

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

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: 02000332

Date Listed: 04/12/02

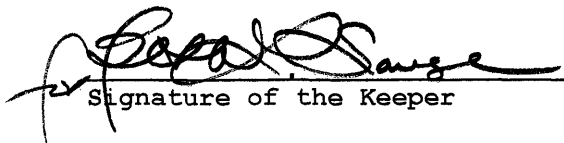
Erwin Home for Worthy and  
Indigent Women  
Property Name

Hartford  
County

CT  
State

N/A  
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

4/12/02  
Date of Action

=====  
Amended Items in Nomination:

**8. Statement of Significance: Area & Period of Significance**

The period of significance is justified as 1891-1952, eliminating 1971 and 1973 as applicable significant dates. "Industry" is not an applicable area of significance under criterion B and is deleted.

This information was confirmed with John Herzan, National Register Coordinator, CTSHPO, by telephone.

**DISTRIBUTION:**  
National Register property file  
Nominating Authority (without attachment)

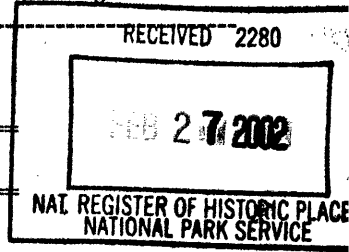
dc 332

PROPERTY NAME

The Erwin Home, New Britain, CT

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1. Name of Property

historic name Erwin Home for Worthy and Indigent Women

other names/site number The Erwin Home

2. Location

street & number 140 Bassett Street

city or town New Britain

state Connecticut code CT county Hartford

not for publication NA

vicinity NA

code 003 zip code 06051

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 February 25, 2002  
Signature of certifying official Date  
John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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**4. National Park Service Certification**

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
     \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
     National Register  
     \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
     National Register
- removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

*[Handwritten Signature]*  
 for Signature of Keeper

4/12/02  
 Date of Action

**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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   NA  

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

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**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: institutional housing

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic Sub: institutional housing**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Queen Anne

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE/sandstoneroof ASPHALTwalls BRICKWOOD/shingle

other \_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

The Erwin Home is a two- and three-story masonry and frame apartment building constructed at the turn of the 20th century in the Queen Anne style, with mid-20th century additions. There are five sections, three built at the turn of the century and two in the 1970s, as identified on the Site Plan, Figure 1. The complex forms an asymmetrical U on a full square block about two-thirds mile south of the center of New Britain. (See U.S.G.S. map.) Principal building materials are rock-faced brownstone, red brick laid up in common bond, and wood, painted brown. In the original construction, the Queen Anne style is expressed in the variety of towers, gables, projecting and recessed sections, embellished with Gothic Revival and Classical Revival details. There are many entrances and several different sizes and shapes of windows. The whole, nevertheless, composes a strong unity of visual effect that is distinctive and characteristic of the style. (Figure 2) The buildings have 43,470 square feet of floor space divided into 69 apartments and common spaces on the 2.5-acre site, which is landscaped with mature copper beech and other shade trees, in a residential neighborhood.

**EXTERIOR**1891

The dominant feature of the original 1891 Queen Anne structure is its three-story corner tower<sup>1</sup> which projects southwest toward the intersection of Bassett and Ellis Streets, under a high conical roof. (Photograph 1) The Bassett Street wing extends to the north from this tower, the Ellis Street wing to the east. (Figure 1) Ashlar foundation and water table are rock-faced Portland,

<sup>1</sup>The tower at first glance appears to be round, but is actually ten-faceted.

Connecticut, brownstone displaying raised ribs on the (grapevine) mortar joints. The wall above is red brick laid up with red mortar in common bond. Fenestration of the tower, indeed of the building as a whole, is not symmetrical. At the first floor of the tower, four tall 1-over-1 windows with brownstone sills and transoms face south toward Ellis Street. Window surrounds are plain, flat, as is the case with all the building's exterior window and door surrounds. The portion of the tower wall facing east toward Bassett Street is plain, leading to two windows opening onto the abutting front porch as the tower dies into the Bassett Street wall. This theme of building components and decorative features dominated by complex asymmetrical design relationships is repeated again and again throughout the turn-of-the-century building.

The second floor of the tower commands attention by its two commemorative diamond-shaped terra cotta plaques. The right (east) plaque carries the date 1891, the year of construction, in decorative figures (Photograph 2), while the left (west) plaque is a cipher of CBE, the initials of Cornelius B. Erwin, the institution's benefactor. Windows on either side are of different shapes and sizes, although there is standardization in the glazing pattern since most sash in the building are replacement 1-over-1s.

The shingled third floor of the tower articulates a complex pattern of horizontal and vertical lines and windows arranged in a grid formed by regularly spaced horizontal and vertical wooden elements tracing the facets of the tower. The scheme resembles low-relief half timbering. The conical roof is strongly flared at the eaves, and has a small copper cap. A historic photograph shows that there was a finial. (Figure 3)

The main front porch and front door are to the left (north) of the tower, approached by a flagstone walk leading in from Bassett Street. (Photograph 3) The front of the porch is comprised of two pointed-arched openings with diagonal braces in their spandrels. The front entrance consists of a double door with sidelights under a brick segmental arch of headers. Above two low panels, the door and sidelights are diamond-glazed, the muntins forming the diamonds being more than one inch deep. In the sidelights added horizontal muntins break the diamonds into triangles. (Photograph 4) The gable end of the porch roof above the cornice is embellished with quatrefoils, trefoils, diamond-glazed square windows, and a strong mullion. The gable-end raking cornices are not embellished with bargeboards, a practice followed throughout the building.

