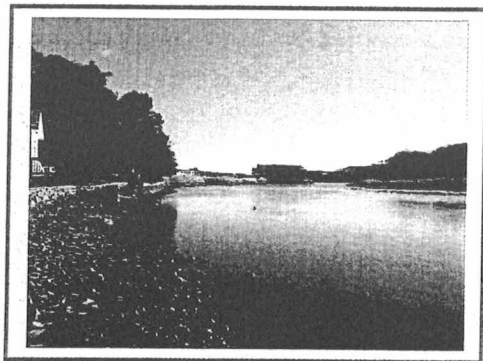
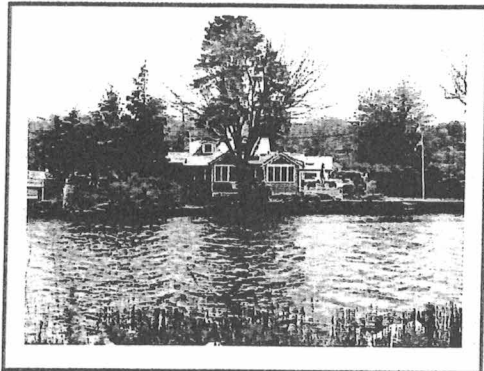
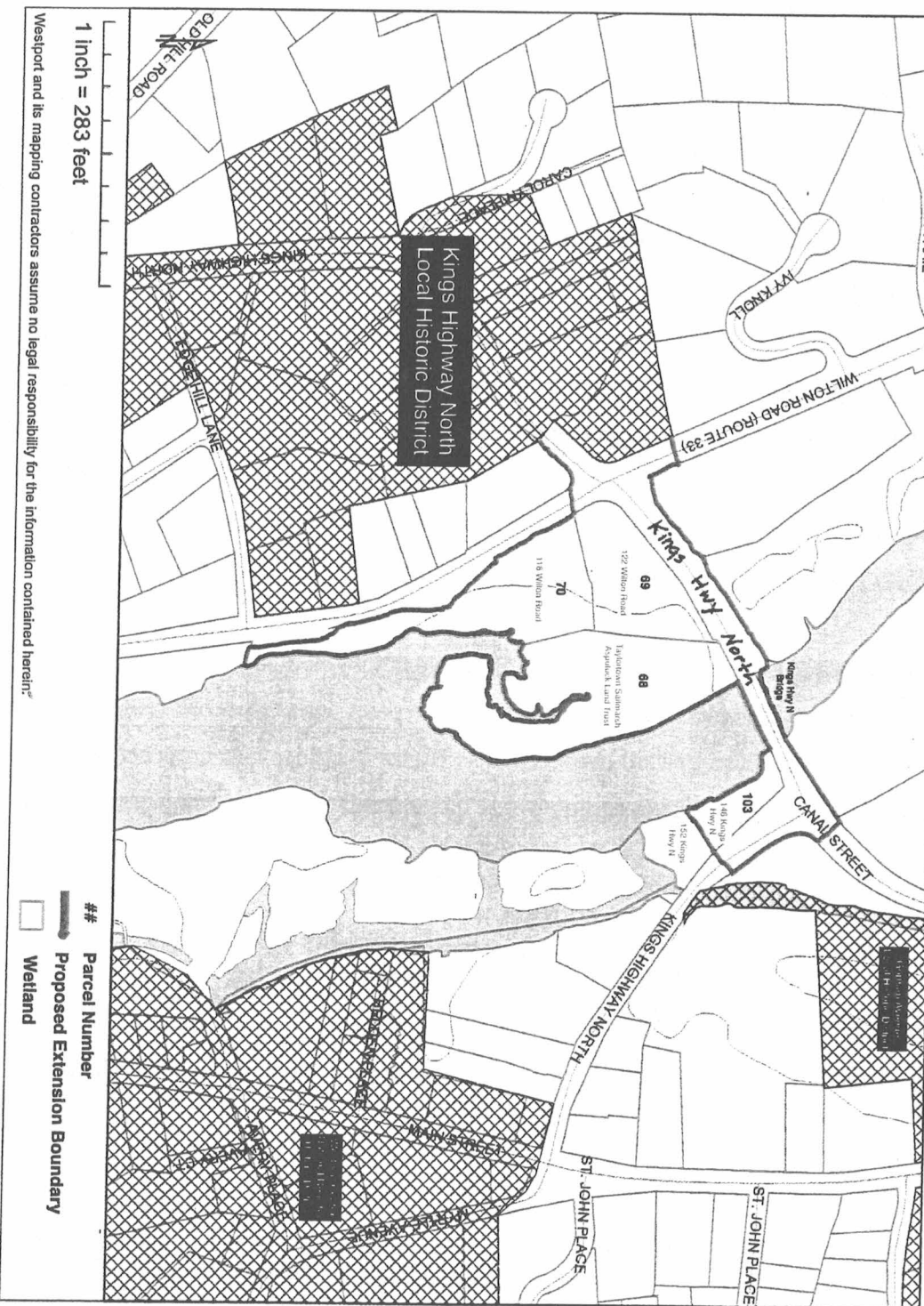


