted. Not everything Mr. Smith said went into print. But his interviews, whether about the condition of Riverside Cemetery, where he said he would at least be always assured of daisies and blackberry blossoms on his grave, or an analysis of George Bernard Shaw and his plays, were all good copy. I asked him once to explain the great success of his plays, and he said it was because they entertained the public. "You must not preach", he said. "The public does not like that. Amuse, divert, relax, but never preach on stage or screen".

One of my best interviews arranged through Mr. Smith, was with Michael Arlen just after the publication of his best seller, "The Green Hat". When Mr. Arlen arrived in New York on the same ship with Mr. Smith, he refused to be interviewed by the reporters from the New York newspapers, who contented themselves with the writing about his 'vescots'. When I met Mr. Arlen at Mr. Smith's home a few days later, he was still rather diffident, but supported by Charles Dillingham, John Golden and Winchell Smith, he finally gave his one exclusive interview. It was really an interview with all four of them, three of whom knew most of the answers to anything I could ask. When I asked Mr. Arlen to explain the girl who wore the green hat, a great shout went up from all four —— "Explain a woman! Don't ask us to do that!" they all chorused. A story is told even now, by Mr. Smith's friends, of the day a breathless messenger arrived at the Farmington Country Club where Winchell Smith was playing golf, with a contract to be signed immediately, for the screen rights to 'Secret Service'. Hundreds of thousands of dollars hung in the balance, but Mr. Smith waved the contract aside until the game was finished.

It was near the site of Mr. Smith's home, and just below the grist mill dam, that the scene of Lillian Gish being rescued from an ice-filled river was filmed for the motion picture "Way Down East". It was Winchell Smith's influence with his friend D. W. Griffith that caused it to be filmed here. The company of actors, director and technicians filled the Elm Tree Inn for a few days, and caused quite a stir in the village.

June 25, 1974
The simulated cakes of river ice were made of wood, and covered with white canvas and mica, all glued together. The rescue was made by Richard Barthelmess, the final take being shot late in the afternoon, after most of the spectators had been called home for supper. Maxwell Phelps and Paul Butterworth were hired to swim out and recover the imitation ice cakes, and bring them back for re-takes. Paul says they were paid 5¢ per hour. The film is a classic and its first screening was held at Millstream with the three most important members of the cast, Lillian and Dorothy Gish and Richard Barthelmess, in attendance. It was re-screened in 1971 as part of the publicity related to the 1971 opening of the Grist Mill as a commercial center, chiefly through the efforts of the owners of the Millrace Book Store, one of the new enterprizes housed there.

"Turn to the Right" was one of Minchell Smith's longer plays and in it was a peach orchard operator, for whose part the technical advice of the owners of Root Orchards was obtained.

Wilmarth Lewis, a youth when Minchell Smith came to Farmington, says that Mr. Smith was very kind to him, and taught him more about writing than did any one else. They even collaborated in writing one play but it was not very successful. Mr. Lewis says that in spite of Mr. Smith's theatrical instincts and success, that he always felt a certain sense of being handicapped due to his lack of a formal education, and was much too humble about it. His plays were unfailing entertainer, never cynical, and he was greatly loved by members of the theatrical profession. Of his one and a half million estate, he left a goodly sum in trust for needy actors and dramatists.

Walter Primhard Eaton wrote Minchell Smith's biographical sketch and says of him:

"... practically all the plays he worked on were comedies in the American tradition, of character types, broad effects, brisk dialogues, wholesome atmosphere, sentimental endings".

He says further:

"His smooth, alert face, behind eyeglasses, was that of a keen and kindly observer -- soft and pleasantly spoken -- with a dry but kindly wit. He was universally liked both by his colleagues in the theater, and his neighbors in the country. The writing of popular plays was easy for him, his worldly affairs were uniformly successful, and he lived pleasantly by giving pleasure".

A Farmington man who remembers him says that Minchell Smith had an aptitude for expressing characterizations, and he described a trait of one of his acquaintances with: "He is the man with the most generous instincts, under the best control".

Minchell Smith provided movie film to be shown in the Town Hall, and he helped with entertainment at the East Farms Schoolhouse, when the East Farms Neighborhood Society was having meetings there.

June 25, 1974
Mrs. Smith died in 1930 and Winchell Smith in 1933, on June 10th.

Mrs. Hurlburt concludes her sketch of him on page 312 of "Town Clerks" with the following:

"Winchell Smith loved living in Farmington, but he found little to interest him or stimulate him in Farmington church, social, political or suburban life. He needed a combination of relaxation and inspiration which he found among his own friends, and in his work. He left no children of his own, and his large fortune was willed to those charities devoted to the care of children, particularly to the Newington Home for Crippled Children, of which his mother had been one of the founders. Winchell Smith was one of Farmington's most important and distinguished residents."

A man who visited Farmington often, and was by marriage a relative of Winchell Smith, is Paul Butterworth of Sunset Farms, West Hartford.

