

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only
received **NOV 27 1987**
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Torrington Fire Department Headquarters
and or common Old Firehouse

2. Location

street & number 117 Water Street N/A not for publication
city, town Torrington N/A vicinity of
state Connecticut code 09 county Litchfield code 005

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name City of Torrington
street & number 140 Main Street
city, town Torrington N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Office of City Clerk
street & number 140 Main Street
city, town Torrington state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1987 federal state county local
depository for survey records Conn. Historical Commission, 59 S. Prospect Street
city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Torrington's Old Firehouse is a rectangular, two-story masonry building located in a mixed commercial and industrial streetscape on Water Street, to the west of and separated by several modern buildings from the historic streetscape of lower Water Street. It was constructed in 1900 and 1901 in the Romanesque Revival style. The building is three bays wide in front and nine bays deep, with an irregularly-shaped, one-story addition to the rear approximately 30' X 50'. The entire building rests on a stone foundation with an exposed facing of rusticated granite ashlar. The walls of the building are of brick, laid in running bond throughout. Windows have sills and, on the side elevations, lintels of smooth granite. The building rises to a corbelled cornice, which is surmounted by a parapet with recessed panels, punctuated at the corners by stepped, pyramidal stone finials. A bell tower with large, round-arched openings occupies the northeast corner, rising from a deep, corbelled base to a heavy, battlemented parapet. The bell which originally hung in the tower is now in the collection of the Torrington Historical Society.

The building's three-bay facade is of variegated orange and red pressed brick. Three overhead vehicle bay doors with massive granite lintels occupy the first story. These are flanked by narrow round-arched niches to either side. The piers which separate the bays are articulated with corners of molded brick, and by means of corbelling they gradually project to carry over three pairs of round-arched windows on the second story. These round-arched openings with molded brick corners are also used in the first two windows of the side elevations on the second story. The pressed brick also wraps around the corners to suggest quoins. Quoins are also suggested on the corners of the bell tower (Photographs 1,2,3).

The interior is accessed by doors in the first bays of the side elevations. The first floor is taken up almost entirely by a 40' X 80' fire apparatus room with approximately 15' ceilings. Flooring in this room is of the Snow system.¹ It consists of three layers of fir, the lowest layer of subflooring laid at a diagonal and the upper two at right angles to one another. The floor is upheld by 10" X 10" posts and 12" X 12" beams reinforced by steel I-beams and concrete-filled steel columns which were added at a later date. The room is wainscoted from floor to ceiling with beaded tongue-in-groove Carolina pine which terminates at a crown molding. Windows are two over two with double-hung sash, molded surrounds, and cornices. The second floor is supported by chamfered 8" X 14" beams which run the width of the building over a central truss-supported 12" X 14" chamfered beam which runs the building's entire depth (Photograph 4). To the rear on the first floor are an entry to the addition, with a pit and hoist for working on vehicles, a 9' X 12' fire marshal's room, and a 9' X 8' dispatch room. The addition contains former work areas. Three stairways ascend to the second floor, one on each side and one in the rear from the gear room. All of them feature heavy, turned newel posts in a spiral pattern (Photograph 5).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Old Firehouse, Torrington, CT

Section number 7 Page 2

The second floor, now unused, was devoted to offices, social rooms, and living quarters for the resident firemen. In the front of the building, lighted by the large arched second-story windows of the facade and side elevations, are two large rooms, originally the parlor and reading room. The rooms are connected by a central panelled folding door and are finished in chestnut, with beaded wainscoting to a chair rail and molded window and door surrounds. In recent years the parlor was used as a recreation room while the former reading room on the east side of the building, was used as a dormitory for firemen.² The ceiling of the latter room has suffered plaster damage due to roof leaks (Photograph 6).

