

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Pratt Street

AND/OR COMMON

Pratt Street Historic District

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

31-10 and 32-110 Pratt St.; 196-260 Trumbull St.

Pratt Street, North side 32-110, South side 31-101; NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Trumbull Street, East Side 196-260

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Hartford

N/A VICINITY OF

First

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Connecticut

09

Hartford

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

DISTRICT

PUBLIC

OCCUPIED

AGRICULTURE

MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

PARK

STRUCTURE

BOTH

WORK IN PROGRESS

EDUCATIONAL

PRIVATE RESIDENCE

SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

ENTERTAINMENT

RELIGIOUS

OBJECT

IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

GOVERNMENT

SCIENTIFIC

BEING CONSIDERED

YES: UNRESTRICTED

INDUSTRIAL

TRANSPORTATION

N/A

NO

MILITARY

OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Multiple. See Item 7

STREET & NUMBER

"

CITY, TOWN

"

" VICINITY OF "

STATE

"

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hartford Town Clerk's Office, Municipal Building

STREET & NUMBER

550 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT 06103

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1982

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

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

The Pratt Street National Register District consists of fifteen late 19th- and early 20th-century buildings lining both sides of Pratt Street in the heart of downtown Hartford. The street, only one block long and two lanes wide, serves as a pleasant, pedestrian-scaled corridor between two major north-south arteries, Main and Trumbull Streets.

Pratt Street's finely crafted, closely set commercial structures, rising two to eight stories, form a rhythmic and unbroken progression. The streetscape roofline is punctuated with a variety of decorative, often projecting, cornices. Several architectural styles are represented in the district, including Richardsonian Romanesque, Sullivanian, and Classical Revival. Although a number of the storefronts have been altered, nearly all of the intricate detailing on the upper stories is intact. In addition to exuberant trim, the buildings are also united by compatible scale, warm-toned masonry, and high-style, architect-created designs.

The construction of this unbroken line of buildings can be traced to two major bursts of development. Six buildings were constructed during the first period, from 1888 to 1900, and seven buildings during the second, from 1918 to 1928. In addition, one building from an earlier era remains, the Spencer house of 1830, and there is also one small structure from 1907, the interregnum between the two major periods of growth.

Boundary Justification

The intent of this nomination is to include the two-sided streetscape of Pratt Street. The district is clearly defined by abrupt changes in scale in the surrounding areas to the west, east, and north. To the west, the light-colored concrete, simply detailed mass of the 1975 Civic Center stands in contrast to the 19th-century district. To the east, Main Street is also built on a distinctly larger scale than Pratt Street. The building at the northeast corner of Pratt and Main, occupied by Michael's Jewelers (photograph 4), is a one-story structure of recent design that has a different scale, detailing, and period from the rest of the district, and is thus excluded. The building at the southeast corner relates primarily to the larger-scale Main Street development, an area that would require separate consideration from Pratt Street for Register consideration. To the north of the district, behind the buildings, stretches a large parcel now under construction for a high-rise office building.

Behind the district to the south runs Asylum Street, which has a similar scale and age but a less cohesive or intact streetscape. Thus, the southern boundary runs along the rear lines of the buildings lining Pratt Street, with one exception. One building around the corner to the south on Trumbull Street is included, the Heublein Building at 196-200 Trumbull Street, because it is closely related to Pratt Street's architecture and development pattern. Trumbull Street, unlike Main Street, does not have the cohesiveness to be considered as its own National Register district, and the two buildings just south of the Heublein Building are already listed individually. Thus, it was felt that the Heublein Building, because of its architectural, visual, and historical relationships, should be included within the Pratt Street nomination as part of the overall National Register survey of downtown Hartford.

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

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

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet 1

Item number 6

Page 1

Hartford Architecture Conservancy Survey of Hartford
1976-1980
Stowe-Day Library
77 Forest Street
Hartford, CT 06105

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 1

Item number 7

Page 1

Individual Buildings

All of the buildings contribute to the significance of the district.

Standard Building, 92-110 Pratt Street, 1925-6. Photograph 1.

