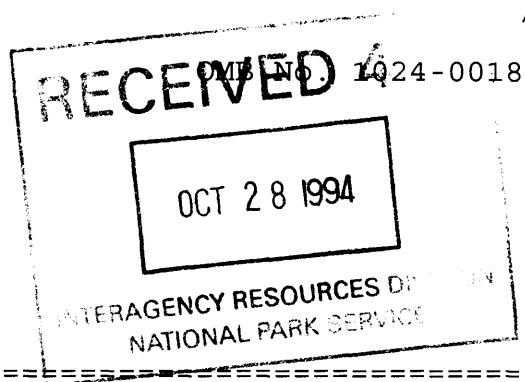


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**



=====

1. Name of Property

=====

historic name: HAMDEN HIGH SCHOOL

other name/site number: N/A

=====

2. Location

=====

street & number: 2040 Dixwell Avenue

city/town: Hamden

not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: New Haven code: 009 zip code: 06518

=====

3. Classification

=====

Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property x meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. ___ See cont. sheet.

[Signature] 10/20/94
Signature of certifying official Date
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. ___ See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register ___ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain):

[Signature] 12/12/94

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: EDUCATION Sub: school
Current: EDUCATION Sub: school

7. Description

Architectural Classification:

Colonial Revival

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation CONCRETE roof ASPHALT
walls BRICK other STONE: Limestone

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: state.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
EDUCATION
ART
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period(s) of Significance: 1935

Significant Dates: 1935

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Roy W. Foote, architect
Salvatore DeMaio, muralist

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

X See continuation sheet.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Hamden High School Hamden, New Haven County, CT	7-2
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The interior plan features a central lobby, from which long corridors lead north and south along the length of the front part of the school. Classrooms, laboratories, offices, and other work areas are ranged along the corridors. The center rear ell contains an auditorium with a balcony, sloping floor, and large stage; the school's original gymnasium; and a large boiler room connected to a tall chimney.

The high school's interior finishes are relatively plain, with plaster walls, linoleum floors, and modern ceilings. Reflecting the period's concern for fire safety, the stairways (Photograph 5) have plain brick or tile walls and steel stairs and handrails. Corridors are lined with modern lockers.

In contrast to the more utilitarian areas of the school, the lobby inside the main entrance is richly detailed with a paneled oak dado, oak doorway moldings, and elaborate plaster cornice and ceiling decoration (Photograph 6). In addition, the lobby is embellished with eleven murals depicting scenes from Hamden's history (Photographs 7 and 8). Painted by local artist Salvatore DeMaio, the murals reflect the Realism that dominated the public art of the 1930s. The murals are four feet high and approximately ten feet long; they completely encircle the lobby just below the cornice. The murals are entitled as follows:

- Forging & Casting Metal Products
- The Invention of the Cotton Gin
- Producing Whitney Fire Arms
- The Farming Industry
- Building the First Town Truss Bridge
- The Whitney Dam Under Construction
- Making Carriage Parts at Mount Carmel
- The Early Social Life
- Moulding and Burning Brick
- Cutting Ice on Lake Whitney
- Completion of the High School

The areas in between the murals are painted with foliage, Hamden landscape features, the seals of the United States and Connecticut, and two young couples, one from the 18th century and the other from the 1930s.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description	Hamden High School Hamden, New Haven County, CT	7-3
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Although it has been expanded several times, the Hamden High School maintains a high degree of integrity. The exterior of the high school's front part is virtually unchanged from its appearance on October 18, 1935, the day of its dedication. Similarly, the significant interior woodwork and murals in the lobby have been retained entirely intact. Modern additions have primarily occurred at the rear of the high school, leaving the original front part unchallenged as the visual focal point of the complex. Even the large gymnasium added at the south end is set back in a line with the rear wall of the front part, so that despite its bulk it does not detract from the original building.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Hamden High School 8-2
Hamden, New Haven County, CT

elementary schools, built to relieve crowding, went to double sessions only a few years after opening. By the time planning began for the high school, it was clear that a large facility would be needed. In the end, the town spent a total of \$750,000 on the building, which enrolled more than 1,200 students when it opened in 1935.

