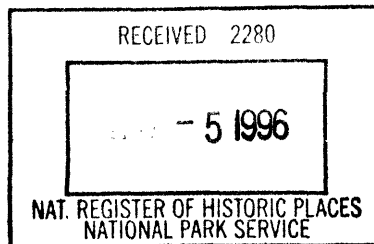


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name _____

other names/site number Downtown Main Street Historic District

2. Location

street & number See continuation sheet. not for publication

city or town East Hartford vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county Hartford code 003 zip code 06108

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

John W. Shannahan 10/30/96
 Signature of certifying official/Title Date
 John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
 State of Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

 Signature of certifying official/Title Date

 State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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 of the Keeper Date of Action
Robert J. Savage 12/20/96

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
public-local
public-State
public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
district
site
structure
object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Table with columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: 32, 7, 0, 2, 32, 9.

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Historic and Architectural Resources in East Hartford, CT

2

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/business/financial institution
speciality store
GOVERNMENT/town hall/firehouse
EDUCATION/school; RELIGION/church/church-related facility
DOMESTIC/single dwelling/multiple dwelling
SOCIAL/meeting hall

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

- COMMERCE/TRADE/business/speciality store/financial institution/restaurant
RELIGION/church/church-related facility
DOMESTIC/single dwelling/multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

- EARLY REPUBLIC/Early Classical Revival
LATE VICTORIAN/Gothic
LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/Classical Revival/Colonial Revival/Mission Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation concrete
walls brick
weatherboard/stucco
roof asphalt
other slate

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 2 Page 1

2. Location

Bissell Street: 26.

Chapman Place: 50, Lot 13:249.

Chapman Street: 14, 15, 19, 20, 23, 27, 32-34, 35, 36, 42, 43.

Main Street: 989-993, 1008-1010, 1005-1017, 1016, 1037-1047, 1048-1064, 1065, 1084-1102, 1085, 1109, 1111, 1110-1112, 1123-1128, 1132, 1133, 1138, 1160, 1165-1169, 1171-1177, 1181-1185.

Rector Street: 3, 12.

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Continuation Sheet**

Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 1

The Downtown Historic District encompasses most of the central business district on Main Street (Routes 44 and 5), a major thoroughfare in East Hartford. It extends four business blocks on both sides of this unusually wide street, from Governor Street on the south to Burnside Avenue on the north (see attached district map). Although some buildings date from the nineteenth century, present-day Main Street evolved in the early twentieth century, a period when not only new commercial buildings were constructed but earlier buildings also were reconstructed or remodeled. The district extends to the east along Chapman Street to include Center School. Chapman Street is primarily residential, a small part of the densely settled early twentieth-century historic neighborhoods that developed behind Main Street to the east and west.

Eighty percent (33) of the 41 resources in the district contribute to its historic architectural character (see addendum on 7:4). Of the 20 commercial buildings there, only seven are non-contributing. They include three banks and an associated drive-up facility, all built between 1949 and 1989, two modern commercial buildings (one scheduled for demolition), and a substantially remodeled historic gas station. Contributing historic institutional development is represented by three public buildings, a former town hall, a fire hose company, and a high school and its playground, along with a church and its associated parish house. In addition to five contributing early twentieth-century residences on Chapman Street, four brick apartment buildings were built there during World War II. A former house on Main Street is now used for commercial purposes. There are several contributing garages associated with the houses.

On the west side of Main Street, two commercial blocks anchor the district at either end. The one at the head of the district is composed of three buildings: the two Comstock buildings on the south, built in 1899 and 1926, with a narrower building on the north that dates from 1892 (Inventory #s 37, 38, 39; Photograph #1). (A historic former house to the north side of this group is not included in the district because of its extensive alterations.) Though both Comstock buildings are three stories in height and joined together by a continuous broad storefront cornice, the balustrade of the older building on the right, which is defined by three small pediments, rises above its neighbors. Its balanced Classical Revival facade is highlighted by three round-arched windows with fanlights and keystones, framed by Doric pilasters, which are paired at the corners. The window in the center is the Palladian type. A full entablature with modillions and dentils extends the full width of the facade under the balustrade. The later Comstock building has a more simplified facade that wraps around the corner with Orchard Street. Three of the seven bays on Main Street surmount the recessed entrance, producing a less formal unbalanced design for this facade. It also utilizes contrasting concrete detailing. Horizontal concrete bands define the facade above the storefronts, above the third-floor windows, and above the narrow parapet, which is stepped to accentuate the angled corner. The storefronts of both buildings generally replicate the original design and pattern, including recessed entrances. The third building has a brown brick facade and red brick on the east and rear elevations. Projecting two-story bay windows extend from the second to the third story on either side of its three-bay facade, and the building is set off by a bracketed cornice. Brick voussoirs with key blocks define the relieving arches of the fourth-story windows. The present storefront level has been painted.