The Standard Building at 228-260 Trumbull and 92-110 Pratt Streets anchors the corner of Pratt and Trumbull Streets. This four-story, flat-roofed, multiple-bay commercial block was designed by Buck and Sheldon of Hartford. Built in 1926, the first and second stories of the building feature metal-framed display windows which are slightly recessed and separated by lengths of smooth-faced limestone. The main entrance at 242 Trumbull Street is sheltered by a flat-roofed metal canopy of sympathetic modern design. The Upper two stories, rising above a denticulated beltcourse, display a long row of rectangular windows and a facing of white brick. The first floor is still entirely in retail use, and the whole exterior is virtually intact.

Cook Building, 84-88 Pratt Street, 1888. Photograph 2.

Directly to the east of the Standard Building stands the Cook Building at 86 Pratt Street. This three-story, seven-bay commercial structure was built in 1888. Its vertical proportions and elaborate, sharp-textured geometrical brickwork are typical of vernacular commercial buildings of the era. The combination of corbelling, sawtooth patterns, and recessed panels is specially characteristic of Hartford's masonry work. The store windows and their polished granite surrounds are 20th-century alterations, while the upper stories remain intact from 1888.

Spencer House, 76-8 Pratt Street, 1830. Photograph 2.

The oldest building in the district stands at 78 Pratt Street, next to the Cook Building. The 2½-story, brick Spencer House was built for merchant Stephen Spencer in 1830. The Classical ornament and temple form of the Greek Revival style are represented in the house, combined with an elliptical fanlight of Federal character in the gable. The triangular pediment is edged with a unique vernacular combination of crown, egg-and-dart and dentil molding. The house, set slightly back from the street, displays an elegant design from Hartford's period of transition from the Federal to Greek Revival style.

A turn of the century photograph from the Connecticut Historical Society shows the original, three-bay facade with a delicate, flat-roofed portico at the left-hand entrance. Above the portico, a wooden addition was built, probably originally a balcony and later enclosed. During the 19th century, a one-bay, one-story addition was built on to the east side of the house, and a second story was added to the addition during the 20th century. Today, a one-story storefront addition extends out to the street, obscuring the original first floor. During the 20th century, two windows were widened on the second story and their sash replaced. At the attic, the fanlight has been filled in with brick.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 2

Item number 7

Page 2

Unity Building, 66 Pratt Street, 1891. Photograph 3.

The Unity Building of 1891, built by the Unitarians, stands just east of the Spencer House. The five-story structure is an outstanding element in the streetscape because of its sophisticated Romanesque Revival design and its extensive use of brownstone trim, which adds richness to the red brick exterior. The second story features round-headed windows with rock-faced brownstone arches. Brick piers rise from a rock-faced brownstone string course at third-floor sill level to the top of the fourth floor. These piers separate the windows in a 3-2-3 rhythm. The fifth, and top, story forms a 3-2-3 arcade with diaper work in the spandrels between the rock-faced brownstone window arches. The deep cornice is richly corbelled with a variety of patterns similar to those on the Cook Building.

The Jacobethan first-floor facade dates from 1928. Light gray artificial stone forms a continuous, shouldered hood molding over the two storefronts and pointed-arched central entry way. Corner crockets, and, over the entry, bas-relief spandrels and a carved "1928" label further enrich the first floor. Present-day signage leaves virtually all of the original facade visible.

48-60 Pratt Street, 1918. Photographs 3,10.

Number 48-60 Pratt Street is a two-story, five-bay neo-Classical building from 1918 with modernized, recessed display windows spanning the entire first floor. The second floor remains intact, and its brick facing features subtle geometric patterns in cream and light gold. Carved brackets support a heavy, richly molded classical cornice. Isaac A. Allen, Jr. of Hartford designed the building, one of four on Pratt Street that are attributed to him.

32-36 Pratt Street, 1925. Photographs 4,10.

The easternmost building included in the district on the north side of Pratt Street is number 32-36. This two-story, flat-roofed neo-Classical structure was built in 1925 and designed by Isaac A. Allen, Jr. While the first floor has been altered by modern storefronts, the upper story is intact, and displays close-set windows and light-colored brick facing. Above the classical cornice is a plain parapet.

Society for Savings, 31 Pratt Street, 1893, 1926-5. Photographs 6,11.