**Study Report**  
**Proposed Cable's Landing Extension**  
**Kings Highway North Local Historic District**  
**Westport, Connecticut**

**Prepared by Rachel Carley**  
**Historic Preservation Consultant**  
**March 2018**

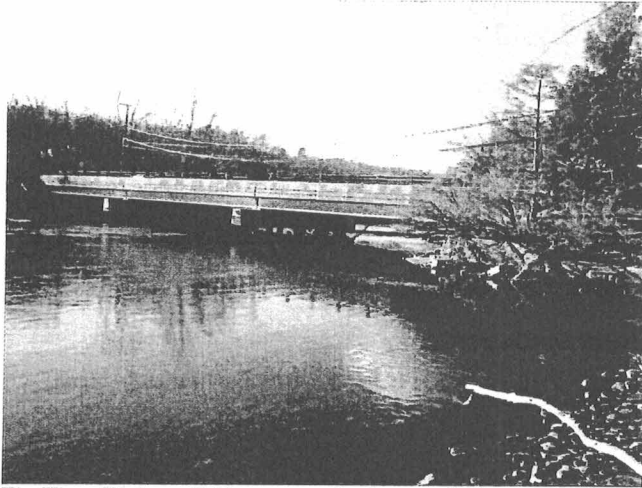


# Proposed Cable's Landing Extension, Kings Highway North Local Historic District



## *Significance*

The proposed Cable's Landing Extension links historically and physically to the Kings Highway North Local Historic District as part of Taylortown, an English colonial settlement established in the 1690s adjacent to the ancient ford that long served as a primary crossing point on the Saugatuck River. Although the study area for the district extension is relatively small, the buildings, structures, roadway and landscapes



The Kings Highway Bridge crosses the Saugatuck River at the site of a Native American ford, one of the most historic locations in Westport; view looking northwest.

distinguishing this important location represent an extended timeline of Westport's historical development—stretching from a pre-colonial era of Native American habitation into the twentieth century.

Much of the significance of the area relates to the use of the ford (possibly prehistoric) by Native

Americans and European colonists. The crossing was instrumental in dictating the route of the Boston Post Road in this part of Connecticut, and it eventually determined the site of the first bridge across the Saugatuck River, erected in 1762. Proximity to this historic ford was a key factor in the decision by English colonists to settle Taylortown in this upriver area, rather than further south, closer to Westport's harbor.