The other historic business block on this same side is at the south end, at the corner of Governor Street. It consists of two buildings, the 1922 Odd Fellows Hall and the 1926 Hooker Building (Inventory #s 18, 20; Photograph #2). Odd Fellows Hall wraps around the corner and has two principal facades. An unusual building of the Mission or Spanish Colonial Revival style, with stuccoed walls and a red tiled roof with doubled wooden brackets under the eaves, it apparently was reconstructed around an earlier nineteenth-

**United States Department of the Interior
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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 2

century building on the site, which was partially destroyed by fire in 1922.¹ In the remodeling process, the building was fireproofed and the roof was raised. The pedimented projections on the facade, which now break the eave line of the roof, occupy the same position as the dormers of the earlier building. Similarly, although the original fenestration pattern was followed, some of the standard double-hung windows at the second floor were replaced by six larger Palladian-type windows set in slightly recessed round arches. A band of Carrara glass surmounted by a copper hood provides the cornice for the glazed storefronts with recessed entrances. The Hooker Building on the north is a more conventional early twentieth-century commercial structure. Its long low facade of yellow brick is surmounted by a stepped parapet and highlighted by a centered, recessed arched entrance to the upper floors. Just beyond this building on the north and set back from the street is a vacant early supermarket built in 1962 (Inventory #22). The building will be removed from the site to make way for an urban park, which will include Center School Playground to the west (Inventory #3; see addendum 7:4).

Two free-standing historic buildings are also located on the west side of the street, interspersed between the modern banks there. The earliest is the Whitney Building at the corner of Roberts Court, which dates from 1902 (Inventory #30; Photograph #3). Though designated as Italianate in style by the 1980 survey of the area, classical elements predominate, including a roofline cornice with modillions, which is supported by consoles and wraps around the first bay of the side elevations.² The unusual frieze below is shaped to accommodate fourth-floor windows, including the modified Palladian type in the center. Brownstone is used for sills and arched lintels and defines the corners of the facade. In the center of its three-bay facade is a two-story bay window, now covered with artificial siding. One block to the south at the corner of Chapman Street is the Georgian Revival-style East Hartford Trust Bank built in 1916 (Inventory #26; Photograph #4). Its one-story granite facade, with five slightly recessed full-height round arches framed by pilasters, is flanked by red brick piers at the corners and surmounted by a granite entablature and parapet. Between the large fanlights and the lower three-part windows, as well as the centered main entrance, are solid transoms. Similar fenestration is repeated on the side elevations, which are constructed of red brick. To the rear of this structure on Chapman Street is the Southern New England Telephone Exchange built of brick in 1928 (Inventory #4; Photograph #5). It echoes the bank in massing and detail, albeit in a simplified manner.

The east side of Main Street has a more diverse architectural character, historically ranging from a High Victorian Gothic Revival church at the north end to a theater and a commercial building on the south, both designed in the streamlined manner of the Art Moderne style. It also contains some older buildings that were remodeled in the twentieth century, as well as one modern one-story commercial block, constructed in 1956 (Inventory #25).

St. John's Episcopal Church at the corner of Burnside Street was designed by Edward T. Potter (1831-1904), the noted architect of several other buildings of this type and period in Hartford: the 1874 Church of the Good Shepherd and its 1896 Parish House, and the 1874 Mark Twain House. Constructed with buttressed rusticated brownstone walls and capped by a steeply pitched gable roof, St. John's has a delicate belfry tower at the southwest corner (Inventory #36; Photograph #6). A repeating Gothic rose pattern is displayed in the polychrome slate of the main roof, which has iron cresting along the ridge. The open belfry of the tower, which is detailed by lacy fretwork, rests on a slanted base and is capped by a pyramidal roof. Trefoil and fleur de lis motifs, also used throughout the

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 3

interior, are found on the west gable capstones and the jambs of the main door, which is set within a recessed Gothic arch at the base of the tower. Together with its associated 1910 Corning Hall (Inventory #41; Photograph #7), constructed with rusticated stone veneer to mimic the brownstone church, it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983.