Across the street from 32-36 Pratt Street is the Society for Savings at 31 Pratt Street. The elegant first floor facade dates from 1893, and was designed by George H. Gilbert of Hartford. Three round arches spring from engaged columns intricately carved in a Pompeian manner.

Renovations to both the interior and exterior were executed by the New York firm of Dennison and Hiron in 1926-27 in the neo-Italian Renaissance style. Their outstanding, intact, interior of the main banking room features ornamental plaster work by DiLorenzo of New York, and ceiling murals done by H.T. Schlatermundt, also of New York. The main entrance, which was originally placed off-center, was skillfully altered to its present central position during the renovation of 1926-27.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 3

Item number 7

Page 3

In 1954-55, S.F. Jeter and Associates of Hartford designed an International-Style facing to the second and third stories, and added a fourth story. A narrow, unobtrusive modern addition was added to the east, recessed behind the street line. In 1959, the 1893 fireplace was restored and mahogany and steel counters installed in main banking room.¹

45-51 Pratt Street. Photograph 6.

Next door to the bank is a two-story, five-bay building at 45-51 Pratt Street constructed in 1919. Isaac A. Allen, Jr. of Hartford designed the fanciful structure, whose detailing features Gothic motifs. The use of structural steel is clearly evident on the terra-cotta-clad facade, with its wide areas of glass separated by thin support mullions.

The first floor has been altered to accommodate recessed display windows, but the second story is intact. The molded white terra cotta features an exuberant crocketed parapet and corner finials.

Hudson Building, 55-59 Pratt Street, 1922. Photograph 7.

The eight-story Hudson Building rises directly to the west at 55-59 Pratt Street. Designed by Edward M. Stone of Hartford in 1922, it has the construction date carved in the center of a peaked parapet. The first story has three wide bays with the name "Hudson" centered over the main entrance. A variety of modern signs obscures much of the storefronts, although the western storefront features a 1980 cafe front of sympathetic design.

Stevens Building, 63-65 Pratt Street, 1907, 1937. Photograph 7.

Next to the Hudson Building is the Stevens Building at 63-65 Pratt Street. This simple, ashlar-faced 3-story structure was built in 1907 and was remodelled in 1937 under the direction of Lester B. Scheide of Hartford. The present facade dates from 1937, although the storefront is now covered with more recent signage. The second and third stories display a stripped-down International style with window bays of carefully proportioned asymmetry.

Dillon(Singer) Building, 69-71 Pratt Street. Photograph 7.

Just west to the Stevens Building is the five-and-a-half-story Dillon (often known as Singer) Building. The exuberant Sullivanian design for this 1899 commercial structure is attributed to Isaac A. Allen, Jr., architect of the small business at 45-51 Pratt. This building has been nominated individually to the National Register, and in 1980 it underwent a rehabilitation according to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards under the Historic Structures Tax Amendment of 1976.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 4

Item number 7

Page 4

The four-bay facade is faced with richly detailed brick, limestone, cast-iron, and terra-cotta. The original design is visible on every story but the first story, where the storefront has been altered to accommodate a Singer sewing machine outlet. An attenuated arcade is suggested by thin brick pilasters that run between the windows on the third through fifth floors and end in elaborate capitals, supporting four arches. Intricate bas-relief terra-cotta panels are set above and below the fourth-floor windows. At the roofline, richly molded brackets support the heavy, projecting cornice, and are interspersed with four small bull's-eye windows. Sculptured heads are set along the cornice above each of the five brackets.

73-77 Pratt Street, 1897. Photograph 7.

The five-story neo-Classical building at 73-77 Pratt Street was designed by an unknown architect and constructed in 1897, two years before its Sullivanian neighbor, the Dillon Block. For the newer Dillon block, described above, Allen had carefully followed the first-and-second floor height and design of 73-77 Pratt. The two buildings also share similarly delicate Classical terra-cotta and limestone ornament, and wide areas of glass on the first two floors. The upper stories of 73-77 Pratt, however, with their more massive proportions of masonry construction, contrast with the skeletal proportions of the later Dillon Building.