The balance of the Bassett Street elevation, which extends to the left (north) of the corner tower, is a series of entrances to apartments, row houses in a sense. The elevation is articulated in a variety of shapes, forms, and materials, including a brick wall, two-story shingled tower which is lower than the principal corner tower, a recessed shingled wall, and a large projecting brick section with shingled gable end. (Photograph 5) To the left of the porch a projecting chimney now terminates at the roof line.<sup>2</sup>

The building steps inward with a small niche, which has a shingled east wall. A 6-over-6 window at grade here may be original, one of the few remaining original sash in the building. Above it a vertical band of six pairs of 1-over-1 windows runs up from mid-first floor to the eaves, to light an interior stair. (Photograph 6) The final section of the Bassett Street elevation, brick at the first floor, shingled above, is in two planes created by an 18" step-back in its center. (Photograph 6) An oriel occupies the left stepped-back portion of the wall. A bronze plaque left of the oriel reads:

ERWIN HOME  
FOUNDED 1891  
SOUTH CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

The large round corner tower which serves as the starting point for the Bassett Street elevation running north, described above, is also the starting point for the Ellis Street elevation running east. (Figure 1) The Ellis Street wing continues the gable-roofed, brownstone, brick, and wood construction. A long curved flagstone walk runs in from the street to serve the four apartment porches on this elevation, then curves back to the street. (Photograph 7) Irregular fenestration along Ellis Street, in the spirit of the Bassett Street elevation but not duplicating its details, includes such features as four narrow 1-over-1 windows grouped

<sup>2</sup>As seen in Figure 2, the section of this and other similar chimneys above the eaves was embellished with square and diamond-shaped panels. The absence of the tops of the many chimneys is a major change in the architectural design.

together by a segmental soldier-course arch, under two windows off-center to the right at the second floor, and a 1-over-1 window with a high small abutting square window to the left.

Continuing to the east, a chimney is partially obscured by a porch with barrel-vault roof. The porch's deck connects with the deck of the porch to the west. Spandrels are filled with classical crosses, a motif that is repeated in a roof-line frieze of eight classical crosses. The steep pitch of the main roof is reduced over this bay to that of a shed roof, extending to provide cover over an open balcony. At the east end of the Ellis Street elevation the original 1891 building makes a right angle to the north, parallel with Warlock Street, providing closure to the basic U shape (Figure 1), with a shed-roofed porch facing south toward Ellis Street. A window in the east wall of the porch repeats the diamond glazing with deep muntins of the principal front doors.

The rear (west) part of this final section of the 1891 building is a three-story square tower with flared pyramidal roof. The top of the tower consists of a wide two-stage band consisting of 16 panel-over-window units, four on each face of the tower. The panels of the upper stage feature blind fanlights; the windows below are filled with diamond glazing. (Photograph 11)

#### 1894

The first addition to The Erwin Home, built in 1894 along Warlock Street, continues the brownstone ashlar foundation but at a level one story lower because grade declines here, making this building, only, three stories high. (Photograph 8) In the asymmetrical elevation facing east toward Warlock Street a wooden porch gable has a monochrome Tudor Revival design. In a tower to the left the windows continue to have splayed lintels, as in the 1891 building. Fenestration at the tower's third floor is a continuous band of five windows under a flared conical roof. The continuous band of windows is similar to that in the nearby square tower, while the flared conical roof repeats, on a smaller scale, the roof of the principal corner tower. A bull's-eye, glazed in small square panes, is located over the ridge line of the porch roof. The building is crowned with a pyramidal roof which has a small copper fixture at its apex, perhaps for a finial.

#### 1914

The 1894 building is attached by a two-story hipped-roof connector to the 1914 addition next north on Warlock Street. Due to the fact that the land level rises again, this building consists of a high basement, with water table of rounded brick, and two stories above grade. (Photograph 9) Instead of a brownstone foundation, a brick wall is used, and window lintels are segmental rather than splayed. The street elevation has a symmetrical plan of a wide projecting section under a Tudor Revival gable. The second floor features a shallow flat wooden oriel on corbels. The gable end above is covered with yellow stucco and vertical timbers. The principal roof behind the gable is both stepped and hipped.

#### Courtyard

Courtyard elevations in general are executed in a manner that continues the spirit and detailing of the street elevations. Brick and shingle materials, cross gables, shed dormers, and bull's-eyes are represented. (Photograph 10) The rear of the Bassett Street side has a two-story three-sided wooden bay; the rear of Ellis Street a small gable-roofed tower that supports a working chimney; and the rear of Warlock Street a cantilevered second-floor balcony. (Photograph 11)

Windows throughout the building are double-glazed aluminum anodized in a dark color, installed as replacements, c. 1980s, within existing frames. (Photograph 18)

#### 1971, 1973

No further construction occurred at The Erwin Home after 1914 until 1971, when the first half of the northern addition and the Cooper Room were built. The new connector from the 1891 structure to the 1971 building has a shed-roofed foyer facing Bassett Street with a plate-glass front wall and front door, becoming the principal central front entrance to the complex. The original front door in the principal corner tower ceased to be used.