One of the oldest buildings in the district is Wells Hall, which was remodeled several times in its history (Inventory #29; Photograph #s 8, 9). Originally Classical Revival in style, it was built of brick in 1832. An entrance tower was added in 1885 when it became the Town Hall, but its steeply pitched and slated hip roof may be original.³ Set flush with the plane of the facade, the tower is capped by a large pyramidal roof, which projects from the main front slope. The tall, recessed round-arched entranceway of the tower is now hidden by one of the one-story brick additions added at the front and rear in 1924. A one-story addition also partially hides the Comstock House just up the street, but the basic form and massing of this Federal/Greek Revival house remains (Inventory #32; Photograph #10). Although covered with asphalt shingles, the fenestration is generally unaltered and full pediments remain on either end. Between these buildings is an unusual commercial structure built as a print shop in 1900 by Henry B. Hale, owner of the local newspaper (Inventory #31). A long narrow brick building, it still displays some of its original industrial metal-framed casements on the facade.

The east side of the district ends on the south with the Andrews Building, which dates from 1930 and incorporates repeating arches in its stylized Classical Revival facade (Inventory #19; Photograph #11). On the north side it adjoins the 1941 Art Moderne Eastwood Theater, which is practically a mirror image of the longer Joseloff/Sage Allen Building built the same year on the opposite corner (Inventory #s 21, 23; Photograph #s 12, 13). Both buildings have concrete facades that flow around the corner in sweeping curves. They are delineated with bands of formed concrete detail, and ribbed metal for the storefront cornice, typical of this style. The storefront glazing may be a replacement but the rest of the Joseloff storefronts, including the vertical fluted panels between the bands of windows, are original. The panels have been replaced with plain concrete block on the theater, but remain on the raised parapet behind the marquee. The theater auditorium is housed in a taller brick section to the rear. Just beyond the Joseloff Building on Bissell Street is Center Hose Company No. 1, a two-story wood-frame structure with a hose-drying tower on the west elevation, which is currently being restored (Inventory #1).

The other major building in the district is the Academic Revival Center School constructed of brick in 1917 (Inventory #4; Photograph #14). Situated on Chapman Place, which forms a "T" at the west end of Chapman Street, it is visible from Main Street. Flanked by projecting wings, the recessed facade is highlighted by a projecting pavilion, set off by two full-height octagonal concrete and brick columns that frame the main entrance. The arched transom above the doors has been filled in. The seven-bay fenestration on either side of the pavilion is displayed against a flush concrete wall, panelled between floors. The original separate entrances for boys and girls are located in the side elevations. A flat concrete and brick parapet and cornice caps the entire structure. Rectangular panels defined by brick and concrete on the front of each wing have molded concrete plaques at the top center. The exposed portion of the concrete foundation is faux stone, with incised joint lines. Since the building is in the process of renovation as a community center, its windows are boarded over. Its associated playground occupies a large lot to the southeast (Inventory #3).

Four identical brick apartment buildings that date from 1943 occupy much of the south side of Chapman Street (Inventory #s 5, 6, 8, 9; Photograph #15). Minimally designed in the

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Continuation Sheet**

Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 7 Page 4

Colonial Revival style, they have as their only decorative features pedimented main entrances that face the street and arched windows above that light the stairwells. Representative examples of several period houses complete this streetscape. They include similar Colonial Revival-style houses on opposite sides at the west end, one built in 1928, the other in 1937 (Inventory #s 14, 16; Photograph #16). The two other houses are a Colonial Revival/Queen Anne, highlighted by decorative shingling in the gables, and its Four-Square neighbor to the west (Inventory #s 7, 10; Photograph #17). The latter house has an extended rectangular plan but displays the essential hipped roof, facade dormer, and open front porch common to that style, a type found elsewhere in nearby neighborhoods.

Addendum (10/3/96)

Since the nomination was written (3/10/96), the supermarket has been demolished and its site along with Center School Playground became an urban park (Photograph #18). Both properties are now listed as non-contributing. Therefore now only 32 (76%) of the 41 resources in the district are contributing. The following inventory list and the district map have been corrected to reflect these changes.