The centerpiece of the 1897 structure is the broken-arch pediment atop the arched central bay of the second story. Attenuated limestone-faced pilasters separate recessed windows on the second floor. The third-story windows are topped by arches, the fourth by splayed lintels with keystones and the fifth by richly molded arches. Walls are of gold-colored brick with limestone and light terra-cotta trim. A heavy cornice with modillions stands out against the light-colored entablature.

The upper stories retain all their fine, original details, though the storefronts and main entrance have been unsympathetically altered.

Steiger Building, 208-216 Trumbull and 89-101 Pratt, 1926-8. Photographs 7,8,9.

The Steiger Building, at 208-216 Trumbull and 89-101 Pratt Street, anchors the south-western corner of Pratt and Trumbull. It closely echoes the contemporary Standard Building on the opposite corner, though the Steiger block is taller, at six stories, and extends farther down Pratt. The two buildings create a distinct entrance to Pratt Street.

Like the Standard Building, the Steiger block has its two lower stories faced in smooth light stone, and has simply-detailed upper stories of tawny brick. Polished pink granite faces the first floor, limestone the second. The lower facade also features decorative iron grilles above the storefronts, and bas-relief limestone panels of Sullivanian ornament. Brick pilasters separate the upper story windows into units of three, and culminate in simple capitals supporting a shallow classical cornice.

Only three of the ten storefronts have unsympathetic, oversized signs; one of the three

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 5

Item number 7

Page 5

also has a bricked-in front. The rest of the building is almost completely intact.

Heublein Building, 196-200 Trumbull Street, 1896. Photograph 9.

The five-story, six-bay Heublein Building was designed by an unknown architect in a simplified Richardson Romanesque mode. Completed in 1896, the building is constructed of brick with brownstone trim. It has been painted white except for the recently-altered first story, which has a colonial-style red brick facade with small-paned windows and a recessed entryway at the south. The second story was also altered at some time during the 20th century and features double small-paned windows at each bay in a plain brick facade. The third and fourth stories are original, and are treated as a tall arcade, whose pilasters have simple capitals consisting only of dentil moldings. Brownstone string courses which double as sills set off the arcade above and below. Above the fifth story is a corbelled frieze and a prominent denticulated cornice.

Property Owners

(All properties contributing)

✓ 31 Pratt Street
Society for Savings

Society for Savings
Att: Elliott Miller, President
31 Pratt Street
Hartford, CT 06103

✓ 45-51 Pratt Street

" " " "

✓ 55-59 Pratt Street
Hudson Building

Rita M. Cohen
2419 Albany Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117

✓ 63-65 Pratt Street
Stevens Building

Libman Enterprises
Att: Martin Libman
60 Pratt Street
Hartford, CT 06103

✓ 69-71 Pratt Street
Dillon Building

Dwight O. Schweitzer
190 Trumbull Street
Hartford, CT 06103

✓ 73-77 Pratt Street

Rita M. Cohen
2419 Albany Avenue
West Hartford, CT 06117

✓ 89-101 Pratt Street and
208-216 Trumbull Street
Steiger Building

Pratt-Trumbull Associates
Att: Richard Gordon
99 Pratt Street
Hartford, CT 06103

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Continuation sheet 6

Item number 7

Page 6

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>✓ 196-200 Pratt Street
Heublein Building</p> <p>✓ 32-34 Pratt Street</p> <p>✓ 36 Pratt Street</p> <p>✓ 48-60 Pratt Street</p> <p>✓ 66-70 Pratt Street
Unity Building</p> <p>✓ 76-80 Pratt Street
Spencer House</p> <p>✓ 84-88 Pratt Street
Cook Building</p> <p>✓ 92-110 Pratt Street and
228260 Trumbull Street
Standard Building</p> | <p>Pratt-Trumbull Associates
Att: Richard Gordon
99 Pratt Street
Hartford, CT 06103</p> <p>City of Hartford
Hartford Redevelopment Agency
Att: Larry Thompson, Executive Director
550 Main Street
Hartford, CT 06103</p> <p>" " " "</p> <p>" " " "</p> <p>" " " "</p> <p>" " " "</p> <p>" " " "</p> <p>Standard Building of Hartford, Inc.
242 Trumbull Street
Hartford, CT 06103</p> |
|---|---|