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The three-story 1971 building continues, in a contemporary architectural interpretation, the use of brick and shingle building materials in a rectangular plan running parallel with Bassett Street, under a gable roof. (Photograph 12) The brick is variegated shades of brown and red, laid up, like the original building, in plain bond,<sup>3</sup> in pink mortar on concrete foundation; the shingles are painted brown. Horizontal bands of three square single-pane bedroom windows under soldier-course lintels are above one another at each floor. This arrangement alternates with a recessed vertical shingled three-story surface with three vertical single-pane living room windows at each floor. This two-part design unit repeats twice to a plain wall surface which marks the end of the 1971 section. There is a slight step-back at the beginning of the 1973 addition, which essentially continues the fenestration arrangement from 1971.

The east elevation of the 1973 building is separated from the site's parking lot by a hedge and flower garden. The east elevation fenestration echoes the street elevation with a corresponding step-back to the 1971 structure. (Photograph 13) Three design units fill the 1971 elevation to the Cooper Room, where grade rises sharply again. (Photograph 14)

The Cooper Room was constructed, as part of the 1971 campaign, to provide a suitable space for social functions. It projects to the east, forming an entity of its own (Figure 1), under a truncated hipped roof.

## INTERIOR

1891, 1894

The 1891 building is laid out with a hallway along each of the courtyard walls. Doors with transoms open from the halls into the apartments; some apartments also have exterior doors. The units are not interconnected, except by halls. The main front entrance leads to a reception area with ceremonial staircase (Photograph 15); the hallways run from this area north and east along the wings, parallel with the streets. The first floor of the corner tower was a public parlor, with an accompanying dining room and kitchen adjacent. (Figure 2) The parlor is now the institution's office and the former dining room is the resident manager's apartment. Otherwise conditions remain about as originally laid out, with the exception of bathrooms. Initially each apartment did not have a bathroom; a common bathroom was behind the front stairway. Now each apartment has a bathroom.

Interior trim is plain. Doors have five horizontal panels. Door and window surrounds in the halls are plain flat stock, approximating the exterior window surrounds. (Photograph 16) Within the apartments, surrounds are flat stock with an inconspicuous band molding. There are no cornices, and baseboards are plain one-inch boards.

The second run of the front stairway from first to second floors is lighted by a broad bank of eight nine-pane square windows, a striking feature. (Photograph 17) It is matched by the companion vertical bank of windows which lights the second stairway in the Bassett Street wing.

Existing windows are heavy dark-colored anodized aluminum 1-over-1s installed c. 1980s. (Photograph 18) Original windows apparently were a mixture of glazing patterns. An original narrow wooden window, 4-over-1, exists on the second floor of the 1894 section. (Photograph 19) A 6-over-6 wood window is still in place at the bottom of the Bassett Street stair. Figure 2, however, indicates small-pane transoms in the principal corner tower over 1-over-1s, some configurations of small panes over single pane, and 1-over-1s elsewhere. Second-floor windows in Figure 2 appear to be more uniformly small panes over single pane. One colored-glass window from an apartment to a hall remains in the second floor of the southeast corner.

An apartment is located in the third floor of the 1891 principal round corner tower, an eagle's nest. In the corresponding space at the top of the 1894 square tower near Warlock Street the diamond glazing is more clearly visible from the interior. The inside of the glass is painted (perhaps originally?), leaving only the four central diamonds clear. The framing of the pyramidal roof above is free of central bracing. (Photograph 20)

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<sup>3</sup>Without periodic rows of headers.

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With the 1894 east wing, the facility consisted of 29 apartments, six outside public entrances, and five private entrances to apartments. Interior woodwork was painted when the building was erected.<sup>4</sup> The operative word is painted, rather than stained. Dark woodwork might be expected, although the Colonial Revival era was already underway. In any event, in the recent redecorating of the parlor/office, the trim was taken down to the wood and no indication of a dark color was uncovered.

1914

The proportions of the 1914 building are more nearly square, in contrast to the long wings of the earlier sections. Accordingly, it is laid out with central double-loaded halls. Trim and other features are similar. In the 1914 building, as elsewhere, apartments consist primarily of two rooms, living room/kitchen and bedroom. (Photographs 21, 22)

1971, 1973

The 1971 and 1973 sections are regarded as a single building today, comprising 34 units<sup>5</sup> opening onto central double-loaded corridors. The three floors are known as lower level, first floor, and second floor. There is an elevator. Doors are flush; trim is not quite clamshell because of its modest ogee profile. The windows are wooden casements. (Photograph 23) Units are arranged somewhat differently from turn-of-the-century apartments in that kitchen areas are smaller, closets are larger and more plentiful, and bathrooms are larger, each with a shower. (Figure 6, Photograph 24) The Cooper Room is regularly used for social events, gatherings, card games, and similar activities. (Photograph 25)

**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.

<sup>4</sup>Erwin Home Board of Managers, 1897 Report.