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

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INVENTORY OF CONTRIBUTING AND NON-CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Inv. #	Address	Name or Type/Style/Dates	C/NC	Ph. #
1.	26 Bissell Street	CENTER HOSE COMPANY NO. 1	C	
2.	50 Chapman Place	CENTER SCHOOL, Academic Revival, 1917	C	14
3.	-- (Lot 13:249)	Urban park, 1996 (former CENTER SCHOOL PLAYGROUND, 1917)	NC	18
4.	14 Chapman Street	SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, Georgian Revival, 1928; remodeled 1987	C	5
5.	15 " "	apartment building, Colonial Revival, 1943	C	15
6.	19 " "	apartment building, Colonial Revival, 1943	C	15
7.	20 " "	residence, Colonial Revival/Queen Anne, c. 1915	C	17
8.	23 " "	apartment building, Colonial Revival, 1943	C	15
9.	27 " "	apartment building, Colonial Revival, 1943	C	15
10.	32-34 " "	residence, Four-Square, c. 1915	C	
11.	35 " "	residence, modern Ranch, 1993	NC	
12.	36 " "	residence, Colonial Revival, 1929	C	16
13.	36 " "	associated garage, 1929	C	
14.	42 " "	residence, Colonial Revival, 1928	C	16
15.	42 " "	associated garage, 1928	C	
16.	43 " "	residence, Colonial Revival, 1937	C	
17.	43 " "	associated garage, 1937		
18.	989-993 Main Street	ODD FELLOWS HALL, c. 1850, remodeled in Mission Revival, 1922	C	2
19.	1008-1010	ANDREWS BUILDING, Classical Revival, 1930; additions, 1980	C	11
20.	1005-1017	HOOKER BUILDING, Early 20th-Century Commercial, 1926	C	2

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

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21.	1016	EASTWOOD THEATRE, Art Moderne, 1941; remodeled late 1960s	C	2
22.	1037-1047 Main Street	urban park, 1996 (former store site)	NC	18
23.	1048-1064	MAURICE JOSELOFF BUILDING, Art Moderne, 1941; SAGE ALLEN after 1964	C	13
24.	1065	modern bank, 1989	NC	
25.	1084-1102	modern commercial, 1956	NC	
26.	1085	EAST HARTFORD TRUST COMPANY, Georgian Revival, 1916	C	4
27.	1109	associated drive-up building, 1982	NC	
28.	1111	modern bank, 1961	NC	3
29.	1110-1112	WELLS HALL/TOWN HALL, Classical Revival, 1832; new entrance, 1885; additions, 1924, 1960s	C	8, 9
30.	1123-1127	WHITNEY BUILDING, Classical Revival, 1902	C	3
31.	1126-1128	HENRY B. HALE PRINT SHOP, c. 1900; partly remodeled facade, 1947	C	8
32.	1132	C. R. COMSTOCK HOUSE, Federal, c. 1830; converted to apartments, 1911; storefront addition, 1969	C	10
33.	1132	associated garage, late 19th-century	C	
34.	1133	modern bank, 1949	NC	3
35.	1138	1922 gas station remodeled for other commercial uses	NC	
36.	1160	ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, High Victorian Gothic, 1867	C	6
37.	1165-1169 (aka 2 Orchard)	COMSTOCK BUILDING (2nd), Early 20th-Commercial, 1926	C	1
38.	1171-1177 Main Street	COMSTOCK BUILDING (1st), Classical Revival, 1899	C	1
39.	1181-1185	Late 19th-Century Commercial, 1892	C	1
40.	3 Rector Street	residence, c. 1920	C	
41.	12 Rector Street	CORNING HALL, ST. JOHN'S PARISH HOUSE, 1910	C	7

Downtown Main Street Historic District
Name of Property

Hartford, CT
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes. Inventory #s 36, 41
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance

c. 1890 - 1943

Significant Dates

N/A

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Edward T. Potter

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

Downtown Main Street Historic District

Hartford, CT

Name of Property

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property 25

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

UTM grid 1: Zone, Easting, Northing

UTM grid 3: Zone, Easting, Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant

organization Cunningham Associates Ltd. date 3/10/96

street & number 37 Orange Road telephone (860) 347 4072

city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name

street & number telephone

city or town state zip code

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 1**Statement of Significance**

The Downtown Main Street District is a tangible expression of the transformation of a nineteenth-century farming community to a modern suburban town. During this period (1890 to 1945), town institutions were consolidated and centralized. New business blocks were constructed and older buildings remodeled in the downtown to meet the institutional and commercial needs of a rapidly expanding population. Encompassing a period that ranged from the Victorian era through the traditional styles of the early twentieth century to the minimalist architecture of the early modern period, the district's architectural significance is derived from its stylistic diversity. Of particular significance are the well-preserved examples of High Victorian Gothic, Classical and Georgian Revival, as well as two representative buildings in the Art Moderne style.