1. Kuckro, Anne C. Hartford Architecture, Volume One: Downtown.
Hartford, Connecticut, 1978. Page 77.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW

<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

Criteria C,D

SPECIFIC DATES See Item #7

BUILDER/ARCHITECT See Item #7

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Pratt Street is significant as downtown Hartford's only intact, two-sided, pedestrian streetscape illustrating the city's importance as a retail center in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Criteria C). A second, and equally important, area of significance is the architectural distinction of many of its buildings. They embody highly skilled craftsmanship, a lavish attention to detail, and a high level of professional design that reflect the turn-of-the-century prosperity of downtown Hartford's commercial enterprises, and the confidence of the associated businessmen and developers. (Criteria C). A third level of significance is evident in the Spencer house of c. 1830, a rare survivor from the era when Pratt Street was a fashionable residential address for Hartford's early-19th-century mercantile elite (Criteria D).

The buildings in the Pratt Street district provide a valuable record of a century of development in the heart of the city. Ranging from the Spencer House of the 1830s to the Standard and Steiger blocks of the 1920s, the district shows in microcosm the progression of Hartford's central business district development. Pratt Street's history underwent four major phases: early use as farmland (approximately 1635-1815, no buildings remaining), residential district (approximately 1815-1860, one building remaining), commercial transition and first redevelopment (approximately 1860 - 1900, five buildings), and second burst of commercial development (1918-1928, eight buildings). By 1928, the district was complete as it stands today.

Early history and residential development

Pratt Street was named for John Pratt, after he and James Pratt deeded the land to the city to lay out a road through the Pratt farmland in 1814. John and James were descendants of John Pratt (d. 1686), one of Hartford's original proprietors, who had owned the tract through which Pratt Street was opened. In 1639, John Pratt had served as a representative to the first General Court of the Colony.

Twenty-five years after the Pratt descendants sold the land, some dozen elegant houses lined both sides of the street. Hartford's economy was then based on the profitable Connecticut River trade. Main Street was a commercial center, while Pratt Street, running west from it, functioned as a quiet, convenient residential street for business and professional people who worked nearby. Mid-19th-century residents of the street included eight merchants, who had their businesses on or east of Main Street. Other residents included a banker, skilled craftsmen, two wealthy widows, and a physician. Female residents of Pratt Street, the wives and daughters of the merchants and bankers, were listed on the rolls of civic and charity work, at the city's orphan asylum and school for the deaf and dumb.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

1. Kuckro, Anne C., Survey Director, Hartford Architecture, Volume One; Downtown, Hartford, Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1979.
2. Smith, Marcus. Map of the City of Hartford, Connecticut. New York: M. Dripps, 1850
3. Survey Files, H.A.C. Survey, Stowe-Day Library.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Approximately 3

QUADRANGLE NAME Hartford North

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A

1,8	6,9,3	3,4,0	4,6	2,6	4,0,0
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B

1,8	6,9,3	3,2,0	4,6	2,6	3,2,0
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C

1,8	6,9,3	1,9,0	4,6	2,6	3,4,0
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D

1,8	6,9,3	2,1,0	4,6	2,6	4,6,0
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E

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F

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G

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H

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Attached

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	N/A	CODE	N/A	COUNTY	N/A	CODE	N/A
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STATE	N/A	CODE	N/A	COUNTY	N/A	CODE	N/A
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11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Merle Kummer, Staff Director, Gail Porteus, Consultant. July 23, 1981

ORGANIZATION

Hartford Architecture Conservancy (203) 525-0279

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

130 Washington Street

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Hartford

CT

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 February 4, 1983

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Julia Helmer
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Entered in the
National Register

DATE 3/10/83

ATTEST:
CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 1

Item number 8

Page 1

In addition to residences, Pratt Street buildings housed a few other uses. The Hartford Female Seminary was established in 1826, on the present site of the Cook building, to teach music, drawing, and French to young ladies. Meetings of the Young Men's Lyceum also took place on Pratt Street. The Society for Savings was incorporated in 1819, and established a home office in 1833 at the same location where its elegant headquarters stands today. Joseph Langdon, its treasurer, had his home on the present site of the Unity Building.