Of the two buildings included in the proposed extension, the oldest is the c. 1760 Cable homestead (no. 146 Kings Highway North). Set on the east bank of the river, this house is believed to



Thomas Cable House, no. 146 Kings Highway North, built c. 1760; view looking east

## Historical Overview

Formally chartered in 1835, Westport originally included parts of colonial Fairfield (incorporated 1639) and Norwalk (1651)—along with a bit of present-day Weston (1787).<sup>2</sup> Prior to the charter, the Saugatuck River formed the border between the east side of Norwalk and the west side of Fairfield. When English settlers arrived in this area in the 1630s, the region was the territory of Native Americans who called themselves Ninnimissinuwock and included various subgroups of the Paugussetts. The location of their ancient “Indian ford of great rocks” upriver from Long Island Sound was influenced by the relative narrowness of the Saugatuck River at this site. It is at this point, about two miles from the coast, where the flow of fresh river water meets the brackish tidal water washing up from Long Island Sound. The minimal tidal fluctuation created by this confluence provided a reliable low-tide crossing place that could not be found at any point lower on the river.<sup>3</sup>

Due to the importance and location of this ford, a Native American footpath leading to and from it likely existed in pre-colonial days, and possibly in the prehistoric era. Settlers from Hartford are believed to have crossed the river here on their way to establish Norwalk in the late 1640s as they followed an overland track connecting the coastal settlements of New Haven (1638), Fairfield (1639), Stamford (1640) and Greenwich (1641). Decades later, when in 1672 colonial postal service was initiated on behalf of the British monarchy, post riders followed the same route. Planned by Francis Lovelace (1621–75), newly appointed governor of New York, his so-called Boston Post Road represented a bid to facilitate communications between the New York Colony and settlements in Connecticut and Massachusetts.

Lovelace solicited the aid of Connecticut governor John Winthrop (1687–1649) in determining the best route for post riders to travel along the sparsely settled coast of Long

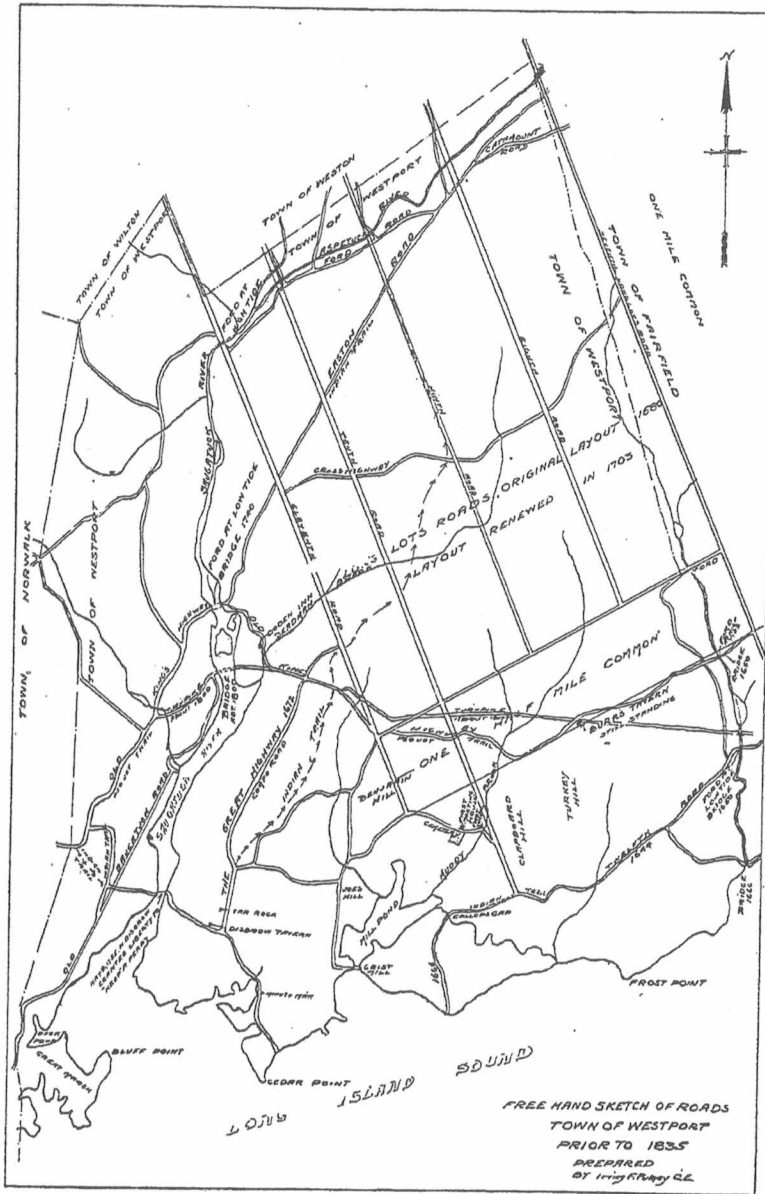
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<sup>2</sup> Upon incorporation in 1835, the new town of Westport absorbed the former Saugatuck River border. Greens Farms was annexed in 1839, when Westport acquired its present borders.