Historical Background and Significance ⁴

East Hartford is located on the Connecticut River directly across from Hartford, the capital city. Rising from the river floodplain in several terraces, its 18 square miles extend to the edge of the hills of the Eastern Uplands, an area roughly bisected by the Hockanum River, a source of waterpower since the colonial period. Settled in the early seventeenth century by people from Hartford, East Hartford remained a part of that town until 1783, when it was incorporated as a separate town, but its economy and development were closely tied to its parent city through most of its history. Laid out in the 1670s, Main Street became part of the major country road that connected towns on the east side of the river. Until the last decades of the nineteenth century, this street served a farming community and farms lined its path. Blessed with arable land and access to the state's major navigable river, the community saw its subsistence farming give way to commercial agriculture, especially the growing of tobacco.

The oldest buildings in the district, Wells Hall and the Comstock House, are survivors from the agrarian period (Inventory #s 29, 32; Photograph #s 8, 9, 10). Wells Hall was typical of the private academies that sprang up in the early 1800s to prepare grammar school students for college. Even after it was taken over for the Town Hall in 1885, it functioned more like earlier nineteenth-century institutions of this type, which were both civic and social centers. It provided space for town offices, as well as a police station and jail, and town meetings were held there. Dances were held in the ballroom on the second floor, which was also a meeting place for the Grange and the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR).

Nineteenth-century improvements in transportation provided greater market access for both industrialists and tobacco growers and set the stage for rapid residential development by the end of the century. Though the arrival of the Hartford, Providence and Fishkill Railroad in 1849 brought some of the first Irish immigrants to town, little real residential growth occurred until a major depot with a roundhouse and repair shops was built here in 1888. After remaining essentially static for most of the century, hovering between 2000 and 3000, the population of East Hartford soared, reaching 6400 by 1900. Not only was the railroad a major employer, but later several railroad men were also involved in the commercial development of Main Street.

In anticipation of a building boom, local speculators had already begun to buy up large tracts of farmland along Main Street after the Civil War. Sustained development of residential neighborhoods and a central business district was delayed, however, until the advent of the street railway, electrified in 1892, which travelled down Main Street and ran over the river to Hartford. Many of the homeowners in East Hartford's evolving new streetcar suburbs worked in Hartford, especially after construction of the Bulkley Bridge

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

Section number 8 Page 2

in 1904. Others were the small business owners who were establishing themselves on Main Street, including Henry B. Hale, who erected a new print shop for his newspaper, the *Weekly Gazette*, founded in 1884 (Inventory #31). Lewis Comstock, a railroad engineer and descendant of an old East Hartford family, constructed his first building in 1899, which housed a theater and offices. A house associated with this family is located across the street (Inventory #21). James Whitney, an undertaker, constructed his new building in 1902 (Inventory #30; Photograph #3).

By 1930 the population had reached 17,000, with much of the growth in the 1920s, when the Grand List tripled. District schools were consolidated and in 1916 the second more modern high school in the town center was built on Chapman Place. It replaced an earlier wood-frame school built in 1895 on Main Street (the site of the East Hartford Trust Company building) that burned down in 1915. The new school provided secondary education until 1954, when it became an elementary school. Town planning became more sophisticated; zoning and building codes were introduced primarily to deal with the rapid growth of residential neighborhoods off Main Street, such as Chapman Street, which were substantially completed in this period. Substantial additions were made to Town Hall to accommodate the enlarged government structure, and in 1929 the town-meeting system was replaced by the council form. The building remained the seat of government until 1936 when a new publicly funded building was erected farther south on Main Street during the Depression.

The demand for goods and services produced a modest commercial boom on Main Street, which was initiated in 1916 by the East Hartford Trust Company in the center of the district (Inventory #26; Photograph #4) and continued until 1930. The newly remodeled Odd Fellows Hall dates from this period and continued, as it had in the past, to also house several retail businesses on the first floor (Inventory #18; Photograph #2). Its new neighbor, the Hooker Building, was built in 1926 (Inventory #20; Photograph #2). It is said that Hooker was a brakeman for the railroad. At the other end of the district, Comstock added his second building that same year (Inventory #38; Photograph #1). Typically, national chain stores appeared in downtowns throughout the region by the end of this period. Such was the case at the south end of the district, where the Andrews Building of 1930 housed F. W. Woolworth on its first floor (Inventory #19; Photograph #11).

