

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received JUN 19 1984

date entered JUL 19 1984

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

**1. Name**

historic Washington School

and or common Washington School

**2. Location**

street & number High and Carmody Streets N/A not for publication

city, town New Britain N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

**3. Classification**

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

**4. Owner of Property**

name City of New Britain (administered by the City Hall Commission)

street & number 21 West Main Street

city, town New Britain N/A vicinity of state CT 06051

**5. Location of Legal Description**

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. New Britain Town Clerk--City Hall

street & number 21 West Main Street

city, town New Britain state CT 06051

**6. Representation in Existing Surveys**

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state CT

---

## 7. Description

---

**Condition** excellent good fair deteriorated ruins unexposed**Check one** unaltered altered**Check one** original site moved      date

---

**Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance**

Washington School, erected in 1922, stands at the corner of High and Carnody Streets, at the eastern end of Washington Park. The city-owned park and the school grounds are the only open space in this densely built-up neighborhood of triple-decker houses. The three-story, flat-roofed school has walls of red brick laid in Flemish bond. Its cast-concrete details are, for the most part, Gothic-inspired. Set apart from the residential community by the open space surrounding it, by its large proportions, by its materials and by its Gothic ornament, Washington School is a commanding visual presence.

The plan features a large, rectangular central portion with symmetrical wings at right angles to each end. The facade (Photograph 1) faces east, toward High Street, and in its middle is a large, beveled-corner projection which contains the gymnasium on the bottom floor and the auditorium on the upper floors. (While the school was in use, the ground-level floor was known as the basement and the upper floors as the first and second stories; this document will follow these designations.) Small porticoes protect the front entries, which are located on either side of the auditorium (Photograph 2).

All openings are symmetrically placed. The auditorium part holds three two-story-high, Tudor-arched windows and two smaller rectangular windows at the ends. Between each entry and end wing appear two sets of double windows and one set of four. All windows contain wooden, six-over-six sash, obscured behind plywood that was installed when the school closed in 1982. The face of each wing features a blind rectangular panel outlined with burnt-brick headers and concrete corner blocks (Photograph 3).

The cast-concrete details range from the simple lintels and sills of most windows to the sculptural entry treatments. Molded stringcourses divide the basement from the first floor and the second floor from the parapet. The auditorium section features brick buttresses with stepped concrete coping and a battlemented parapet also topped by concrete coping; at the corner of this section, lion's-head gargoyles project from the cornice (Photograph 4). The entries are set back within the richly detailed porticoes, which have buttresses at their corners. Each portico (Photograph 2) has a large,

(continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 1

Description (continued):

segmental-arched opening with concrete quoins, beveled jambs and, at the top, four molding courses with a course of modillions set between them. Above the opening is a panel with a border of cast leaf motifs and, in its middle, an unfurled banner with the words "Washington School" in Gothic letters. The interior of the portico is finished with red brick laid in herringbone pattern, and the segmental-arched door opening accomodates glazed sidelights and transom as well as the double entries. A short parapet with four cast-concrete, quatrefoil openings surmounts each portico.

The portico steps back in depth above the parapet and terminates in a round-arched tablet that projects above the roofline. The tablet bears cast relief: fasces, the date "1922", an open book, and an owl with out-stretched wings. Stubby obelisks stand atop the tablet and at the corners of the portico roof. Above the blind face of each wing is another round-arched projecting tablet with a different set of cast motifs: a heraldic shield with the name "Washington" and the first President's dates, 1732-1799, below a medieval knight's helmet, a crown, and another bird (probably a dove - Photograph 3).

The two side elevations of the school are exactly alike. Shallow steps divide each side elevation into three planes (Photograph 5). The front plane holds a set of four windows. The middle plane holds a shallow entry pavilion and two sets of double windows around a central set of four. The segmental-arched entries have concrete surrounds with quoins at their sides and molded lintels. Above the lintels are panels of herringbone-pattern brickwork. Where it passes over the side entries, the molded stringcourse above the basement is broken to form battlements resembling those of the facade. The rear plane of each side elevation resembles the ends of the facade, with blind panels outlined in burnt headers and projecting tablets with "Washington" and all the other cast motifs.

The rear elevation (Photograph 6) is relatively plain, with only the stringcourses, an off-center entry with segmental-arched drip mold, and a brick chimney to relieve the rhythmic window groupings in sets of two, four and five. The flat roof is a concrete slab supported on steel beams.