Of the total amount, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration contributed \$165,000, making the high school not only the largest public building in Hamden, but the town's largest single work-relief project as well. Along with the murals in the lobby, the high school building has exceptional local historical significance because it recalls the Great Depression and the New Deal public-works programs that were devised to address the period's economic hardships.

The building was a completely up-to-date facility for its day. It was of fireproof construction and its large windows supplied good light and ventilation. The building's large size allowed it to provide numerous specialized areas, such as an auditorium, gymnasium, laboratories, study halls, library, home economics area, and shops. These were important for two reasons: the school was a comprehensive high school, intended to meet the needs of both the college-bound and those whose education would be completed upon graduation, and its proponents were committed to addressing each student's individual needs by providing a wide variety of options--"artistic, social, mechanical, [and] economic, as well as academic." Reacting to the rigid curriculum and excessive "tracking" then prevalent, the school offered a wide variety of electives to all students, including drama, arts and crafts, music, radio, nature study, creative writing, and athletics. The idealism of its proponents was further underscored by the original furnishing scheme, which provided group work tables in the classrooms rather than rows of individual seats. In dedicating this facility, Hamden citizens were conscious of "creating, de novo, a complete modern high school . . . an event that may be looked back upon by succeeding generations as one of outstanding importance in the Town's history."¹

¹Hamden High School (Hamden: Hamden Chamber of Commerce, 1935), 3, 10.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Hamden High School 8-3
Hamden, New Haven County, CT

Architectural Significance

Hamden High School embodies many of the defining characteristics of the Colonial Revival style, especially as it was carried out in large public buildings. As was typical for city halls, libraries, and post offices of the period, the high school drew upon the most architecturally elaborate buildings of early America for its inspiration. For example, the tower with a belfry and dome and the pedimented pavilion over a stone-faced arcade are two elements found on numerous early American courthouses. In combining the Georgian Classicism of these precedents with Federal-period fanlights and cornice detailing, the high school exhibits the somewhat anachronistic tendencies of the style, which typically sacrificed academic correctness in order to take advantage of more ornate detail. By thus alluding to the colonial period, and America's accomplishments in those years, the building conveyed connotations of patriotism, tradition, and high moral and aesthetic values, all appropriate to its function as a high school.

The architect for the high school was Roy W. Foote (1879-1947), one of New Haven's preeminent architects of the pre-World War II period. After taking a correspondence course in architecture, Foote served for several years in the office of Leoni Robinson, at that time the city's foremost practitioner, and then set off on his own in 1912. Foote designed the Powell Building (1921), one of New Haven's earliest tall office buildings, the Neo-Classical Masonic Temple (1926), numerous large homes, and several public schools, among which the Hamden High School was the largest. Following the high school project, he undertook (with Douglas Orr) the Art Deco Southern New England Telephone building (1937) in New Haven and, also with Orr, New Haven's first three public housing projects, completed in 1939 and 1940.

Artistic Significance

The eleven murals in the lobby of the Hamden High School exemplify the public-arts projects undertaken as part of Depression-era federal work-relief programs. All across the country, post offices, courthouses, and other buildings were embellished with paintings intended to bring art to the masses, as well as give work to unemployed artists. Primarily depicting localistic themes, especially local history, in a

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance

Hamden High School
Hamden, New Haven County, CT

8-4

realistic style, these murals were enthusiastically received by the public.²

In their content, style, and ideological overtones, the Hamden murals are typical of New Deal art projects. In addition to using local history as their subject matter, the murals appeal to the public by including local landmarks as their scenery, such as the East Rock promontory and Lake Whitney, and by employing a realistic style. Although the murals are far from polemical in tone, they reflect the progressive liberalism underlying the New Deal. The subject matter, for example, is heavily weighted toward economic and technological history. In every scene, ordinary people are shown hard at work, although the historical role of "Great Men" is acknowledged as well (Eli Whitney appears in at least three scenes). The greater inclusiveness of New Deal social ideology is also evident. Women are shown driving cattle as well as performing domestic tasks, and at least one worker is clearly intended to represent an African-American. Finally, by showing the high school as the culmination of Hamden history (through 1935), and juxtaposing male and female students with a colonial couple, the murals proclaim that people are active participants in history and shape their own destiny.