Although at one time East Hartford was the fourth largest tobacco grower in the state, production had declined by the time Pratt and Whitney's large modern assembly plant was built here in 1929. By 1931 many acres of former tobacco land were laid out for Rentschler Field, which not only served the company but was the municipal airport for the capital region. Since most of its 3000 workers still commuted from Hartford, the original location of the company, at first the Pratt and Whitney presence had little impact on the town. In fact, new construction, both residential and commercial, typically declined during the Great Depression. In addition, East Hartford, along with other towns and cities in the Connecticut River Valley, suffered through several disastrous floods. Starting in 1939, however, wartime production at the "Aircraft" soared, bringing workers from all over the country, creating a severe housing shortage, only partially alleviated by emergency housing built by the government. Just how many of the 40,000 workers employed by the company by the end of the war lived in East Hartford is not known, but it is probable that the apartment buildings on Chapman Street were constructed in 1943 to meet some of the demand (Inventory #s 5, 6, 6, 9; Photograph #15).⁵ Recreational needs were met by the new air-conditioned movie theater built in 1941 on Main Street by Maurice Joseloff of First National Stores, Inc. (Inventory #21; Photograph #s 11, 12). The building was leased to the Perakos family, owners of a chain of movie houses in the region. An earlier theater in the 1899 Comstock Building became a roller skating rink. Joseloff's companion building on the opposite corner, which was built as a drugstore, was

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Downtown Main Street Historic District, East Hartford, Hartford County, Connecticut

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taken over by Sage Allen, a department store chain, after the war (Inventory #23; Photograph #13).

Architectural Significance

In broad terms, the Downtown Main Street Historic District represents the commercial development of downtown America in the early twentieth century. Like many historic downtowns, it evolved sporadically with little planning. Stylistic choice depended as much on the whim of building owners as it did on prevailing fashion. With the notable exception of more conventional institutional architecture, buildings were often a mix of several styles. Over time buildings were remodeled and some were demolished. New modern buildings took their place and stand side by side with historic structures. For all these reasons, East Hartford's central business district, like downtowns everywhere, is a unique assemblage of historic resources and therein lies its architectural significance.

Chief among the special qualities that contribute to the significance of the Downtown Main Street Historic District is an exceptional stylistic range and a diversity of style and form. Nothing quite so obviously embodies the complete cultural shift that occurred in East Hartford during the district's time frame as the two extremes of its stylistic range, High Victorian Gothic and Art Moderne. St. John's Church (Inventory #36; Photograph #6) epitomizes the stylistic emphasis of the Victorian age on embellishment through texture and ornamentation, while Art Moderne stripped architecture to its essential functional form. The former was derivative, the latter, which evolved from the international revolution in the arts, was a totally new modern concept. The two streamlined examples in the district clearly reflect the horizontality of the early International style (Inventory #s 21, 23; Photograph #s 11, 13, 13). Within this broad range there was considerable room for individual expression, as demonstrated by the eclectic remodeling of Odd Fellows Hall (Inventory #18; Photograph #2).

Despite this diversity, a solid classical core of institutional architecture anchors the district, best represented by the integrated facade of the Georgian Revival East Hartford Trust Company of 1916 (Inventory #26; Photograph #4). Similarly, classical references were the basis of the design of the Southern New England Telephone Exchange and Center School (Inventory #s 4, 2; Photograph #s 4, 14). Among the commercial buildings, which, in general, all give a nod to classicism, the first Comstock Building has the most fully developed and classically proportioned facade (Inventory #38; Photograph #1). Others employ repeating round arches with tripartite window groupings, as seen in the Andrews Building, a late example (Inventory #19; Photograph #11). The Palladian motif is even a bold, if somewhat incongruous, element of the design of Odd Fellows Hall (Inventory #18; Photograph #2).

Although this repetition of architectural elements, as well as the use of similar materials, helps unify the district, building heights are not sustained throughout. Instead, an interesting rhythm is created by the various massings and profiles of the historic commercial blocks. The taller and older buildings give way to the lower massing of the more recent historic examples, which in turn are reflected in the post-1945 modern infill.

