

Some facts about the historic “Loading Rock” in the Five Mile River

“To the east of Contentment Island, at Five Mile River, there were two dramatic, rocky projections - one at the mouth of the river, on Butler's Island (now joined to Contentment Island by a causeway), and the other slightly upriver, formerly known as the “Loading Rock”, because it was used for loading cargo sloops in the 18th and 19th centuries.”

The Loading Rock as well as other local coastal scenes were favorites of America’s preeminent Luminist painter, John Frederick Kensett. The Metropolitan Museum holds several paintings in its collection of Darien and the Five Mile River. Deeply influenced by the aims and technique of Hudson River School founder Thomas Cole, Kensett is viewed by many as an heir to Cole in his leadership of the Hudson River tradition.

In 1867, Kensett purchased from his friend Vincent Colyer a parcel of land on an island, which he called Contentment, just off the coast of Darien, Connecticut, in the Long Island Sound. He built a studio and worked there in season on the coastal views on which he had staked his reputation.

Among Kensett’s many paintings of the area are

- *Rocks, Darien-Rowayton*
- *the Old Pine Darien, CT*
- *Long Neck Point from Contentment Island*
- *Twilight on the Sound*
- *Twilight in the Cedars*
- *Sunset on the Sea*
- *Eaton’s Neck*
- *Passing Off the Storm*

Kensett’s works not only earned him the reputation as one of America’s most notable landscape artist but foreshadowed such famous American abstract artists as Mark Rothko and New Color photographer Joel Myerowitz. Kensett’s influence has reached through the centuries to inform our own modern sensibilities.

The Loading Rock along with the west coast of the Five Mile River area are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places:

The Mouth of Five Mile River including Contentment Island and both the Darien and Rowayton sides of the river are eligible for listing on the national Register of Historic Places because of their history and their association with Hudson River and Luminist painters who lived in the area, based on the following criteria:

Candidates for nomination include

“Properties that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past. The criteria is generally restricted to properties that illustrate rather than commemorate a person’s important achievements.”¹ *The National Register Bulletin*

The Loading Rock has been a local landmark for centuries:

“At Five Mile River, oyster sloops took on their cargoes at Loading Rock, a huge boulder, part of which still remains a landmark on the west side of the river.”

¹ The National Register Bulletin www.nps.org How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation

From Connecticut Place Names by A.H. Hughes and M.S. Allen, p. 109

“Loading Rock: A large rock on the west bank of Five Mile River near 125 Five Mile River Road, used as landing by packet boats” [which sailed up the river from the 1700s through the late 1800s.]

From *Rowayton of the half-shell* by Frank Raymond, 1991.