The interior of Washington School retains the overwhelming majority of its original materials. The north entry of the facade opens into a small foyer and the main staircase (Photograph 7). Like the two other staircases, which

(continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

Description (continued):

are located in the wings, the main one features cast-iron stairs with paneled strings. Its landing has a segmental-arched opening that looks out over the foyer and is filled with four ogee arches of laminated oak (Photograph 8). Corridor walls are finished with buff-colored brick to a height of seven feet, where a molded cornice divides the brick from the plaster finish of the upper walls (Photograph 9). Ceilings are also plaster and linoleum covers the concrete-slab floors. The cores of non-bearing walls are hollow tile blocks.

Classrooms occupy the first and second floors except for the auditorium area. The typical classroom (Photograph 10) has two entries with maple doors featuring a square light at eye level and recessed panels above and below. Glazed transoms that open outward augment the access of light and circulation of air. Blackboards occupy one end wall and the corridor-side wall. At the other end is a set of cabinets recessed between a closet and an air shaft with a grate at the bottom (Photograph 11). Large double-hung windows (six-over-six) extend nearly to the ceiling. Baseboards, chair rail and cornice are all of molded oak, as are the blackboard, door and window surrounds. Walls and ceiling are plaster and linoleum covers the floor. The only difference among all the classrooms is the number of windows. The basement contains several classrooms as well as plainer spaces for shop instruction, storage and maintenance rooms.

Much of the interior decorative character is concentrated in the auditorium. This large open space occupies the full length of the facade's buttressed projection and is open for its full two-story height. The auditorium's beveled corners follow the plan of the exterior (Photograph 12). Its plaster ceiling is enriched by a set of non-structural beams at each end, arranged radially around a turned pendant (Photograph 13). The stage, a full proscenium with a shallow apron, opens to the auditorium's south end. Its arch is made of black-painted plaster and features outside moldings around a central course of pulvinated panels alternating with floral-motif medallions (Photograph 12). On the short, angled walls to either side of the stage are large Tudor-arched panels containing paintings. The left one appears to represent the voyage of Columbus, depicting three ships with the full quarterdecks of 15th-century Spanish vessels. The right panel displays an amalgam of mythical figures (Photograph 14). Seated at center, at the top of a staircase, is a female figure holding a book. She may represent

(continued)

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 3

Description (continued):

Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom and skill. The winged horse Pegasus vaults over Athena's head. Figures on the stairway include what appears to be a medieval sorcerer and, at the bottom, an inquiring student. A suspended balcony at the north end of the auditorium was apparently added after original construction, because it slices across one of the monumental Tudor-arched windows.

Directly beneath the auditorium are two gymnasiums (Photograph 15), set back-to-back. The gym floors are about seven feet below grade, so that the large casement windows between corridor and gym could be opened to create a balcony-like vantage point from the corridor.

Washington School retains a high degree of architectural integrity. Virtually all its original material, inside and out, remains in place. Alterations are limited to the auditorium's balcony and new aluminum rails bolted to the cast-iron staircase balusters; these have not caused displacement of original material. The plywood in the windows detracts from the historical appearance, but these temporary installations have covered rather than replaced the original wooden sash. Inside, plaster is cracking off some of the walls and the wooden gym floors are buckled, but the school is otherwise intact.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	xx architecture	xx education	military	social/
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
1800-1899	commerce	exploration settlement	philosophy	theater
xx 1900-	communications	industry	xx politics government	transportation
		invention		other (specify)

Criteria A,C

**Specific dates** 1922--built

**Builder/Architect** Delbert K. Perry, New Britain, CT

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Washington School is significant because it embodies the distinctive characteristics of school architecture from the first quarter of the 20th century (Criterion C). In response to the growing size of urban populations, to reforms in educational methods, and to concern over the health and well-being of students, architects before 1925 developed a unique form of architecture for schools. The buildings were substantially larger than earlier schools; they included features aimed at providing maximum light and ventilation as well as fire-proofing; and they included amenities such as auditoriums and gymnasiums. To lend an appearance of dignity and grandeur to the schools, architects based decorative treatments on historic precedents, drawing mostly from the Classical or, like Washington School, the Gothic modes. This school is also significant as the work of a prominent Connecticut architect, Delbert K. Perry, an important figure both in his profession and in school design. Washington School also holds significance in the history of New Britain (Criterion A). It was part of a major campaign to expand and upgrade the schools in response to the city's population explosion in the early 20th century. Washington School's highly embellished appearance prompted a conflict among city officials that resulted in the city setting a more restrained standard for subsequent schools. Thus Washington School affected the New Britain schools for decades to come.