<sup>3</sup> A second ford was located another two miles up the Saugatuck at present-day Ford and Red Coat Roads, where the flow is entirely fresh water. Crossing at that site was not subject to tidal levels, but it had the inconvenience of being located that much further upstream, adding four miles to a traveler’s journey.

postal route, meaning that the two routes (Kings Highway and Boston Post Road) were long synonymous in this part of town. That changed around 1811, when the postal route was redirected to the present State Street crossing downriver.<sup>5</sup>

WESTPORT IN CONNECTICUT'S HISTORY



This map of local roads indicates how the old Kings Highway jogged north to the upriver crossing.

<sup>5</sup> Remnants of Kings Highway located north of present-day U.S. Route 1 later became known as Kings Highway North, as distinguished from pieces of Kings Highway that also survive to the south of Route 1.)

The homestead is believed to be the oldest extant building on the east side of the old ford in the area of the present bridge. The exact location of Thomas Cable's boat landing is unknown, but references in 18<sup>th</sup>-century deeds place it near the Kings Highway bridge—possibly on the quarter-acre “water lot” that Cable owned just to the south of his homestead. Multiple citations of a road “to Thomas Cable's landing” also appear in land records dating from the 1770s to 1803.<sup>6</sup> How this landing was used is not entirely clear. The Saugatuck River was reportedly navigable by sloop only as far as Ebenezer Coley's wharf on the east side of the river, near Gorham Island, but low-draught vessels presumably could have traveled further up the waterway. It may also be that Cable operated a high-tide ferry service over the ford prior to construction of the 1762 bridge.

Remarkably, the Kings Highway bridge remained the only span over the Saugatuck River until about 1800, when a second bridge, a drawbridge, was built downriver at the present State Street crossing. By 1811 construction of a new road to the drawbridge by the Connecticut Turnpike Company was complete, thus precipitating the redirection of the postal route over the downriver span.<sup>7</sup>

Although the old Kings Highway bridge had become too narrow to handle the larger vehicles now able to navigate roads newly improved under the turnpike system, it remained an important crossing point. By the early 1800s, the hamlet on the east side of the bridge had developed into a small business and manufacturing center. In the 1820s and 1830s, the old Cable homestead housed a cobbler's shop, and a hat shop stood directly across the road, next to Rhodes Brook (present canal).<sup>8</sup> Just to the north, and served by the canal, was Lees Manufacturing Co., maker (as of the 1840s) of cotton twills, ribbons, candlewicks and bouclé.

Continued growth of river commerce inspired the bid (lead by a Taylortown resident) to create the new town of Westport, carved out of Norwalk and Fairfield in

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<sup>6</sup> See Dorothea Malm, “History of 146 Kings Highway North, Westport, Connecticut,” (unpublished manuscript, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> A 1798 statute permitted Norwalk and Westport to build a toll bridge across the Saugatuck at the present State Street location, and it was completed a few years later. The Connecticut Turnpike Company was incorporated in 1806 with the purpose of constructing a toll road from the east side of Fairfield to the Byram River in Greenwich. Institution of the turnpike system in the late 1790s was intended to improve the state's poor roads.