<sup>5</sup>Thirty-four units in the 1970s buildings plus the original 36 suggests a total of 70 apartments, but the count is not exact because of alterations: one unit is now a sewing room; two small units were combined into one; the resident manager's apartment is a former dining room; guest rooms have been created from time to time; etc.



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## Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.  
 B removed from its original location.  
 C a birthplace or a 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.

## Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
INDUSTRY  
SOCIAL HISTORY

Period of Significance 1891-1973Significant Dates 1891, 1894, 1914, 1971, 1973Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) Cornelius B(uckley) ErwinCultural Affiliation NA**Architects**

Cook, Hapgood & Co., 1891  
Hapgood & Hapgood, 1894  
\_\_\_\_\_, 1914  
Hirsch, Hammerberg & Kaestle, 1971  
Hirsch-Kaestle-Boos, 1973

**8. Significance****Summary**

The Erwin Home is significant architecturally because it is an outstanding example of the Queen Anne style. It is also significant in local history because of its association with a prominent industrial leader of the New Britain community during the second half of the 19th century. It is of interest as an early example of private beneficence for the benefit of impoverished women which has continued its mission for more than a century. The architecture uses the masonry materials, Gothic Revival and Classical Revival allusions, and asymmetric character-defining eccentricities of shapes and forms associated with the English interpretation of the Queen Anne style with skill that brings the whole into a recognized unity. The concept for which the building was constructed, an attractive and pleasant residence for women in need as a private philanthropy owned by a single church, was innovative for its day. The fact that the home continues to operate under the original plan adds to its distinction. The many industrial activities and wide range of philanthropies associated with Cornelius B(uckley) Erwin (1811-1885), the benefactor, earned him a permanent place in the history of New Britain, The Erwin Home being not the least of his many contributions to the city.

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**Historical Background**

Cornelius B. Erwin's will provided, among many benefactions, \$80,000 to establish a residence "for use of worthy but indigent women of the town of New Britain, who sustain a good moral character, and are of good disposition, and who desire to do something for their own support;..."<sup>6</sup> The funds were left to the Pastor and Standing Committee of South Presbyterian Church, trustees. Erwin had been a member of the church. The will provided that the Pastor and Standing Committee appoint a Board of Managers, to exercise active oversight of The Erwin Home. The ownership/management entity has never changed. There are no entries in the New Britain land records related to the property since the first and only one of 1889.<sup>7</sup> The will provided that the land and buildings were to cost not more than \$50,000, with the balance of \$30,000 to be endowment invested in real estate mortgages, providing ongoing income. These instructions were faithfully followed.

Erwin's intent, in line with the thrust of 19th-century benevolent programs not to expose middle-class women to public embarrassment, was to create a non-denominational non-sectarian charitable institution, not to "encourage those who are or desire to be self-supporting." It was made discretionary for the Pastor and Standing Committee to charge rent of such occupants as may be able to pay, and the Board of Managers' By Laws, using language from the will, provide that the facility comprises apartments to be leased with or without rent. In fact, from the first rent was charged, initially at the rate of \$2.00 per month, increased from time to time to the present rental fee of \$250 per month.

Land was purchased in 1889, with dimensions given as 426 feet on Bassett Street, 264 feet on Edson Street, 406 feet on Warlock Street, and 264 feet on Ellis Street.<sup>8</sup> These continue to be the dimensions of the property.

The first construction of 1891 consisted of 24 apartments; the 1894 addition along Warlock Street added five, and the 1914 addition seven more, bringing the total to 36 by the end of the first quarter-century.

The Building Committee held 25 meeting in 1890 with the result "After considering the plans of various architects, [we] have decided on the general features and have secured plans and specifications for the work." New Britain Building Permit No. 51 was issued February 2, 1891. Expenditures included the following:

Cost of land	\$6,500.00	
Site improvements	3,843.48	
Total		10,343.48
1891 building and furnishings	34,588.71	
Addition (1894)	6,656.54	
Total		41,245.25
Grand total for 19C land and buildings		51,588.73 <sup>9</sup>

The main building was completed and opened in April 1892.

Hapgood & Hapgood, the "original architects," were employed for the 1894 addition. The construction contract was signed March 19, 1894. The addition was complete and accepted December 5, 1894. Hapgood & Hapgood were paid \$361.29.

The Board of Managers in their 1912 report noted that applicants were waiting so it was thought best to add to the existing building or erect a new building. The decision was made to erect a further addition to the east wing on Warlock Street, bringing the total number of units from 29 up to 36. Identity of the architect was not mentioned in the Board of Managers' reports, and has not turned up in the records in the course of preparation of this documentation. Cost of the 1914 addition was \$14,000.

<sup>6</sup>Erwin Home Board of Managers By Laws, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup>New Britain Land Records, volume 9, page 454, December 16, 1889.

<sup>8</sup>New Britain Land Records, volume 9, page 454, December 16, 1889.

<sup>9</sup>Also reported at the time as \$50,139.27

Some indication of what life was like residing in The Erwin Home during its early days emerges from the records. Over the years the units were consistently referred to in Board of Managers reports as tenements. The 1896 financial report recorded Receipts of \$592.87 and Expenditures the same. The 1900 report noted that "A few residents of the home are able to support themselves in part by nursing. A few work in factories, and some obtain a small income from needlework or other manual labors." The residents not only did their own housekeeping but also tended and cleaned the establishment as a whole. In the 1912 financial statement receipts were listed as \$489.25 from rents, while expenditures were headed by \$400 to the man in charge, called the janitor, and \$50 to his wife, the matron. A plan was briefly considered, c.1950s, to accept male residents as well, but upon making inquiry of counsel, opinion was received that language in the will is quite clear that the home is for women only. Consequently, plans for enlarging the home were postponed. In 1953 the age spread among residents was 57 to 92. There has never been any program of assisted living facilities. To remain in the home residents must be able to look after themselves.

Plans for a building campaign re-emerged in the 1960s. The *New Britain Herald* for December 6, 1967, published news of a \$650,000 expansion plan for 31 additional apartments and complete modernization of the exterior of the building. (Figure 4) The drawing suggests that the Cooper Room was to be in the Bassett Street facade linking the old and new sections, but no construction occurred at the time. Two years later, in its issue of December 5, 1969, the *Herald* announced a similar plan again, architects to be Hirsch, Hammerberg & Kaestle. (Figure 4) The New Britain Assessor's office has on file Application A1-843 for a building permit dated, May 26, 1970, for an addition of 17 beds and baths<sup>10</sup> in two sections, 43' x 96', and 23' 4" x 36" 8", three stories, at cost of \$100,000. This became the Stanley-Thornton addition, named after the principal donors, Esther B. Stanley and Arthur E. Thornton, which was dedicated May 12, 1971, consisting of 17 apartments and the Cooper Room at cost of \$400,000.<sup>11</sup> (Figures 5, 6)

The final addition, the Reeks Wing, followed building permit application A3-650, May 17, 1972, for 18 apartments in 2 1/2 stories, size 45' x 80', at cost of \$98,000, architects Hirsch, Kaestle & Boos. Principal source of funds was \$175,000 received from the Reeks estate in November 1971. The Reeks Wing was dedicated April 29, 1973.

Erwin's will provided that the church own and manage the home. The ethic of 19th-century private philanthropy brought somewhat similar enterprises elsewhere in central Connecticut, but not of the type and longevity of The Erwin Home. For example, Lawson Ives, a member of the Pearl Street Congregational Church, Hartford (which later merged into Immanuel Congregational Church), by will left funds for the two Widows' Homes (1864) on North Main Street which were owned and managed by the church, paralleling The Erwin Home circumstance. But in the 20th century Immanuel Church disposed of the Main Street property in favor of building a high-rise apartment house on Woodland Street known as Immanuel House, which has since been incorporated and spun off as a separate entity. The Hartford Episcopal community has made two undertakings, one a residence owned and managed by the diocese, the other Armsmear, a home for Episcopal widows which was established by the will of Elizabeth Hart Jarvis Colt, herself the daughter of an Episcopal minister. However, Armsmear, her former home, is owned and administered by the trustees of her estate. The Erwin Home is not known to be matched in the sense of ownership/management by an individual church and in continuation of the original arrangement for well over a century.

## Architecture

The Erwin Home was one of the stellar examples of the work of Melvin H. Hapgood (1859-1899). Well-trained in the Aesthetic Movement at the Massachusetts Normal Art School, Lowell, under the influence of a faculty member, Walter Smith (1836-1886), from London's South Kensington's English Aesthetic Movement, Melvin H. Hapgood came to Hartford in 1882 at the request of John C. Mead (1840-1889). Charles C. Cook (1857-1940) was already a member of Mead's office, and after Mead's death the practice continued as Cook, Hapgood & Co. to 1893. Another chief example of the firm's work is Hartford's Second North District School (1891) on High Street. Melvin Hapgood was the designer. The Erwin Home amply reflects his strong training in the basics of contemporary styles and historic forms as well as his talent for ingenuity and innovation. His mixture of

<sup>10</sup>The unit layout is shown at Figure 6.

<sup>11</sup>\$135,000 of the \$400,000 was to refurbish the turn-of-the-century building, but the nature of the work is not known.

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Gothic Revival details such as pointed arches and quatrefoils with classical crosses, from his schooling, with totally innovative banks of windows along the two main staircases from contemporary Queen Anne developments in England is exceptional in central Connecticut. His interpretation of the English Queen Anne for the Erwin Home was more scrupulous than that in the contemporary Hartford examples of the Mark Twain House and James J. Goodwin mansion.

When it was built, The Erwin Home was acclaimed for its avoidance of the appearance of repetitive row houses in what was essentially a series of almost identical apartments. In this solution it is likely that Hapgood was influenced by the work of George Keller (1842-1935), Hartford's leading 19th-century architect, who had done something similar on Columbia Street and Park Terrace in Hartford in 1888 and 1889. Keller designed row houses that did not look like row houses by varying the materials, planes, and porch and roof designs, by producing a multiplicity of effects anchored by end towers, and thus providing a timely precedent for The Erwin Home. Keller, in turn, had observed work of this character by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912) and Philip S. Webb (1831-1915), such as housing at Bedford Park outside London, during his 1885 trip to Europe.

In 1883 Melvin H. Hapgood's third cousin, Edward T. Hapgood (1866-1915), joined the firm, whereupon the Hapgoods withdrew to establish their own firm of Hapgood & Hapgood, which planned the 1894 addition to The Erwin Home, as a continuation of the 1891 work. Melvin H. Hapgood met an untimely death from cancer in 1899 at the age of 40, after which his cousin continued alone as the office of Edward T. Hapgood. Edward Hapgood was heavily influenced by the architectural style of the time and conducted a successful, fashionable practice responding to clients' wishes in the Colonial Revival style. Therefore, in considering the possible identity, so far unknown, of the architect for the 1914 addition to The Erwin Home, it is unlikely that Edward T. Hapgood drew the plans. While the 1914 addition does try to relate to the earlier structures in some ways, its proportions are different, masonry work is different, and the prominent yellow stucco Tudor Revival gable ends are not characteristic of Edward Hapgood's work.

The 1971, 1973 additions respect the building materials -- brick and painted shingles -- of the original work, and the additions are comparable in size and mass to the original. They continue the established groundplan. The new buildings also clearly bespeak architectural design preferences of the mid-20th century. They are clean and effective, but, of course, far simpler than the originals. The Cooper Room is a highly successful setting for social events, largely due to the harmonious proportions, the width, length, and height of the room seeming to work together especially well. The sequence of development from origination of the Queen Anne style in England to the design of The Erwin Home is strong and clear. In England, Richard Norman Shaw was a leader in the movement to humanize Gothic Revival and Classical Revival precedents, but not abandon them, in architecture of a more personal and prettier character. He brought these trends to a level of modest domesticity in his Bedford Park work. Keller recognized the trend and imported it to Columbia Street and Park Terrace. Melvin Hapgood was comfortable with the development from his school training with a South Kensington instructor. The Erwin Home was a rational, almost predictable, culmination of these forces.

It is to be noted, however, that Hapgood's Erwin Home went beyond its predecessors in important ways. For instance, while Keller designed row houses that did not look like row houses, he did stay with basic planning forms and some degree of symmetry. For example, his Columbia Street rows are organized A-B-C-B-A. At The Erwin Home nothing is repeated. No sequence is repeated. No basket of details is repeated. The components are always individual, but clearly related to each other. The parts work together with great success as a whole. The ingenuity and complexity of the Hapgood work goes beyond Columbia Street and Bedford Park, carrying originality and innovation to the extreme. Hapgood followed the dictum, "The more the variety the better."<sup>12</sup> Intensive study of the detail of The Erwin Home is fascinating and rewarding because it is all different, it is all good, and it all works. There is nothing comparable in the greater Hartford area.

### Significant Person

Cornelius B. Erwin, benefactor of The Erwin Home, was born on June 11, 1811, in Booneville, Oneida County, New York. He arrived in New Britain in February 1833, in 1836 married Maria North (1816-1884), and in 1839 founded with Henry Russell the Russell & Erwin Manufacturing Company, of which Erwin was president to his death. The factory manufactured

<sup>12</sup>Girouard, p. 94.

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builders' hardware Erwin was also president of the New Britain National Bank from its organization in 1860, and a member of the boards of directors of many companies, including the Stanley Works, Landers, Frary & Clark, and New Britain Savings Bank. He was a leader in bringing the community to its decision to build New Britain's first waterworks and was one of the largest contributors to the fund which brought the State Normal School<sup>13</sup> to New Britain. With Henry Russell, he commissioned McKim, Mead & White, Joseph Wells (1853-1890), partner in charge, to design the Russwin Hotel in 1884-1885. The hotel became the New Britain City Hall and continues to serve in that capacity.

Erwin died on March 22, 1885, age 74, blind, leaving no children, with an estate valued at \$1,100,000. His will provided for many charitable bequests of which \$80,000 for The Erwin Home was one. \$30,000 to the New Britain Institute (New Britain Public Library) was another.

Erwin was "one of the most prominent men in the affairs of New Britain"<sup>14</sup> He was perhaps New Britain's most prominent businessman of the 19th century.

### Criteria Considerations

Because The Erwin Home is owned by a religious institution, Criteria Consideration A raises the question of whether it is eligible for the National Register. Since the property derives its primary significance from architecture and architectural distinction, it is considered to be eligible.

### 9. Major Bibliographical References

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<sup>13</sup>Now Central Connecticut State University.

<sup>14</sup>Fowler, p. 211.

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## 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 # \_\_\_\_\_

## Primary Location of Additional Data

 State Historic Preservation Office Other State agency Federal agency Local government University Other Name of repositories: History Room, South Congregational Church, New Britain, CT

Local History Room, New Britain Public Library

Harriet Beecher Stowe Center Library, Hartford, CT

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property 2.52UTM ReferencesZone Easting Northing

A 18 684860 4613900

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is a square block bounded by Bassett, Ellis, Warlock, and Edson Streets, as described in New Britain Land Records, volume 9, page 454, December 16, 1889.

Boundary Justification

The boundary has not changed since inception.

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**11. Form Prepared By**

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name/title David F. Ransom, reviewed by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinatororganization Architectural Historian date July 2001street & number 83 Avery Heights telephone 860 953-8626city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

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**List of Photographs**

Photographs were taken in July 2001 by David F. Ransom. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission.

**Photograph 1**

Principal corner tower  
View northeast

**Photograph 2**

Detail of Photograph 1

**Photograph 3**

Front porch  
View east

**Photograph 4**

Front door  
View east

**Photograph 5**

Bassett Street elevation  
View northeast

**Photograph 6**

North section of Bassett  
Street elevation  
View east

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## Photograph 7

Ellis Street elevation  
View northwest

## Photograph 8

1894 addition  
View west

## Photograph 9

Warlock Street elevation  
View southwest

## Photograph 10

Courtyard  
View southeast

## Photograph 11

Detail of Photograph 10

## Photograph 12

1971, 1973 additions  
View northeast

## Photograph 13

1973 addition  
View southwest

## Photograph 14

1971 addition  
View northwest

## Photograph 15

Main front stair inside  
principal corner tower  
View southeast

## Photograph 16

Five-panel door under  
transom in plain surround.  
Apartment 212, typical  
View south

## Photograph 17

Window bank at second run  
of main front stair  
View northeast

## Photograph 18

Aluminum window, typical  
View northeast



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## Photograph 19

1914 original ? window

View east

## Photograph 20

Interior of top of Warlock

Street tower

View southeast

## Photograph 21

1914 living room, Apartment 205

View northwest

## Photograph 22

1914 bedroom, Apartment 205

View north

## Photograph 23

1973 building, casements

Apartment 7

View northeast

## Photograph 24

1971 building, living-  
dining area, second floor

east

View northeast

## Photograph 25

Cooper Room

View northeast

**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Site Plan

Figure 2. Historic Architectural Drawing

Figure 3. Historic 1902 View

Figure 4. 1971 Proposal Drawing

Figure 5. 1971, 1973 Additions As Completed

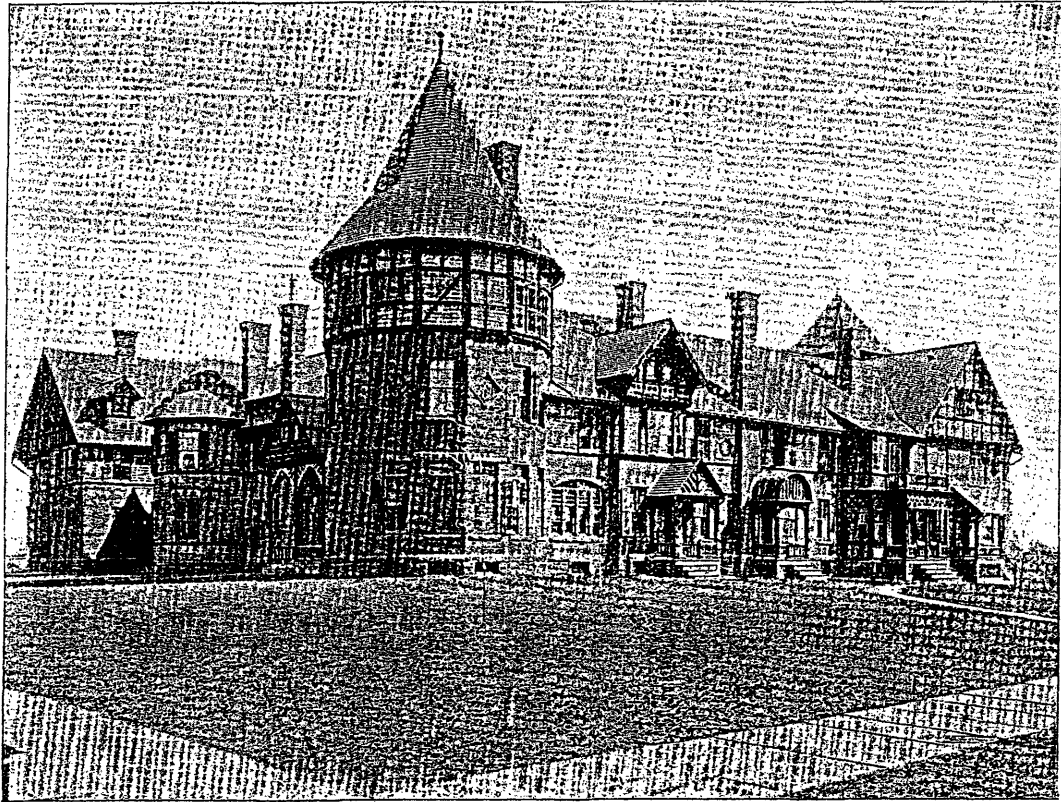
Figure 6. Apartment Layout, 1971 Building

Figure 7. Schematic Footprint Giving Dimensions

Figure 8. Photo Key







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**Figure 3**

1902 View

At Cost - \$650,000. Herald  
12-5-69

## Expansion, Modernization Planned for Erwin Home

By JOSEPH A. OWENS

A \$650,000 expansion and modernization program for the Erwin Home was announced today by the Standing Committee of the South Congregational Church. The church administers the fund.

The program, as detailed by the Rev. Hugh B. Penney, pastor, calls for construction of 31 one-bedroom apartment units, a social hall, club and meeting rooms, a television lounge, and an arts and crafts room.

The interior of the existing home at 140 Bassett St. will be completely modernized, the Rev. Mr. Penney said. This facility has 30 living units.

According to plans drawn by the office of Hirsch, Hammerberg and Kaestle, architects, the L-shaped addition will extend north of the present facility. The Erwin

Home property covers approximately 2.5 acres in the block bounded by Bassett street to the west, Warlock street on the east, Edson street on the north, and Ellis street on the south. The addition will cover 12,293 square feet. The old covers 10,538 square feet. Presently this property is in a 2-family zone. To permit construction the church is requesting a change to A-3 apartment zone designation. A request has been referred by the Common Council to the City Plan Commission for a recommendation. This board will consider the matter at a meeting tomorrow night in City Hall starting at 7:30.

The Rev. Mr. Penney pointed out the Erwin Home was established 75 years ago through funds set aside in the will.

(See Page 17, Col. 1)



SKETCH OF ERWIN HOME SHOWS PROPOSED ADDITION AT LEFT

The Erwin Home  
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Figure 4

New Britain Herald  
December 5, 1969

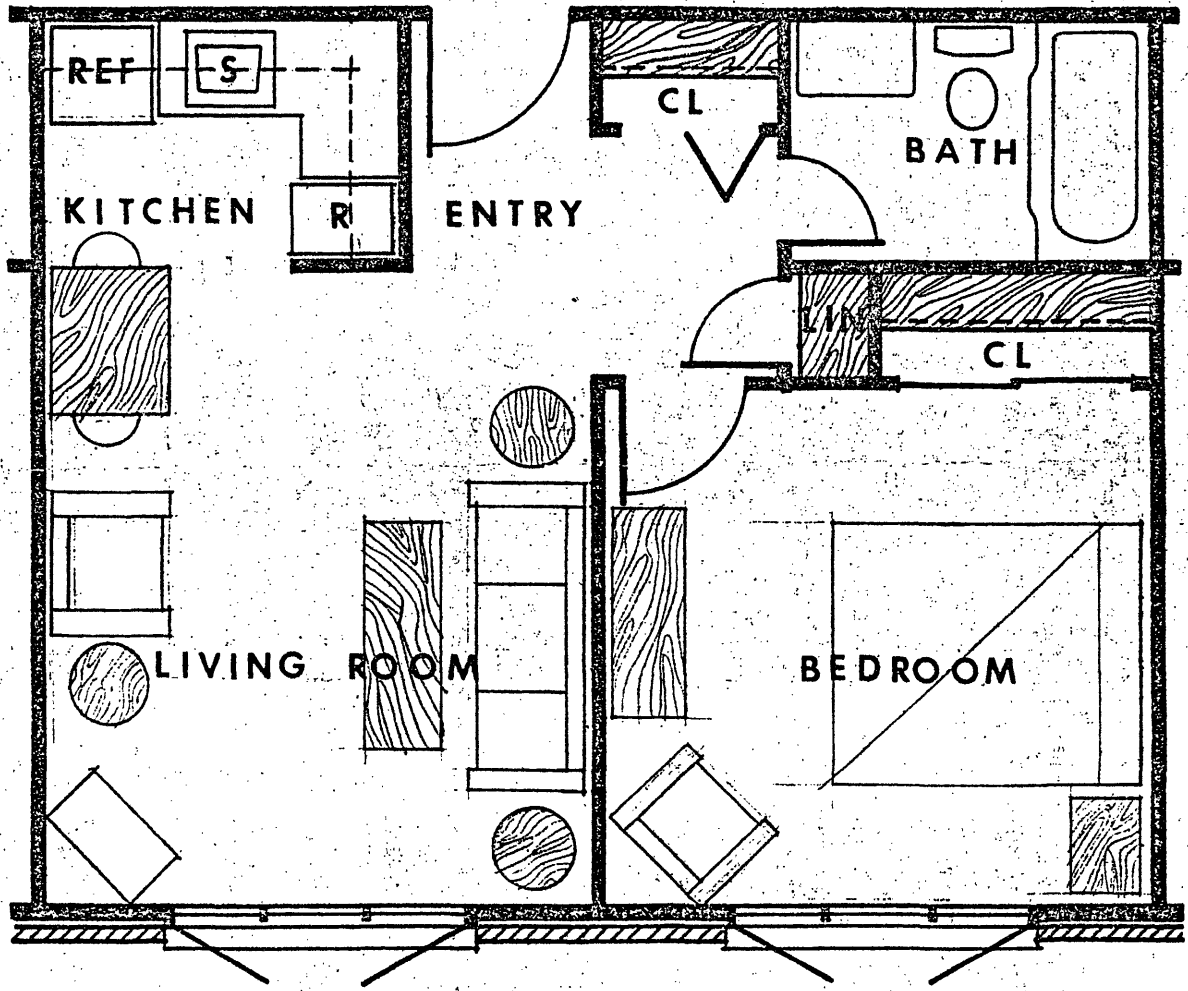


The Erwin Home  
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**Figure 5**

1971, 1973 Additions  
As Completed

# ADDITION TO THE ERWIN HOME



## TYP. APTS. LAYOUT

SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"

HIRSCH · KAESTLE · BOOS ARCHITECTS





The Erwin Home  
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Figure 8

Photo Key

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