The Spencer house at 76-78 Pratt Street is the only structure surviving from Pratt Street's residential development, and is one of Hartford's only buildings illustrating the city's mercantile prominence as opposed to its later industrial character. Stephen Spencer, a successful merchant, built the house in about 1830. He had a wholesale grocery business on Commerce Street and served on the board of directors of both the Aetna Insurance Company and the Connecticut River Bank. Spencer sold the house to Clarissa B. Wildman in 1834, and she lived there through the 1850s.

In addition to having historical importance as a rare survivor from Hartford's early years, the Spencer house also displays architectural significance. It still retains high-style architectural detailing in the molded pediment and elliptical fanlight, and is an unusual example of Hartford's transition from Federal-era design to the newly emerging Greek Revival style. (photograph 2).

Transition from residential to commercial

Pratt Street is significant because it records, in its late-19th-century history, the growth of Hartford's central business district as the city changed from a mercantile to an industrial center. The Civil War ushered in an era of major industrialization in Hartford, led by armament and machine manufacturing. At the same time, the insurance business added to the city's growth, both in population and physical development. The two greatest periods of expansion were the immediate post-Civil-War years and the decade of the 1890's. The needs of this growing population gradually caused the expansion of Hartford's retail district west of Main Street and into Pratt Street. The shift in entry point from the river, at the east, to the railroad, at the western end of downtown, reinforced the western expansion. Pratt Street was a link between the older and newer areas of downtown, and became a prime retail location. In particular, it became a center for the fashion trade.

By 1860, the number of private homes on Pratt Street has already begun to decrease, and several of the residents were boarders in the homes of others. At the east end of the street, near Main, two paper manufacturing and a coffin maker operated their businesses.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet 2

Item number 8

Page 2

The decade of the 1870s was a transitional period in the district, reflecting the unprecedented growth of the city as a whole. Pratt Street witnessed an influx of dressmakers and milliners, who began their businesses in residential buildings. During the 1870s, the street featured four dressmakers, three milliners, a costumer, a boot-and-shoe-maker, several dentists, and a doctor. The news office of the Hartford Courant and a printing company also joined the neighborhood.

In the 1880s, dressmakers and milliners dominated the street, and by the end of the decade, construction of new commercial blocks had begun. In 1888, the Hartford Female Seminary was the first building to go, as the Cook Building went up on its site. The same year the Cook building was completed, Reuben Langdon, treasurer of the nearby Society for Savings sold his home to the First Unitarian Congregational Society. The Unitarians proceeded to construct the impressive, five-story Unity building on the site, and when it was completed in 1891, it featured a public hall as well as commercial space. In 1893, Society for Savings built its new office, and other commercial blocks appeared at 196-200 Trumbull Street in 1896, 73-77 Pratt Street in 1897, and at 69-71 Pratt Street in 1899.

As the new century opened, development pressure on the street eased, and only one building was built until the end of World War I. This was the Stevens Jewelry store in 1907. During the early years of the 1900s, however, Pratt Street's image as the "Fifth Avenue of Hartford" was consolidated. The city's highest quality jewelers, furriers, and clothiers became concentrated on Pratt Street. An interview with a local resident of the period asserts that "a suit from Pratt Street was an assurance of quality."¹¹

Second development boom

Pratt Street's history also reflects Hartford's prosperity in the post-World War I era, when most of the buildings on the street were erected. The city's industry matured and diversified during the period, and Hartford insurance prospered enormously from a near-monopoly on the nation's business. The face of downtown changed at the same time, with an increase in density and the construction of larger-scale commercial blocks. The pedestrian orientation of the retail district remained unchanged, however, and new buildings continued to provide large glass areas for display on their ground floors.

Two rather modest two-story buildings started the post-war construction period: 48-60 Pratt Street, in 1918, and 45-51 Pratt, in 1919. By 1922, the completion of both 36 Pratt Street and the eight-story Hudson building firmly established the dominance of the commercial scale on Pratt Street. The Hudson building was named after Barzillai Hudson, a dry-goods merchant who had made his home on the site. Mr. Hudson was still living there in 1870 when many of his neighbors had already sold their homes to commercial enterprises.

In 1925, 32-34 Pratt Street was completed, and construction soon began on the two impressive limestone buildings that form a frontispiece from Trumbull Street. The Standard building, at the north, was finished in 1926, and the Steiger building across the street in 1928.