<sup>8</sup> The shoe shop was owned successively by shoemakers Henry Platt and George L. Cable.

an artists' and writers' colony.<sup>9</sup> Attracted by the simplicity of village life and proximity to New York, creative thinkers had begun making Westport home as early as the 1880s. By the 1920s, when the Helds arrived, the town had solidified a reputation for its bohemian spirit, owing in part to rumors of the occasional bootleggers' cache washing up on the shore and to the 1920 arrival of F. Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald to a cottage near Compo



Held's "flapper," the Held Girl, figured prominently on his cover for *Tales of the Jazz Age*.

Beach. John Held Jr.'s impact on village life was so pervasive that art-colony chroniclers Dorothy and John Tarrant recalled: "Years later local people would look back and call the town 'John Held's Westport.'" (*Community of Artists*, 1985).

One of the artist's most famous creations, the pert, short-haired flapper—complete with rolled stockings and cigarette holder—known as the "Held Girl," embodied the halcyon days of the twenties. In 1922 Scott Fitzgerald tapped Held to design the book jacket for his *Tales of*

*the Jazz Age*. Soon after, the artist's work began appearing in *The New Yorker* magazine, founded in 1925 by his childhood friend Harold Ross.<sup>10</sup>

A talent in her own right, Johnnie Johnson was an accomplished blacksmith who crafted iron gates, signs, weathervanes, hinges and other items made from her husband's sketches, which she sold with the help of whimsically illustrated catalogues.

A WROUGHT-IRON SIGN DESIGNED FOR YOU BY John Held Jr. IS ALWAYS IN GOOD TASTE —

WEATHERVANES  
DOOR KNOCKERS  
FOOT SCRAPERS  
AND HINGES

ASK MRS HELD FOR A BOOKLET

GRINDSTONE HILL  
FORGE MRS JOHN HELD JR  
WESTPORT CONNECTICUT

<sup>9</sup> No. 146 Kings Highway North remained in the Shurtleff family until 1923. (See Westport Land Records, 9:321 and 432; 33:18; and 41: 515.) John Held Jr. married his second wife, Ada "Johnnie" Johnson, in 1918 while he was in the Navy and she was serving as an ambulance driver in France.

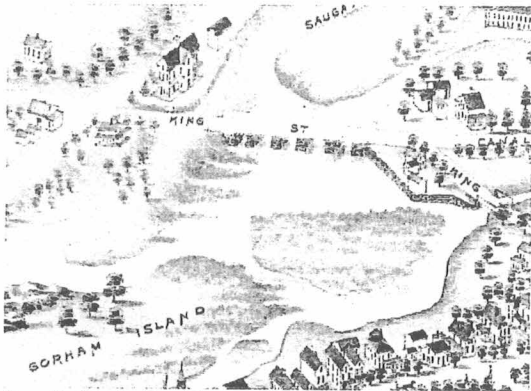
<sup>10</sup> Held's lifework included cartoon strips, magazine covers and theater-set designs, card games, poster art and countless book illustrations.







the colonial era, the Taylortown Saltmarsh is an especially important remnant of Westport's estuarine environment. An integral component of the Saugatuck watershed's

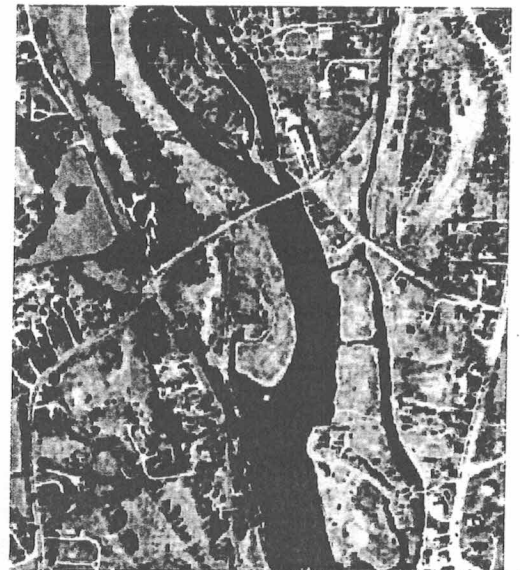


Detail, *Birds-Eye View of Westport*, O.H. Bailey, 1878. The saltmarsh is shown in the upper left corner, and the Cable Homestead with its stone retaining wall appears in the upper right corner.