Mr. Butterworth, born in Columbus, Ohio, of ancestry which dates back to William Penn's Quaker group, attended Trinity Hall School in Washington, Pennsylvania, and is a 1909 graduate of Trinity College of Hartford. His Butterworth ancestor settled in Lynchburg, Virginia, but finding slavery there he moved up to Ohio, between Dayton and Cincinnati. Another ancestor of the name of Munger, was a settler in Guilford, Connecticut, in 1637.

In 1911 Paul Butterworth married Clarabel Smith, daughter of Winchell Smith's brother Dr. Oliver Cotton Smith, and sister of Oliver Harrison Smith, later to be the owner of the house at 144 Main Street, Farmington. Paul was in the Hartford Gas Company for many years, as his father had been with the same type of business in Columbus, Ohio.

Paul Butterworth and his wife built on the William B. Smith property, Sunset Farm, in 1916-17, and the present group of 65 houses and families is formed around the nucleus which was the Butterworth home. It was an un-planned community, chiefly of friends, or friends of friends, who wished to join the group. Dr. Maxwell Phelps is one of the residents, and is now president of the neighborhood Sunset Farms organization.

Mr. Butterworth in 1938 married Elizabeth Taylor, daughter of Charles Taylor, who was the head of the Collins Company for many years, and director of many other companies. Mr. Taylor's hobby was furniture and old lumber. He was a very good amateur cabinet maker, doing much of the paneling and cabinet work in his daughter's house with lumber salvaged from an extremely old Wethersfield house. 

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"Hillstreams" was sold by the estate of Winchell Smith in 1937, to John Hill Morgan and his wife, Leila A. Morgan. The purchase by the Morgans is believed to have included only the house and the land between the Pequabuck and Garden Street, and not including the grist mill or the house at 180 Garden Street.

John Hill Morgan was the iconographer mentioned by Wilmarth Lewis on page 449 of "One Man's Education" as having done the iconography of George Washington, a comprehensive study of all portraits of George Washington. Leila A. Morgan took title to the property in 1958 after her husband's death, and in 1959 sold it to Robert F. Murphy.

Robert F. and Elizabeth Murphy and their five children had lived for a time at 45 High Street, renting that house, and had owned and occupied from 1951 to 1958 the house at 31 Main St. They moved later to Simsbury.

Newman Marsh is believed to have been the next owner, purchasing from the Murphys. Mr. Marsh, originally of New Hartford, had worked for Hartford National and then moved to New York, where he was with Franklin Bank and Trust. Mr. Marsh sold some land to the rear of 180 Garden Street to Mrs. Alden Y. Warner of 149 Main Street. Later he sold some land between there and the canal bed, to Dr. Burwell Dodd, retired surgeon. Both Mrs. Warner and Dr. Dodd built houses on their property.

Mr. Marsh sold Hillstreams in 1967.

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Owners of this house since their purchase in 1967 are Mr. and Mrs. Gordon Stuart Phelps. They had owned and lived at 25 Hatters Lane from 1956 to 1963, and then in a purchased home on Mountain Spring Road from 1963, and from there they began the search for a larger house. After looking at several others in the village, they finally decided on Millstreams. The house had been vacant for some time, and vandals had broken many windows, thrown paint on the walls, broken many of the spindles in the staircase and prisms of the crystal chandelier, but it was on a fine site, was a large house, and they could see its possibilities. They purchased and renovated it --- and there have been no regrets. It has a beautiful setting, and the remnant of the old Farmington Canal bed, spanned by the brick bridge, is quite an attraction.

The house has not needed any alterations nor major improvements, but of course its damage had to be repaired, and it had to be entirely redecorated. The only original painting from Hitchell Smith's era left on its interior walls are in the third floor ballroom, and in one of the linen closets.

Gordon Stuart Phelps, born in Hartford, is the son of Dr. Maxwell Overlock Phelps and Frances Lewis, both formerly of Farmington. Dr. Phelps is the son of the late Dr. Stuart Ezra Phelps, who was Farmington's well-respected physician for many years, and Mrs. Phelps is the daughter of George Lewis of West District, who owned and managed a dairy farm near the present West District School. Gordon Phelps is a graduate of Kingswood School and of Trinity College.

Mrs. Gordon Stuart Phelps, born in New York City, is the former Anne Stewart Pollock, daughter of Woolsey McAlpine Pollock and Frances Taft. Her father was the owner of a large cold storage plant in Chicago. She has attended Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, was graduated from Spence School in New York, and attended Finch College.

Mr. and Mrs. Phelps lived in Hartford when first married, Mrs. Phelps working at Kingswood School until the birth of their first child.

Mr. Phelps is a General Partner in the brokerage firm of Conning & Company of Hartford. He also serves on the Investment Committee of the Farmington Village Green and Library Association. Mrs. Phelps is Past President of the Women of St. James, President of the Farmington Garden Club, and works one day per week in the library of Renbrook School. Both are members of the Farmington Field Club. They gave a showing in their home one night of the old motion picture "Way Down East", one scene of which had been filmed near the grist mill.

The four daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Phelps are:

- Page Taft Phelps
- Elizabeth Stuart Phelps
- Kimberly Lynn Phelps
- Cummings Kyle Phelps (twins)

Renbrook, Purnell, Bradford
Renbrook, Purnell
Renbrook
Renbrook

June 25, 1974