

The Lesser Known Historic Landmark in West Hartford

By We-Ha

Deb Cohen of The Front Door Project has discovered that the Noah Webster House is not the only National Historic Landmark in West Hartford.



The Edward W. Morley House, located at 26 Westland Ave., West Hartford, CT, is one of the town's two National Historic Landmarks.
Photo credit: Deb Cohen

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Much to my surprise, West Hartford has not one but two National Historic Landmarks. Only a fraction of those properties on the National Register of Historic Places obtain National Historic Landmark status as the overarching criteria is that the property be “nationally significant” with “meaning for all Americans” according to the [National Park Service](#).

So does it surprise you that the home in the feature photo is a National Historic Landmark, and has been since 1975? It surprised me as I assumed that a landmark had to be significant architecturally. Although this home is a lovely residence, the National Register nomination form describes it as a style “typical of the period” with “no architectural importance.”

So ... what is so special about it? It happens that this home was inhabited by the highly regarded chemist Edward W. Morley. As such the property meets Criterion 2 of landmark eligibility, which identifies a property as the one most closely associated with a nationally-significant figure in American history.

Born in New Jersey and spending much of his youth in Hartford, CT and Attleboro, MA, Edward graduated from

Williams College in 1860, studied theology and ultimately accepted a position teaching chemistry at Western Reserve College in Cleveland, Ohio in 1869.

It was there that he gained his reputation and became famous for his collaboration with Albert A. Michelson on the [Michelson-Morley experiment](#), a groundbreaking experiment related to the speed of light. Edward was also well-known for his work on the atomic weights of hydrogen and oxygen.

I won't pretend to know anything about science but that sounds nationally significant to me.

Edward W. Morley constructed his home in West Hartford upon his retirement in 1906 and he lived there until his passing in 1923. He continued to run experiments in his laboratory in the garage of the home until his death. In honor of his contributions to science, West Hartford named the [Edward W. Morley Elementary School](#) after him.

Like most of our other National Register properties in town, this home is not protected in any way by its Landmark designation. Until West Hartford adopts the available law which protects all National Register homes from demolition, this home is vulnerable to actions by its owners.

Enjoy this post? You might also like reading about West Hartford's other National Historic Landmark, the [Noah Webster House](#).

Deb Cohen of West Hartford started The Front Door Project in the summer of 2014 as a way to motivate herself to get outside, exercise and pay more attention to her surroundings. She began photographing homes with a primary focus on the front door, which is a welcoming focal point. Social media provided the means to share the photographs and a ready audience to follow along, and her new-found interest soon led to exploring other local area towns in my free time. The "project" has led to deeper interests in architecture, local history and historic preservation and came at a time in Deb's life when she needed some inspiration. Please join Deb as she continues to share her everyday travels and explorations of other towns and places! You can find her other posts at www.thefrontdoorproject.com.

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