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Continuation sheet 3

Item number 8

Page 3

By that date the street had evolved to its present physical appearance.

Architectural significance

While most of the district's buildings are highstyle examples of their period, it is the combined contents of the block that embody the valuable architectural resource of Pratt Street. The street displays a unity found in no other street downtown. It is an entire, two-sided, unbroken block of commercial buildings with retail on the first floor, and all of its buildings strongly respect one another in design. Each is linked to the others by the same pedestrian scale, the presence of ornate architectural detailing, and a strong cornice line.

At the same time, each building is an individual, carefully composed design, and the district presents a running history of local commercial architecture. Several of Hartford's most prominent architects had commissions on the street, including George H. Gilbert, Isaac A. Allen, Jr., and Smith & Bassette. The distinguished Society for Savings interior also features the work of the New York firm of Dennison and Hiron. The design of the Spencer House, an important early addition to the district's significance, was discussed earlier.

The commercial development dramatically illustrates the revolution in design caused by the introduction of structural cast-iron and steel. The Cook, Unity and Heublein buildings of 1888, 1891 and 1896 represent the massive styles of the late 19th century, which dramatize the heaviness and strength of masonry construction (photograph 2,3, and 9). The Cook building was constructed in a typical, brickwork-ornamented style, while the Unity and Heublein blocks have finely ordered, richly detailed Romanesque designs whose architects, unfortunately, remain unknown. Their upper stories display heavy proportions.

Across the street in 1897, another unknown architect designed a building at number 73-77 that shows a transitional design, revealing more openly the use of structural iron and steel. The upper three stories still have traditional proportions of window to wall, with relatively heavy masonry walls and small windows. The first two stories, however, have narrow supports and wide window areas, detailed with classical pilasters stretched into new proportions.

Next door at the Dillon Building, built two years later, the design of the first two stories incorporates similar wide windows and narrow supports, while the upper stories also express the steel construction. Narrow pilasters run all the way up the top three floors of the facade and windows fill in the entire width between. By 1919, in the Art Clothes building, Isaac Allen, Jr.'s design reduced the visible solid exterior supports almost to nothing, and the facade is entirely glass except for thin, terra-cotta moldings between the tall windows.

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Continuation sheet 4

Item number 8

Page 4

At the same time, the other buildings on the street express the more conservative Classical Revival tastes that dominated Hartford during the period. George H. Gilbert's 1893 Society for Savings facade is a delicately detailed Beaux Arts composition. While faced in solid limestone, it has the lighter proportions found in the other Pratt Street buildings of the transitional period.

American architecture of the 1920s was dominated by neo-Classical architecture, and almost all of Pratt Street's buildings from that era reflect the classical influence, strongly reinforcing the district's sense of unity. The Steiger building, by Smith and Basette, is the most distinguished district design of the twenties. Smith & Basettee, designers of the State Office Building on Washington Street, were Hartford's most prominent practitioners of the "modern" mode. The Steiger block well illustrates their typical combination of simple classical form and stylized naturalistic ornamentation.

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1. Interview with Laura H. Jensen, East Hampton, Connecticut
November, 1980.