environmental systems, the marshes mitigate flooding by absorbing rainwater and slowing shoreline erosion. Comprising part of a groundwater discharge zone, these wetlands also protect the river's water quality and chemistry balance by filtering runoff and metabolizing excess nutrients. The portion of the Taylortown Saltmarsh

contained in the historic

district study area is defined by a distinctive, peninsular profile (as seen from the air.) Remarkably, that profile appears to have survived over time relatively intact. It is clearly delineated on the 1878 O.H. Bailey map, above, and shows on the 1934 Fairchild aerial survey map, right.



Fairchild Connecticut Aerial Photography Map, 1934

*Adjacent Marsh Properties: 118 and 122 Wilton Road*

Situated on a ridge above the Taylortown Saltmarsh, the parcels at nos. 118 and 122 Wilton Road (lots 69 and 70), together comprising almost three acres, serve as a natural groundwater recharge zone for the marshland below. Groundwater recharge is the primary mechanism for aquifer replenishment. The vacant lot at no. 122 Wilton Road (1.16 acres) is the former site of the c. 1750 Adams house (see page 8), which was photographed for the Works Progress Administration's Census of Old Buildings in Connecticut in the 1930s. (According to the census, the building had by that time been moved about 30 feet south from the corner—perhaps to provide better automobile access to the Kings Highway Bridge. It is not known how long that building has been gone.) The parcel, now overgrown, includes a

under the aegis of Westport First Selectman Herbert E. Baldwin at a cost of \$140,000 financed with State Aid Funds.

## **Summary and Findings**

In determining the boundaries for the proposed Cable's Landing extension to the Kings Highway North Local Historic District, several aspects of the area's character were considered, including the physical and visual cohesion and integrity of the recommended resources, historic and architectural significance and the relationship of the proposed extension to the existing district and to the town of Westport as a whole. This study concludes that the properties under consideration preserve a strong and cohesive contextual connection to the previously designated Local Historic District on the west side of the Saugatuck River. Research on the Thomas Cable Homestead at no. 146 Kings Highway North, early owned by members of the Cable and Taylor families, supports the supposition that the east side of the Kings Highway Bridge may rightly be considered part of the colonial settlement of Taylortown. There are also direct links to the Taylors: Rhoda Cable, wife of Thomas, was born a Taylor, and upon Thomas's death in 1797, sold the property to her cousin Abijah Taylor. The two sides of the river in this area also had a long historical connection owing to the location of the ford and to the routes of the Boston Post Road/Kings Highway, a well-traveled road that stimulated residential development and commerce on both banks of the river.

The long history of a ford at this location further supports the historical and archeological significance of the bridge crossing and the Taylortown Saltmarsh parcel. Both the crossing and the marsh played an important role in Native American life and the era of colonial settlement. Moreover, inclusion of the marshlands presents a rare opportunity in Westport to protect an important natural resource and honor its view shed down the river. Inclusion of the 1965 Kings Highway Bridge and its 1851 abutments reinforces acknowledgment of the historic value of the river crossing and its role in dictating the route of the one Connecticut's most important roads, the Boston Post Road as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

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Westport Historical Society, Research Files  
Westport Public Library, Vertical Research Files

**HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY—BUILDINGS AND STRUCTURES**

Please send completed form to:  
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development, One Constitution Plaza,  
2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

\*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

**GENERAL INFORMATION**

Building Name (Common) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Building Name (Historic) \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street Address or Location 122 Wilton Road  
 Town/City: Westport Village \_\_\_\_\_ County: Fairfield  
 Owner(s): First Garden Development LP  Public  Private

**PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Present Use Vacant Lot

Historic Use Residential

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

Interior accessible?  Yes  No If yes, explain n/a

Style of building: \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Construction \_\_\_\_\_