For the most part, the integrity of the district's resources has been maintained. The historic facades of commercial buildings are generally well preserved and a number of storefronts have been preserved or restored to their original design. With the selection of East Hartford for Connecticut's Main Street program, it is expected that the rehabilitation process will continue. Not surprisingly, two of the oldest buildings, Town Hall and the Comstock House, have undergone the most alteration and the most recent

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additions obscure their earlier historic facades. In both cases, however, the changes are reversible.

End Notes:

1. The relatively limited extent of the fire damage to the exterior of the building was determined by comparing a 1908 photographic view with its present appearance. See East Hartford Historic Resource Survey Inventory Form #201, 1980.
2. Throughout the nomination, a number of style designations have been changed from those used on survey forms to correct errors or to conform with current National Register style nomenclature.
3. Even though oral tradition and historic photographs tend to confirm that the unusual main roof was original construction, such a prominent hip configuration is more characteristic of the later Victorian period.
4. The history presented and summarized here is taken from the multiple property listing of 1991, entitled "Historic and Architectural Resources in East Hartford, Connecticut." Three historic contexts were identified at that time, including "Maturation and Diversification, 1880-1945," the focus of this nomination. Two other district nominations associated with this context have been listed, which were primarily concerned with residential development and the associated property types in that period. Although some of these are included here, this district nomination is the first to be concerned with institutional and commercial development and introduces appropriate new associated property types.
5. The decadal federal census figures bracket the wartime period. By 1950 29,922 people lived here, an increase of 65 percent over 1940. It is not possible to determine how many residents were employed by Pratt and Whitney during the war, especially since most of the workforce was laid off immediately at war's end.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Atlas of Hartford City and County. Hartford: Baker & Tilden, 1869.

Federal Census of the United States, 1800-1940.

Goodwin, Joseph O. *East Hartford: Its History and Traditions.* East Hartford, Connecticut: The Raymond Library Co., 1975 (reprint of 1879 edition).

Historical and Architectural Surveys, Phase I, II, III, and IV. Town of East Hartford and Connecticut Historical Commission, 1980-1987.

Paquette, Lee. *Only More So: The History of East Hartford.* East Hartford: Raymond Library Co., 1976.

Sherrow, Doris D. "Historic and Architectural Resources in East Hartford," 1991.

10. Geographical Data

UTMS Hartford North Quad:

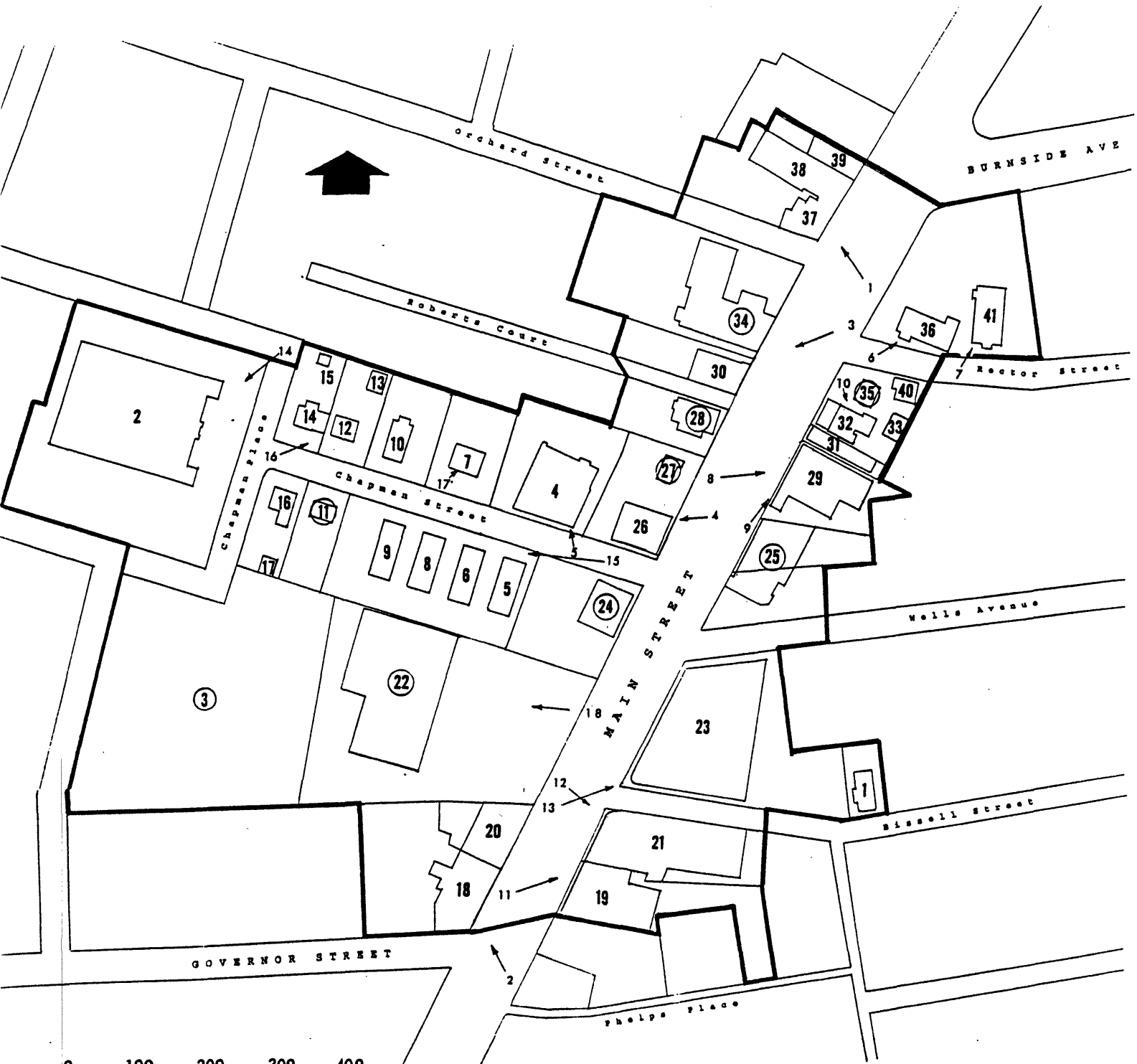
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2. 18 696040 4627240
3. 18 696260 4627200
4. 18 696030 4626840
5. 18 695800 4626800
6. 18 695680 4626010