### Architectural Significance

Washington School includes many of the characteristic features that distinguished early 20th-century schools from their predecessors. Its size alone marks the school as the product of its time. Other aspects of the building reflect the practical concerns of educators. Fire-proof materials were used at crucial points: tile non-bearing walls, concrete floor and roof slabs and cast-iron stairs. The air shafts, transoms and large windows in the classrooms assured that "fresh breezes get a clean sweep," as the New Britain Herald described the ventilation these features provided. The large windows also allowed "a generous supply of light" to illuminate the work of the pupils.

The school's significance is further based on its representing the most up-to-date educational theory of its time, the "platoon plan." This system

(continued):

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

City of New Britain, Annual Report, 1907, 1914, 1922, 1923, 1924, 1929.  
New Britain Directory, 1900-1930.  
New Britain Herald, December 30, 1922; May 25, 1923; June 19, 1954.  
(Continued)

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 3.3

Quadrangle name New Britain

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A 

1	8	6	8	4	1	0	0	4	6	1	6	1	5	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

**Verbal boundary description and justification** The nominated property is co-extensive with Lot 1, Map C6B, New Britain Land Records. It includes all the acreage associated with the school and excludes any part of the abutting Washington Park.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries N/A

state code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Matthew Roth & Bruce Clouette, Partners edited by: John Herzai, National Register Coordinator

organization Historic Resource Consultants date February 10, 1984

street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone 203 547-0263

city or town Hartford state CT 06106

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

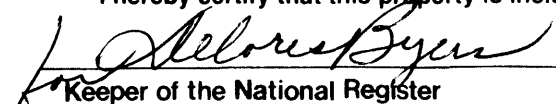
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date 6/13/84

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

 Keoper of the National Register Included in the National Register date 7/19/84

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT

Item number 8

Page 1

For NPS use only  
received  
date entered

Continuation sheet

Significance (continued):

eliminated many of the perceived inefficiencies of the prior method, in which one teacher would, in one room, instruct a class in all subjects. The platoon plan divided students by ability and began the specialization of teachers by subject area. By partial rotation of students to different rooms, this system enabled a school to accommodate 25% to 30% more pupils than the one-room method. The increase depended on using every classroom at all times. When one class was in the gym, for instance, their room would not be empty but would have another class scheduled in it. The platoon system can be related to contemporary developments in industrial management, in which time studies were used in an attempt to determine the most efficient movements of people and materials. Not only did the platoon system claim a similar sort of efficiency, but in orienting students toward the importance of time and coordinated movements, it helped socialize them into the rhythms of 20th-century factory life. Platoon teaching required a larger body of students than was common under the one-room method, simply to have a group large enough to divide up. Thus it meshed well with the increasing size of school populations in the early 20th century. Washington School exemplifies this trend. When it opened it accommodated 700 students, replacing two other schools and drawing additional pupils from a third. A decade after opening it held over 1,000 students. Although it started as an elementary school, Washington School served junior high school students by the late 1930s.

Another implication of having more students per school was the greater size of common areas, such as auditoriums, for those periodic occasions when the entire student body was assembled. Architect Delbert K. Perry capitalized on the large auditorium area by using it as a decorative and didactic centerpiece. The vaulted effect of the ceiling beams and the Tudor-arched, monumental windows suggest ecclesiastic architecture and impart a ceremonial aspect to the space. The beveled-corner plan funnels attention toward the stage, where the deeply molded proscenium holds the eye. The large paintings at the corners are highly distinctive and project value-laden images. The voyage of Columbus not only represents the educational ideal of discovery but also refers directly to the American experience, an important consideration for early 20th-century educators faced with a student population in which immigrants and the children of immigrants predominated. The other painting elevates the goddess of wisdom to a place of central importance.