Materials (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- |  |   |                                       |                                       |  |
|--|---|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard             | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding        | <input type="checkbox"/> Brick        | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle | <input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone            | <input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten         | <input type="checkbox"/> Stucco       | <input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone  | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type) _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ |                                       |  |

**Structural System**

- Wood Frame  Post & Beam  Balloon  Load-bearing Masonry  Structural iron or steel  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Roof (Type)**

- Gable  Flat  Mansard  Monitor  Sawtooth  
 Gambrel  Shed  Hip  Round  Other \_\_\_\_\_

**(Material)**

- Wood Shingle  Roll Asphalt  Tin  Slate  Asphalt Shingle  
 Built up  Tile  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Stories: \_\_\_\_\_ Approximate Dimensions \_\_\_\_\_

Structural Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Exterior Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Alterations?  Yes  No If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR OFFICE USE**

Town # \_\_\_\_\_ Site \_\_\_\_\_ UTM \_\_\_\_\_

- District  S  NR, Specify: \_\_\_\_\_  Actual  Potential

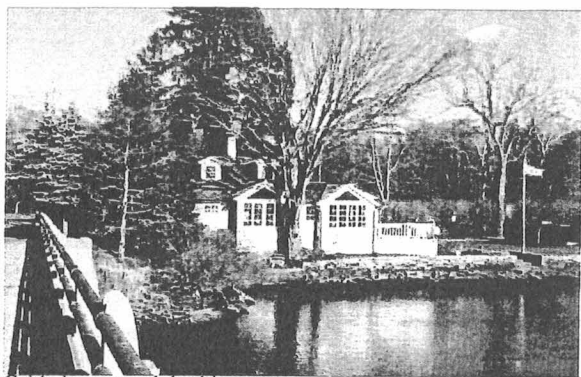


**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)**

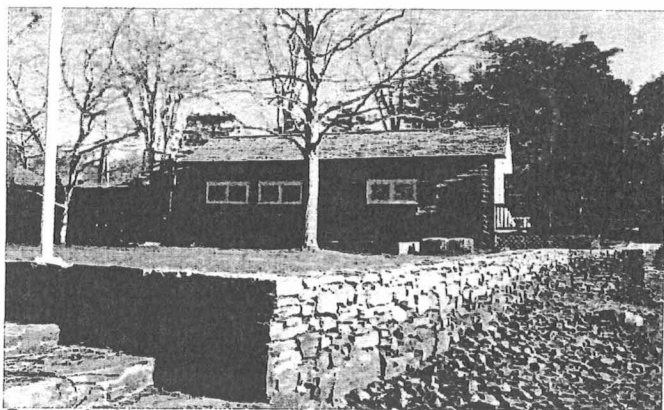
The documented chain of title of a house at this location dates to 1797, when Rhoda (Taylor) Cable, recent widow of Thomas Cable (1735–97) sold a dwelling and about 1/3 acre here to her cousin Abijah Taylor, a ferryman, along with an acre across Kings Highway with a “garden spot” on Rhodes Brook (present canal). Earlier mention in a deed related to the adjoining lot to the south indicates that a house belonging to Thomas Cable stood here as of 1774.

By 1826 the house was owned by a shoemaker named Henry Platt. It sold that year to another shoemaker, George Cable, and was re-conveyed in 1834 to Platt with the parcel across the road. The deed (44:57) indicates there was a separate shoe shop on this property at the time. By 1860, the house belonged to Charles Burt, and the property here on the west side of Kings Highway North consisted of one acre, including a building to the south—probably the barn that shows on the 1878 Bailey map. Burt sold in 1860 to James Condon, who re-sold in 1861 to Bartholomew Shurtleff (Shortliff). Both were Irish immigrants who may have joined the many Irish who labored in Westport’s onion fields. Among notable subsequent owners (1923–26) were Ada (Johnnie) Johnson and her husband John Held, Jr., prominent members of Westport’s artists’ and writers’ colony. John Held, artist, illustrator, set designer and cartoonist originated the “Held girl,” personification of the 1920s flapper. Johnnie, a self-taught blacksmith, ran the Grindstone Forge, where she made whimsical hand-wrought signs, weather vanes and hardware made from her husband’s designs. The Helds were followed by Mr. and Mrs. William Armstrong Perry. W.A. Perry (1877–1938) was an editor of *Boy’s Life* and *Scouting* and an early researcher in radio media. His wife (Lulu) Montanye Perry (1876–1966) was a contributor to *McCall’s* and a novelist.