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries are shown on the attached district map drawn to scale from East Hartford Tax Assessor's Maps #s 13, and 14 and East Hartford Topographic Survey, 1983.

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries were selected to encompass the historic core of East Hartford's historic downtown and contain the maximum number of contributing institutional and commercial buildings on Main Street that are associated with its period of significance. Severely altered or modern buildings were excluded on the south and north. The district was extended along Chapman Street to Chapman Place to include Center School. This extension is justified because the school has historic importance within the period of significance of the district and is visible from Main Street. With the exception of Chapman Street, the rest of the residential neighborhoods to the east and west of Main Street were excluded because of their different architectural character.



**DOWNTOWN MAIN STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT
EAST HARTFORD, HARTFORD COUNTY, CT**

- # Contributing resource
- Ⓝ Non-contributing resource
- # with arrow: photograph view

Bold Line: National Register District Boundary

Compiled by Cunningham Associates Ltd. 2/96

Base Maps: East Hartford Tax Assessor's Maps 13 & 14, 1994; East Hartford Topographic Survey, 1983

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List of Photographs

Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd. (except as noted)

Date: 5/96 (except as noted)

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

1. COMSTOCK BUILDING (2ND), COMSTOCK BUILDING (1ST) & 1181-1185
MAIN STREET (L-R), facing NW
2. ODD FELLOWS HALL & HOOKER BUILDING (L-R), facing NW
3. WHITNEY BUILDING & 1133 MAIN STREET (L-R), facing W
4. EAST HARTFORD TRUST COMPANY, facing W
5. SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND TELEPHONE EXCHANGE, facing N
6. ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH, facing NE
7. CORNING HALL, facing NE
8. HENRY HALE PRINT SHOP, WELLS HALL/(former)TOWN HALL, & 1084-1102
MAIN STREET, facing E
9. WELLS HALL/(former) TOWN HALL, facing NE
10. C. R. COMSTOCK HOUSE, facing S
11. EASTWOOD THEATER & ANDREWS BUILDING (L-R), facing E
12. EASTWOOD THEATER, facing SE
13. MAURICE JOSELOFF BUILDING, facing NE
14. CENTER SCHOOL, facing SW
15. 15, 19, 23, & 27 CHAPMAN STREET (L-R), facing W
16. 42 & 36 CHAPMAN STREET (L-R), facing E
17. 20 CHAPMAN STREET, facing NE
18. Park, facing E (Mary Martin, 9/96)