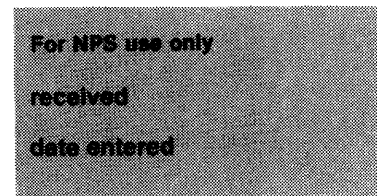
Both the interior and exterior of Washington School present a more highly embellished appearance than any other New Britain school of its period. The central projection that holds the auditorium offers a fully realized Late Gothic Revival vision, complete with buttresses, Tudor arches, battlements and gargoyles. Much of the rest of the building consists of comparatively

(continued):



**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**



Continuation sheet      Washington School  
New Britain, CT      Item number      8      Page      2

Significance (continued);

plain walls of windows, but applied Gothic details carry out the Gothic format established by the auditorium section. Gothic architecture carried with it connotations of serious academic purpose: Connecticut campuses such as Trinity College and Yale University were awash with medieval-style structures in the 1920s and were actively building more. Perry juxtaposed details in a unique fashion by using elements that would not ordinarily be included in a strict Gothic scheme, an eclectic approach that perhaps reflected Perry's lack of formal architectural education. The lintels of the entry porticoes feature a course of modillions, a Classical reference that had no place in the pre-Renaissance English architecture that inspired the Late Gothic Revival. Another incongruous feature is the arcade of ogee-shaped openings at the landing of the main staircase. Such shapes are often termed Venetian or Moorish arches, indicating their Mediterranean origin, not medieval English.

Perry's idiosyncratic approach to ornament is perhaps best displayed in the tablets over the blind panels of the wings, where he combined a reference to George Washington with heraldic imagery, even including a crown. Images rooted in the monarchism of medieval Europe seem inconsistent with the republican ideals for which Washington fought. Nevertheless, such intricate and even obscure use of symbolism was common in the period. Although the architect's intention is unclear, these tablets might be interpreted as an allegory in which the harmonious blending of details was less important than the creation of a design that would help elicit respect from the school's students. Viewed in this way, the tablets can be seen not simply as a mixed metaphor in cast stone but as a consistent attempt to inculcate officially approved ideals. Washington stands for the New Republic and the American way of life, while the medieval patterns balance the freedom which is a basic American value with the tradition, pomp and acquiescence to authority represented by feudal Europe.

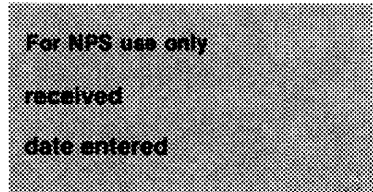
The ornate character of Washington School is most evident in relation to New Britain's Nathan Hale School, a comparably sized building which opened just several years before Washington School and was also designed by Perry. For Nathan Hale, Perry confined exterior ornament to the main entry pavilion, where he used a Tudor-arched opening of molded concrete. But the rest of the building was entirely plain, with no interruption to the repetitive groupings of flat-arched windows. For Washington School he extended the Gothic character across much of the facade, relieved the plainness of the side elevations with a series of setbacks and the Gothic-styled entries, and made a handsome theater of the auditorium. The ambitious design for Washington School did not go unnoticed. The city government paid very close attention, and altered city policy to limit future expenditures for what were seen as unnecessary amenities.

(continued):

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

3

Significance (continued):

Local Historical Significance

Washington School is important because it illustrates the growth of this industrial city in the first quarter of the 20th century and because the circumstances surrounding its construction illuminate how government leaders viewed the relative importance of function and aesthetics in public buildings. The hardware manufacturers of New Britain experienced tremendous growth in the first decades of the 20th century. They developed new product lines, opened new markets, built dozens of new factories and expanded employment. Most of the new workers brought in between 1900 and 1920 were European immigrants, with Polish and Italian people comprising the largest groups. Washington School met the needs of a mostly Polish neighborhood. The triple-decker dwellings on streets surrounding the school, such as High, Gold, Grove and Carmody Streets, virtually all housed Polish families. New immigrants caused the city's population to more than double between 1900 (28,202) and 1920 (59,316). Early in this growth trend, the city government recognized the need for expanded educational facilities and began building new schools by 1907. But the Board of Education cautioned that "it is doubtful if their completion will accomodate the children seeking school advantages if the city's rate of growth continues."<sup>2</sup> The growth did continue, particularly during World War I, when defense production caused a sharp rise.