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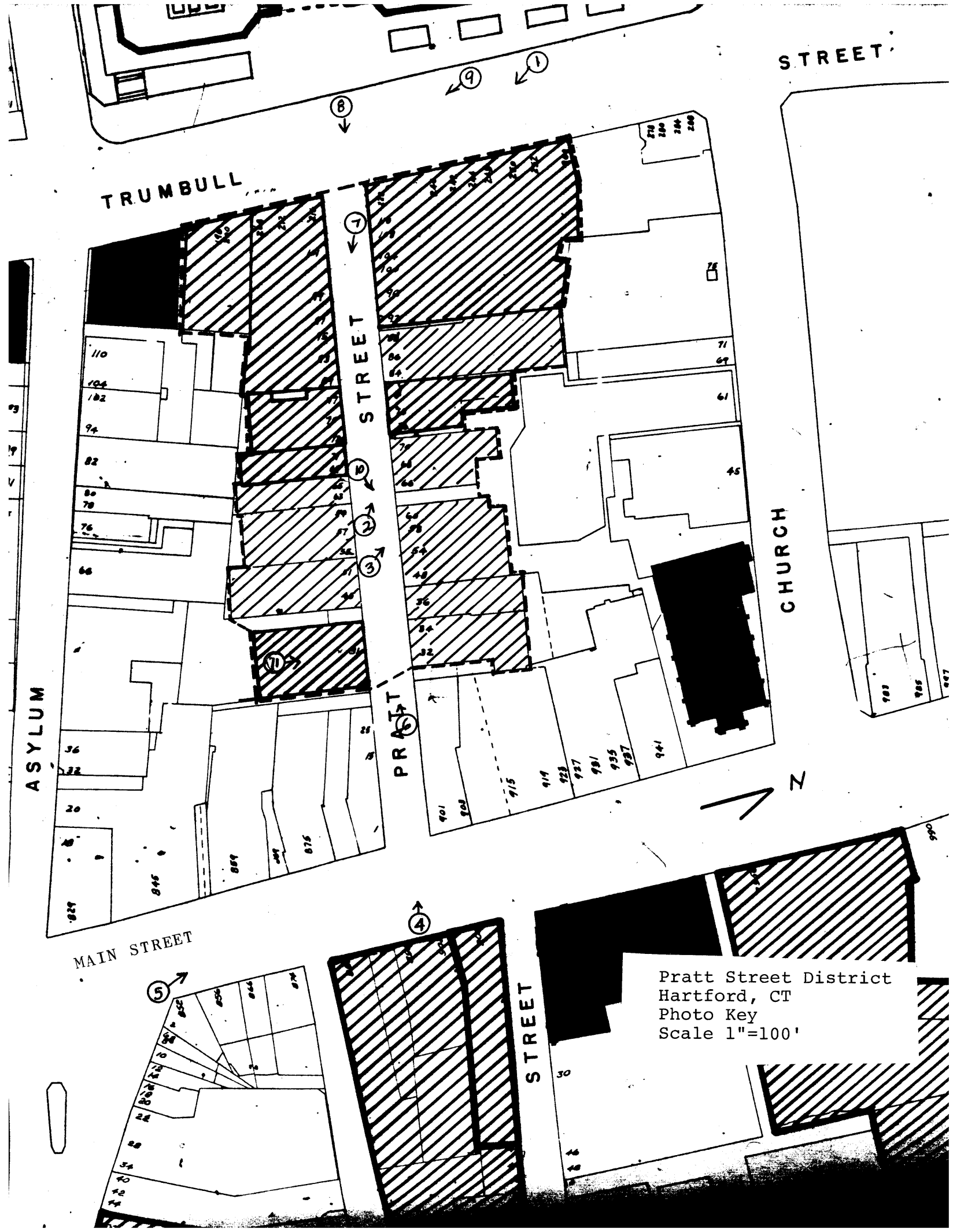
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Continuation sheet 1

Item number 10

Page 1

The general intent of the boundary is to follow the building lines of the district's structures. Starting at the northeast corner of the building at 32-34 Pratt Street, the boundary runs southerly along its east building line to Pratt Street and across the street to the northeast corner of the Society for Savings building at 31 Pratt Street, then follows the Society for Savings' east building line to the southeast corner of the structure. The boundary then runs westerly along the rear building lines of numbers 31 through 101 Pratt Street until it meets the east building line of the Heublein Building at 196-200 Trumbull Street. It then turns south, then west along the east and south building lines of the Heublein Building, until meeting the east line of Trumbull Street. Turning north on Trumbull Street, the boundary follows the east street line up to the northwest corner of the Standard Building at 228-260 Trumbull Street, then turns easterly along the rear building lines of the structures at 110 through 32 Pratt Street to the point of beginning.



STREET

TRUMBULL

⑦

STREET

⑥

②

③

PRATT

⑥

CHURCH

ASYLUM

MAIN STREET

⑤

④

STREET

Pratt Street District
 Hartford, CT
 Photo Key
 Scale 1"=100'

110
104
102
94
82
80
78
76
66
56
32
20
829
845
889
407
675

71
69
61
45
901
903
915
919
923
927
931
935
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941

230
220
210
200

990