The Hamden High School murals were the state's single largest publicly funded art activity in 1935, when the Federal Emergency Relief Administration transferred its projects to the Works Progress Administration; it is likely that they cost between \$3,000 and \$4,000, based upon the average of \$7.24 a square foot that was spent on murals in Connecticut. Although small in comparison with Depression-era road and park projects, which employed hundreds of people, the federal arts program in Connecticut was substantial: at any one time, between 70 and 80 unemployed artists were given work by the program, creating murals for public buildings, working on individual paintings, sculptures, and ceramics, and compiling the Index of American Design. Murals were the largest component; by the time the projects were closed out around 1940, a total of 15,768 square feet had been completed in Connecticut.

²In fact, in Connecticut, administrators worried that they were too popular and detracted from the program's other components, such as ceramics and individual oil paintings.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance

Hamden High School
Hamden, New Haven County, CT

8-5

The Hamden High School murals were painted by Salvatore DeMaio (1908-1960), assisted by F. Rutkoski and J. Schorck. DeMaio, a native of New Haven, was an artistic and musical prodigy who finished Yale in three years (B.F.A., 1930), winning the prestigious Prix de Rome along with \$8,000 that enabled him to study and travel in Europe for an extended period. By the time he returned home, the Depression was at its worst. Like dozens of other Connecticut artists, DeMaio found employment with the federally funded public works program then underway. In addition to the high school paintings, completed in 1936, he produced two other mural projects in that period, the lounge of the Governors Footguard Armory in Hartford and the New Haven Public Library children's room. He also undertook some interior decoration work for Yale University's Saybrook College at about the same time. Although DeMaio continued to be identified as an artist in city directory listings throughout the 1930s, his attention was turned ever more to the restaurant he operated with his wife in Hamden and the Italian-foods business his family ran in New Haven. He eventually became a prominent Hamden businessman and was respected in the community for his efforts on behalf of mentally retarded citizens and persons with muscular dystrophy. His death in 1960 made the front page of the New Haven Register and, although 25 years had passed, his accomplishments as a muralist were foremost among the many aspects of his life cited by the paper.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Geographical Data Hamden High School
 Hamden, New Haven County, CT

10-1

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary includes a rectangular area surrounding the contiguous portions of the main high school building, drawn so as to be 25' from the nearest wall on the north, west, and south sides, with Dixwell Avenue as the east boundary (see accompanying sketch map). This is a portion of the property known as 2040 Dixwell Avenue (Parcel 2527-17), recorded in the Hamden Land Records, Vol. 555, p. 269.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary includes all the original portions of the high school, while excluding modern parts of the property such as the parking lot to the north, the stadium to the west, and small freestanding buildings built in the 1960s and 1970s. Although the nominated property includes modern additions, these are all attached to the original portions of the high school at one or more points and so could not be meaningfully excluded from the nominated property.

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CONTINUATION SHEET**

Photographs Hamden High School Photos-1
 Hamden, New Haven County, CT

All Photographs:

1. Hamden High School
2. Hamden, New Haven County, CT
3. Photo Credit: HRC, Hartford, CT
4. March, 1994
5. Negative filed with Connecticut Historical Commission
Hartford, CT

Captions:

East elevation, camera facing northwest
Photograph 1 of 8

Modern additions at rear of school, north elevation, camera facing
southeast
Photograph 2 of 8

Center bay of east elevation, camera facing west
Photograph 3 of 8

Detail of cornice and tympanum ornament, center of east elevation,
camera facing west
Photograph 4 of 8

Typical interior stairway, south corridor, west side, camera facing
northwest
Photograph 5 of 8

Interior, main lobby, camera facing west toward auditorium
Photograph 6 of 8

Detail of lobby mural, south wall, camera facing southwest
Photograph 7 of 8

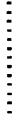
Detail of lobby mural, north wall, camera facing northeast
Photograph 8 of 8