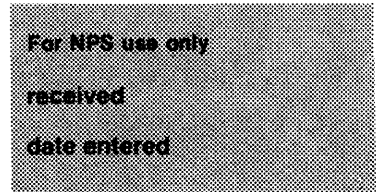
Immediately after the war the city began a comprehensive program of eliminating or expanding older schools and consolidating students from smaller schools into new, larger buildings. In 1914 New Britain had 14 schools for its 7,000 students. Fifteen years later 20,000 students attended class in 20 schools. Perry's designs were part of this campaign. Apparently pleased with Nathan Hale School, the city again turned to Perry for Washington School. As the construction bills came in, however, city officials began regretting the decision. In 1923 Mayor Paonessa reported that "the most outstanding feature of the last fiscal year...was the attention paid by the mayor and the City Meeting Board to the school department as regards school accomodations." He appointed a committee to "determine whether the great amount of money spent was absolutely necessary."<sup>3</sup> School Superintendent Holmes defended Washington School and the architect. The committee questioned the necessity of such thick walls, to which Holmes

(continued):

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

4

Significance (continued):

responded that they followed the city building code. Both the size and ornateness of the auditorium were attacked. Holmes asserted that it was "not too large for the number of pupils it will have to accomodate," adding that because it could seat all the pupils the auditorium "makes it possible to organize and conduct the school on the platoon plan of instruction."<sup>4</sup>

The mayor and his allies prevailed. In 1924 a new appropriation of \$500,000 for building schools came with the conditions that expense for non-essential items be curtailed, and that "there will be in the new school buildings smaller auditoriums."<sup>5</sup> The city thus established a plainer format for its new schools, leaving Washington School as New Britain's foremost architectural symbol of the expansive civic and national pride that accompanied this phase of massive urban growth. To enforce this plan, Mayor Paonessa further proposed that the city hire an architect to work full-time for the city. Then there would be no fight over designs and, the Mayor thought, there would be substantial savings on architectural fees.

The Architect--Delbert K. Perry

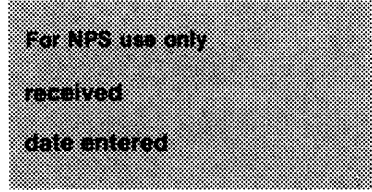
Perry came to New Britain in 1904 to work in the office of B.H. Hubbard Co., a construction contractor. He never received academic training in architecture, but the drafting and design skills developed at Hubbard enabled Perry in 1910 to become a partner in the architectural firm of Unkelbach and Perry. After the war he set up an independent practice, and then in the 1920s he joined with Earle K. Bishop. Throughout his career Perry specialized in academic buildings. Besides the New Britain schools, he designed schools for the towns of Wethersfield, Newington, Berlin and Plainville. Among his most important works were the buildings for the expanding state university in Storrs. Perry's Gothic buildings defined the architectural character of what is now the center of the campus: the Dining Hall (1920), Holcomb Hall (1922), Beach Hall (1929), and Hall Dormitory (1940). All the buildings, except one, that filled out the quadrangles followed the Late Gothic Revival styling established by Perry. (The exception is the Neo-Colonial Wilbur Cross Library, 1938.) The broken wall planes, rich textural effects, and handsome entry treatments of Perry's buildings provide some of the most distinguished architecture that the campus offers. His influence was not limited to the state university though, because Perry also

(continued):

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Washington School  
New Britain, CT



Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 5

Significance (Continued):

received commissions for buildings at Connecticut College, New London, and Middlebury College, Middlebury, Vermont.

Perry's career also illustrates the strong craft tradition that undergirds the discipline of architecture. His lack of college training did not hamper his rise to statewide prominence. On the contrary, Perry was so respected by his peers that they elected him President of the Connecticut Chapter, American Institute of Architects.

Notes for Statement of Significance

1. New Britain Herald, May 25, 1923.
2. City of New Britain, Annual Report, 1907, p.26.
3. City of New Britain, Annual Report, 1923, p.23.
4. New Britain Herald, May 25, 1923.
5. City of New Britain, Annual Report, 1924, p.21.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Washington School

Continuation sheet

New Britain, CT

Item number

9

Page

1

Bibliography (continued):

University of Connecticut, Physical Plant Dept., Architectural Drawings.

The Work of Perry and Bishop, Architects, illustrated catalog, New Britain, n.d.

Works Progress Administration, Study of Public Facilities in New Britain, Connecticut, project # 465-15-3-92, New Britain, 1939.