The waterside wall is a significant historic feature, dating from the 1870s or earlier.



Cable homestead, looking east



Cottage, looking south

**PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)**

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

- Barn     Shed     Garage     Carriage House     Shop     Garden

Other landscape features or buildings: \_\_\_\_\_

**Surrounding Environment:**

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

• **Interrelationship of building and surroundings:**

The bridge span runs east/west from embankments on Kings Highway North at Canal Street and at Kings Highway North at Route 33 (Wilton Road).

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

The bridge is a low-lying span constructed of pre-stressed concrete resting on two horizontal plinths. Iron pipe railings. Thirty-foot wide roadway and six-foot flanking sidewalks. Stone abutments.

Architect \_\_\_\_\_ Builder \_\_\_\_\_

• **Historical or Architectural Importance:**

Constructed in 1965 at a cost of \$140,000 and financed through State Aid Funds, this bridge is the third at this location; it was built under the aegis of First Selectman Herbert E. Baldwin. The previous span was built in 1851 by Westport financier Morris Ketchum to provide a carriage crossing for himself and other residents of Cross Highway. Ketchum, who had been instrumental in bringing the railroad to town in 1848, wanted a convenient way to get to the depot. That second bridge, the "old red bridge," was later widened to accommodate automobile traffic and pedestrians. The 1851 abutments, constructed of stone, are still in use. The site itself is highly significant as the location of a historic Native American ford that was used by English colonists from the time of the town's founding. The Saugatuck was forded at this upriver location because this site is the lowest on the river where the tide fluctuation is at its most minimal—a point where brackish water washing up from the Sound meets the fresh river water coming down. Because a trail or rudimentary road already existed here (connecting both sides of the ford), the place was chosen as the crossing for a portion of the Boston Post Road (west portion connecting coastal CT to NY) in 1673. The route was designated the Kings Highway c. 1679, when a statute required the maintenance of the roads connecting between CT towns. The first bridge was built here in 1762, and George Washington crossed over it in 1775.

• **Sources:**

Historic Maps  
 Archives, Westport Public Library and  
 Westport Historical Society  
 DOT

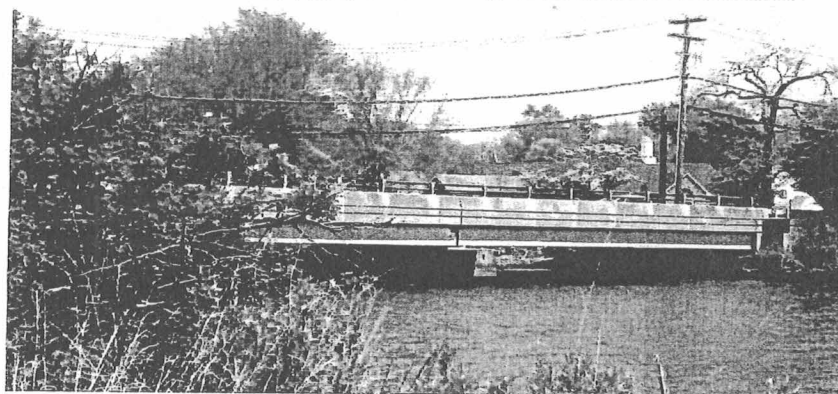
**Photographer:** Rachel Carley **Date:** 5/15

**View:** From the southwest

**Name:** Rachel Carley      **Date:** 5/15

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

• **Subsequent field evaluations:**



**Threats to building or site:**

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