



Name of Property: James Merrill House
City, State: Stonington, Connecticut
Period of Significance: 1954-1995
NHL Criteria: 2, Exception 8
NHL Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
3. Literature
Previous Recognition: 2013 National Register of Historic Places
National Historic Context: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ)
Heritage Initiative
XIX. Literature
XXXI. Social and Humanitarian Movements

NHL Significance:

- The James Merrill House is nationally significant for its association with one of the most significant American writers of the second half of the twentieth century. Merrill had a long and prolific career; during his lifetime he published thirteen collections of poems, as well as novels and plays, prose, and a memoir, which won every major award for poetry in the United States.
- During a period when most of America was breaking from the strict formalist poetry of previous centuries, Merrill held fast to this style. Over time, he introduced more radical material into his poetry, including well-crafted examination about homosexuality, art,



and spiritualism.

- In the American tradition of Walt Whitman and Hart Crane, of Elizabeth Bishop and May Swenson, he wrote with subtlety and sympathy of homosexual life, illuminating its anxieties and fulfillments. His masterwork, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, is a long epic poem drawing on occult practices. In the opening pages Merrill describes the importance of his home at 107 Water Street in composing his poetry. This house played a monumental role in the development of Merrill's work and it is where he composed his award-winning poetry for almost forty years.

Integrity:

- The property has a remarkably high level of historic integrity to the period of significance. The only alterations include the addition of exterior stairs in the 1970s and an elevator a decade later, all within the period of significance.
- The interior also retains a high level of historic integrity. Changes to the interior include bathroom renovations, likely dating to the 1950s, and a rooftop studio commissioned by Merrill and Jackson in 1956, also within the period of significance.

Owner of Property: Stonington Village Improvement Association (SVIA)

Acreage of Property: Less than one acre.

Origins of Nomination: The property was identified through the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Heritage Initiative. A National Council for Preservation Education (NCPE) summer intern, in collaboration with program staff, developed the NHL nomination.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- If designated, the Merrill House would become the third NHL associated with LGBTQ history, an underrepresented theme in the National Historic Landmarks Program.
- The LGBTQ heritage initiative has received positive feedback from the public and professionals in the field. Designation of the Merrill House would continue to attract support and recognition to an underrepresented theme.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Landmarks Committee Comments: Designation. Mr. Hoyos moved, Dr. Young seconded; unanimous approval.

Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 11/17/15):

The Honorable Joe Courtney, Connecticut 2nd District, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal, United States Senator, Washington, DC

Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office staff, Hartford, Connecticut

Advisory Board Recommendation: