

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 1

8. Narrative Statement of Significance

Overview

The Robert W. and Mary F. McCready house enjoys tangible historic associations with the life of Robert Workman McCready (1862-1949), an Irish-born builder who rose to prominence in the greater Sloatsburg area, particularly in association with the construction of major architectural commissions executed by his company in Tuxedo Park. Trained initially in his trade in Belfast, under the employ of the shipbuilding firm of Harland & Wolff, McCready came to America and in the ensuing years worked for the well-known construction firm of Mead & Taft. In 1889 he formed a professional partnership with his brother-in-law William Finch, general contractors under the name of McCready & Finch, before assuming sole ownership of the company in 1904. During its time the company was responsible for executing important domestic commissions in Tuxedo Park, New York, where major works of residential architecture were being built to the plans of some of the nation's leading architectural offices, and at the height of its prominence employed upwards of 600 employees. McCready retired from business in the 1920s, and lived in the nominated house, built c. 1889 as a wedding gift to his spouse Mary Finch McCready, until their deaths in 1949. It is an example of eclectic Late Victorian domestic design, with interior and exterior work reflecting Eastlake, Queen Anne and Colonial Revival-style influence, though not all representative of a single building campaign. In addition to the main house, the property includes a c. 1930 bungalow, a large frame carriage barn that is believed to have been moved here from Tuxedo Park, in addition to designed landscape components including a koi pond and fountain.

Historic Context: Development of Sloatsburg

Among the first documented owners of property in the area that would develop as the Sloatsburg in Rockland County was Wynant Van Gelder, who purchased land here from local Native Americans in 1738.¹ The tract of land on which the hamlet evolved in the 19th century was obtained in June 1747 as a gift by Isaac Van Duser, who married Van Gelder's daughter. Stephen Sloat, for whose family the village takes its name, married Van Duser's daughter and received as dower the property on which he erected a stone house—which remains today, as a service wing to a later, early 19th century construct—on the south side of the hamlet on the Orange Turnpike. At one point the Sloat house, which stayed in the family for multiple generations, served as a tavern on the Orange Turnpike.² In the 19th century the hamlet developed in association with industries established here by Jacob Sloat, whose mid-19th century house, Harmony Hall, remains to chronicle this period of development and the Sloat family's continued presence here. Both the earlier family house and Harmony Hall are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The former Orange Turnpike, present-day Route 17, is among the older transportation arteries in the Hudson Valley; it proved to be one of the more significant overland transportation routes during the Revolutionary War, as it offered passage through the Ramapo Mountains, lending it tremendous strategic importance. This roads prominence as a major transportation artery, however, was partially diminished by arrival of the railroad, though it, along with the later New York State Thruway, followed the same corridor through the Ramapo Pass.

¹ Early history derived from Frank Bertanguie Green, *The History of Rockland County* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1886), 397.

² *Ibid*

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 2

Sloatsburg was located on the New York & Erie Railroad, which allowed for easy access to the burgeoning metropolitan region to the south as well as offering a reliable source of transportation for goods manufactured at the Sloat mills. An excellent 19th century account, published in 1852 in *Harper's New York and Erie Rail-Road Guide Book*,³ provides a sense of the character of the place at this time. Sloatsburg was described as a "Beautiful and thriving space [that] presents a singular aspect to the traveler. From the station he sees two substantial cotton factories, and not a sign of a village or Hamlet in sight, the damsels employed in them dwelling in the humble but neat abodes scattered along the 'happy valley.'" The writer further noted that "Embowered in noble trees, the mills look as though placed in a gentleman's park."⁴ He continued:

Major Sloat's enterprise and mechanical ingenuity have brought the mills to their present flourishing condition, and his good taste has made Sloatsburg the fairest portion of the valley... If the tourist stopped here, and penetrated beyond that factory and its grove, he will see evidence of the immense influence of man's controlling taste in the well-fenced meadows, the sacred regard for trees that gives the place its park-like beauty, and the general prosperous air of every dwelling around him. And what nobler certificate of character can there be than is such fair characters neatness, order, and industry, written upon a man's estate?

To accommodate his neighbors, the Major has put up a "model Country store" stylish enough for a country residence from which however is rightly excluded all intoxicating drinks.⁵

Isaac Sloat had established a tannery here as early as 1792, and in 1815 the Sloat family built the first cotton mill, giving rise to a long period of manufacture under their guidance; in 1839 the firm of J. Sloat & Company was established, and in 1853 the Sloatsburgh Manufacturing Company. Sloat-related operations ceased here in 1878.⁶ In 1882 the mill was renovated and opened by Robert McCullough for the production of spun silk thread. Around the time of the construction of the McCready house, the hamlet boasted six stores and about 50 dwellings.⁷

Robert Workman McCready (1862-1949), Master Builder

Robert Workman McCready was born in Belfast, Ireland in 1862, the son of Scots-Irish parents.⁸ During his youth McCready was employed with the firm of Harland & Wolff, a shipbuilding company established in 1861 and located on Belfast's River Lagan. This firm rose to prominence under the auspices of Edward Harland and Gustav Wilhelm Wolff, and in 1870 was let the contract to build the *Oceanic* for the famed White Star Line shipping company, the first of 70 vessels built by Harland & Wolff for White Star, including the ill-fated R.M.S. *Titanic*. It was in the employ of this Belfast-based shipbuilding company that McCready learned the rudiments of carpentry and construction, prior to coming to America. Around 1884 McCready emigrated from his native Ireland to Falls River, Massachusetts, arriving there, as described by

³ *Harper's New York and Erie Rail-Road Guide Book* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1852), 326.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Green, *Rockland*, 167.

⁷ Ibid, 397.

⁸ This sketch of McCready's life was in part compiled by Edward J. Marse, current owner of the nominated house; his research has included an examination of the McCready-Finch business books for the period 1896-1902, and likewise communications with McCready's great granddaughter.

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 3

his great-granddaughter, “with a tool box under one arm and a five pound note in his pocket.”⁹ Some time thereafter McCready made his way to Sloatsburg, where he participated in the construction of that hamlet’s Methodist Church, built in 1887 to replace an earlier edifice. Soon he gained employ in the construction firm of Mead & Taft of Cornwall, New York, which was responsible for the construction of some of the early dwellings in Tuxedo Park, a residential enclave nestled in the Ramapo Mountains. Tuxedo Park was developed as a high-scale suburb beginning in the 1880s, under the guidance of Pierre Lorillard V, in consultation with landscape architect Eugene Bowditch and architect Bruce Price; in the coming years it would include major works of domestic architecture built from the plans of prestigious designers and architectural offices such as McKim, Mead & White, Russell Sturgis, and William Lescaze, to name but a few. Mead & Taft earned a wide-ranging reputation and was responsible for executing work for, among others, the architectural office of McKim, Mead & White, which placed them among their preferred list for designs rendered in frame construction.¹⁰

Having earned considerable experience in the employ of Harland & Wolff—and, after coming to America, Mead & Taft—in 1889 Robert McCready, in conjunction with his brother-in-law William Finch, established the general contracting firm of McCready & Finch. This partnership spanned the period 1897-1903, and in those years became the most prominent executing work in Tuxedo Park, constructing a large percentage of the houses built in that period. In 1904 the company was reorganized, at which time McCready became the principal owner, before retiring from active business in the mid-1920s. The company, in addition to providing general contracting services, executed cabinet-work and likewise offered upholstery and painting services. At the height of its success McCready’s firm employed upwards of 600 employees during the construction season, and worked with some of the most prestigious architectural firms of the day, bringing from plan to realization many of Tuxedo Park’s landmark domestic commissions. The following advertisement dates to 1906, and suggests McCready kept a professional office in Tuxedo Park:

Phone 4

Established 1889

ROBERT McCREADY

Successor to

Masons	McCREADY & FINCH	Cabinet Makers
Laborers	General Contractors	Upholsters
Tinsmiths		Painters
Carpenters		Decorators
Tuxedo Park		New York

Seventeen years in the contracting business in TUXEDO gives me the highest specimens of Residences and Stables to show as proof of my ability to satisfactorily carry out all work entrusted to me. The only complete plant on the ground.

I furnish everything from first work of the laborers to the most advanced and artistic productions of my upholsterers.

ROBERT McCREADY
TUXEDO PARK, N.Y.¹¹

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰Robert McKay, Anthony Baker and Carol Traynor, eds., *Long Island Country Houses and Their Architects* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), 276.

¹¹Advertisement in Donn Barber, ed., *Catalogue of the 25th Exhibition of The Architectural League of New York* (New York: 1906), 209.

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 4

McCready's prominence in the development of Tuxedo Park's architecture was noted in a period obituary, which cited him as a "pioneer in the development" of that place.¹² Other noteworthy commissions included the house in Suffern built for Allen Ryan, Sr., son of the Wall Street financier Thomas Fortune Ryan; McCready likewise contracted to build the Harriman family barns at the Arden estate. It likewise appears McCready dealt in at least some level of real estate speculation, as a 1918 advertisement in the *New-York Times* noted his offering for sale, or let, a large farm property west of Newburgh in Orange County.¹³

As for his personal life, the year he formed the partnership with William Finch, 1889, was the same year McCready married Finch's sister Mary Finch. The nominated house was built by McCready as a wedding gift to his new bride; the couple resided here for nearly sixty years and it is here they raised their two children, Olive and R. Halsey. McCready and his wife Mary were prominent members of the Sloatsburg community, and involved with the Methodist Church, the construction of which had brought him Sloatsburg. In 1907, when a new church was erected to serve the congregation, McCready's company provided the contracting services and the couple donated two memorial glass windows, in honor of their recently deceased parents. McCready was a member of the Masonic Order and was a charter member of Lorillard Lodge 858 of Tuxedo; he was likewise a Knights Templar and member of the Shrine.¹⁴ Mary F. McCready died in April 1949, Robert McCready the following fall.

Architectural Analysis

Built c. 1889, the Robert W. and Mary F. McCready House—known otherwise as "Westwind"—is an example of Late Victorian period domestic architecture, eclectic in its stylistic references. The frame building was erected using light milled components characteristic of the late 19th century, and built above a cut-stone foundation; the footprint of the house is largely self-contained, the building covered with an intersecting roof consisting of front and rear facing gables and, on the side elevations, jerkin-head gables. A two-story bay window is employed on the south elevation, while the façade is defined by a four-sided projection with associated verandah of the same form, hip roofed. The exterior would seem to defy precise stylistic definition but displays detailing associated with both Picturesque and Late Victorian period domestic architecture. Present are treatments alluding to the Eastlake and Queen Anne styles; Colonial Revival influence is evident on the interior, representative of the subsequent updating of the house after the original c. 1889 building campaign was undertaken.

Exterior treatments are for the most part understated and include the four-sided verandah—corresponding with an octagonal-shaped parlor on the interior, as partially expressed on the exterior, and the bedroom that occupies the position above—which has decorative open-frieze spindle work and posts with decorative brackets; the two-story bay window on the south elevation; an oculus window in the front gable field, and Queen Anne and Colonial Revival-style window sash; decorative trim boards utilized for the jerkin head gables, detailed with brackets and incised detailing; and one chimney with paired Gothic Revival-inspired terra cotta chimney pots. The exterior is sheathed with clapboard, excepting a shingle-

¹²Robert McCready, Pioneer Builder, Is Buried Today," obituary; source unknown.

¹³*New-York Times*, 6 April 1918, classified section,

¹⁴Robert McCready, Pioneer Builder."

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 5

clad porch, and the roof, originally covered with cedar shingle, is now for the most part clad with rolled asphalt.

The McCready house has an interesting first floor plan with the octagonal-shaped parlor serving to link the entrance vestibule and stair hall with the dining room and rear kitchen and associated service areas. The primary entrance of the McCready house opens into the vestibule, which leads into an ample stair hall with open-stringer staircase; this hall accesses the octagonal-shaped parlor, situated in the front of the house, with large windows facing Orange Turnpike. Adjacent to the parlor is the dining room, on the south elevation and corresponding with the bay window, behind which is disposed the kitchen, a rear vestibule, pantry, and service stair. On the second floor are situated the bed chambers, four total including an octagonal-shaped one matching the dimensions of the parlor below, which opens onto a small porch; there are additionally three small rooms in the half story below the roof. So far as interior finish work is concerned, the transition from stair hall to parlor is marked by a Colonial Revival-style treatment with unfluted *in antis* colonettes and a corresponding moulded cornice defining the opening, while the vestibule features quarter-sawn oak wainscot, the wall and ceiling above finished with polychrome-stained wood in a herringbone pattern; the parlor has parquet oak flooring with a mahogany border, and a Colonial Revival-style fireplace with prominent ogee-form mantel shelf, a tripartite mirror above. The dining room, meanwhile, has a mantel similar to that in the parlor, though with an over-mantel area defined by ornate, hand-carved foliate columns believed to be of 18th century Venetian origin, which give way to a heavy moulded cornice. There is likewise a built-in cupboard in this room, the opening fitted with an oak door with leaded glazing, in a Colonial Revival manner; door and window architraves are formed of decorative pressed metal, while the floor, like that of the stair hall and parlor, is laid with oak parquet. Finish work upstairs includes a mantel in the master bedroom with paired, lathe-turned balusters flanking the firebox opening, above which is a bracketed frieze with moulded mantel shelf; and moulded wood door and window architraves with corner blocks, moulded wood cornices and baseboards, and thin-width flooring and plaster walls and ceilings.

Notable is the period bathroom in the second floor, which appears original to the turn of the 20th century; it retains its marble sink with backsplash and nickel-plated fixtures; a claw footed sink; and a marble-walled shower with a needle-type shower. Water was gravity fed via two zinc-lined storage tanks in the area beneath the roof, one for the bathroom, the other serving kitchen plumbing; the tanks were filled via a pump from ground level.

Finishes suggest the house was built by McCready and the interior subsequently updated over time, as he became more prosperous and as new stylistic influences and fashions arose, in part a consequence of his work as a contractor-builder, which included significant work at Tuxedo Park. The house's interior finish work, in particular, some of it executed in the years he rose to prominence as a builder in this region, should be viewed within the context of McCready's work in the building trades, which exposed him to designs of some of the premier architectural designers of the day. Treatments, while eclectic in scope, nevertheless portray characteristic Late Victorian treatments.

In addition to the main house, the property includes a c. 1930 bungalow; it is of frame construction with a subtly concave hipped roof, and is clad with wood shingles. By all indications it was built by McCready at the beginning of the Great Depression, as a rental property conceived to garner additional income in the

Property Name *McCready, Robert W. & Mary F., House*
Location *Sloatsburg, Rockland County, New York*

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Section Number 8 Page 6

face of mounting financial losses. There is likewise a frame carriage barn of significant scale, which tradition maintains was moved to the site from Tuxedo Park at the time it was replaced by a new construct; it appears on the 1942 Sanborn Fire Insurance map however it is not yet know when it was moved here. So far as landscape components are concerned, between the main house and bungalow is situated a brick-lined koi pond, and a fountain with cast-concrete benches and stone and brick elements; the pond and fountain are set within a circular drive. Additional landscape elements include a stone wall at the property's northwest corner, which, in concert with a concrete retaining wall, defined a terrace or garden area.