Hamden High School

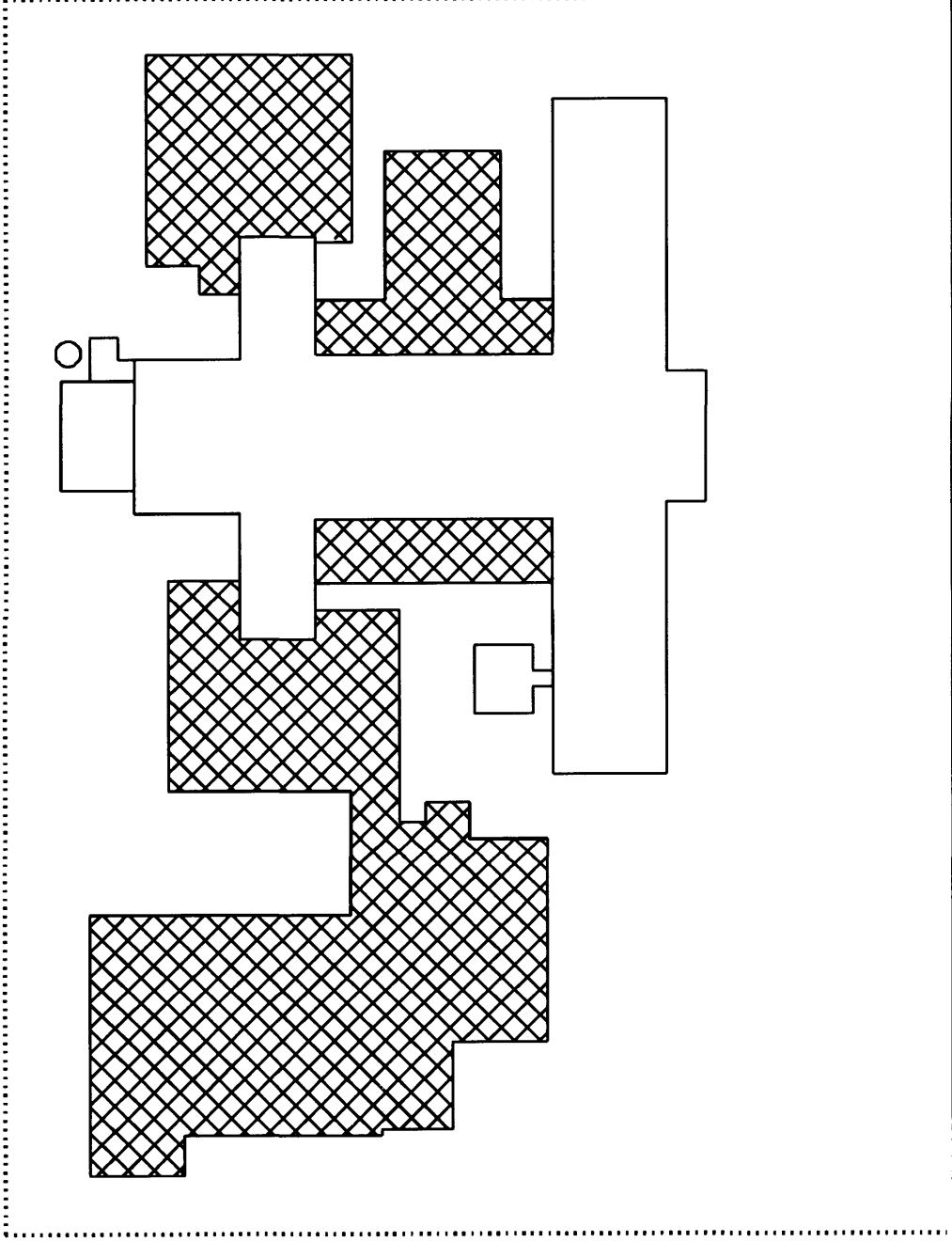
Hamden

New Haven County, CT

Boundary of
Nominated Property



Modern Additions



DIXWELL AVENUE

Hamden High School

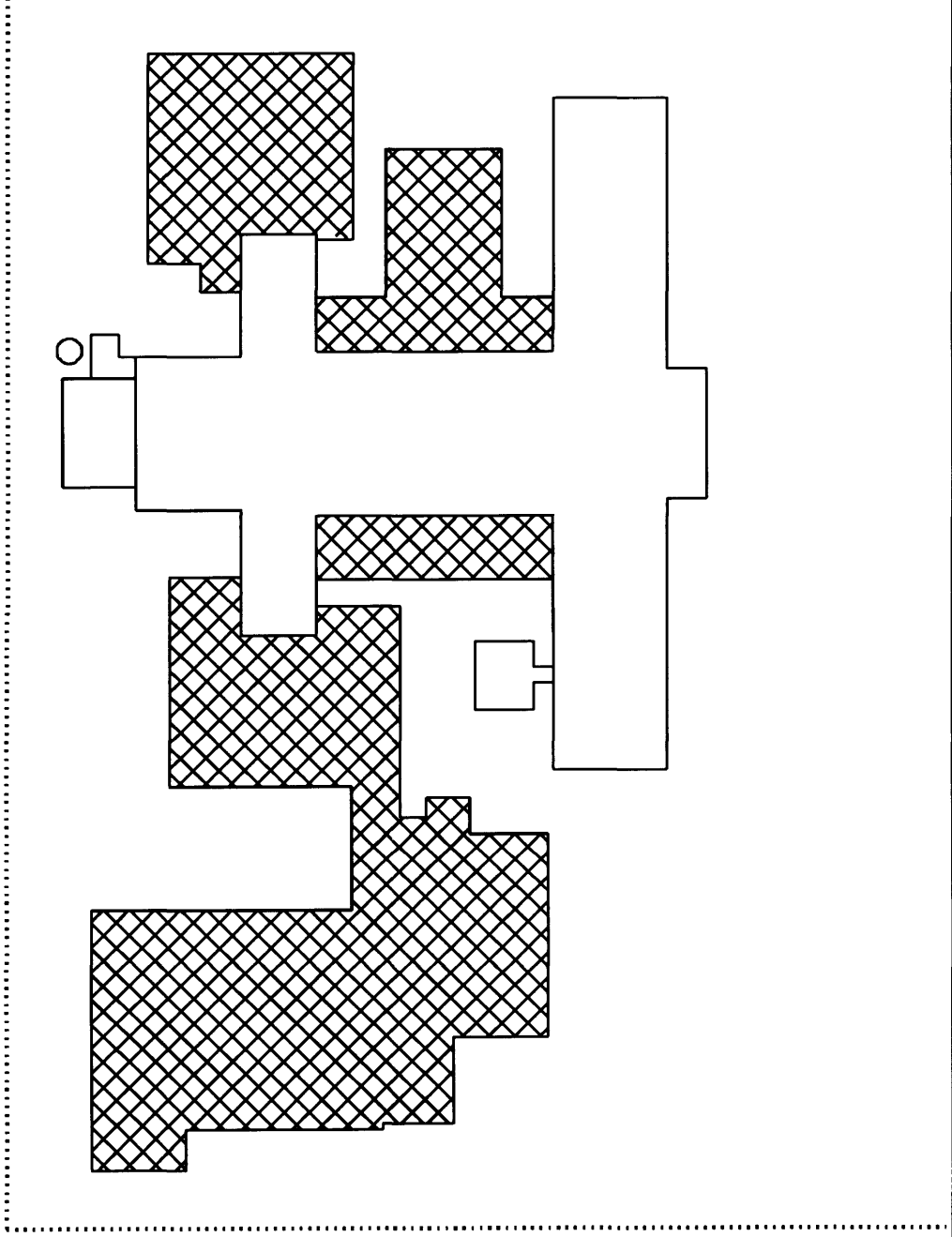
Hamden

New Haven County, CT

Boundary of
Nominated Property



Modern Additions



DIXWELL AVENUE