To the rear of the parlors a corridor, with beaded wainscoting of pine up to a chair rail, runs in a U shape with its ends toward the rear, where a back stairs and a small closet are located. Doors are panelled and have transoms (Photograph 7). In the central block of rooms created by the corridor are a large skylit card room, with beaded wainscoting and a light shaft, a large bathroom similarly skylit by means of a deep light shaft, and smaller rooms which served as storage and battery rooms (Photograph 8). On the opposite sides of the corridor, facing the outside of the building, are eight small bedrooms and a kitchen. There are four 10' X 10' bedrooms on each side of the corridor. The kitchen was originally a larger bedroom occupied by two drivers. Throughout the floor, cast-iron radiators are original and feature a variety of ornamental patterns.

The attic is accessed at the rear of the second floor by an old fire ladder. It contains storage rooms and the six trusses comprised of 10" X 12" members which support both the roof and the long central spliced beams in the ceiling of the first floor by means of long 2" diameter iron tie rods (Photograph 9).

The basement of the firehouse contains hose storage rooms and an acid room where battery acid was stored, one of the two original coal furnaces and a coal bin, and the long wooden racks used for drying fire hose.

Alterations to the building have been minimal. On the first floor, the gear room occupies space where eight horse stalls and a box stall were originally located. The panelled folding vehicle bay doors have been replaced by standard overhead doors. On the facade of the building, letters spelling out "TFD 1900" which originally occupied the central crest above the parapet have been removed, and one of the three original pyramidal stone caps is missing. In the rear, the one-story service addition was built about 1905 and occasioned the conversion of a rear door on the east elevation into a window opening.

1 Torrington Register, February 22, 1901

2 Interview with Captain John Herpich of Torrington Fire Department
May, 1987.

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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Criterion C

Specific dates 1901 **Builder/Architect** Architect: Charles S. Palmer
 Builder: Hotchkiss Bros. Co.

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Torrington's Old Firehouse is significant as a very well-preserved example of a firehouse of its period, built in the Romanesque Revival style and incorporating innovative features in construction and organization of space as well as fine materials and workmanship (Criterion C). The building is also significant to the history of Torrington as the city's fire department headquarters from the time it was built in 1901 until 1980, and as an expression of local architectural and building skills.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

During the nineteenth century, Torrington developed from a small manufacturing village into a diversified industrial and retail center for the surrounding rural region. Urban growth was concentrated in the village of Wolcottville, which in 1886 was chartered by the Connecticut General Assembly as the Borough of Torrington. To replace the informal and inadequate bucket brigades which were serving the borough as fire protection, citizens of Torrington in 1887 built a wood frame firehouse and organized the Torrington Fire Department consisting of two fire companies, Crystal Hook & Ladder Company and Excelsior Hose Company. However, rivalries quickly developed between the two companies and on the recommendation of Chief Dayton the two companies were merged into Mutual Fire Company No. 1 on October 20, 1888.

The fire company grew to more than 50 members by 1900 and the present Old Firehouse was authorized by a borough meeting held April 11, 1900. It was completed in February, 1901. The former building was moved back on the site and was later moved again off the property. Bronze letters which spelled "TFD 1900" were cast by the local Turner & Seymour Company from metal salvaged from more than 50 fires and from coins and other metal collected by local children, and were mounted on the crest of the building's facade. An 1800-lb. fire bell was purchased from the Menelly Works in Troy, New York, and placed in the bell tower. About 1905 a one-story addition providing work areas for mechanics was constructed in the rear (Photograph 3).

ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

The building's design and construction incorporated advanced ideas. The truss system which supports the roof also supports, by means of long iron tie rods, the central support beam of the first floor ceiling. The first floor, which held heavy fire apparatus, is supported by 12" x 12" beams and three layers of wood flooring. The second story, planned as living and social space for the firemen, is well-lighted and ventilated. The two large rooms could be converted into a single large space by means of folding doors, and afford fine views of the city through the large arched windows in the front of the building. The card room and bathroom are illuminated naturally by means of skylights and long light shafts.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property .25

Quadrangle name West Torrington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	5	4	2	8	0	4	6	2	9	2	4	0
Zone				Easting				Northing						

B

Zone				Easting				Northing						

C

Zone				Easting				Northing						

D

Zone				Easting				Northing						

E

Zone				Easting				Northing						

F

Zone				Easting				Northing						

G

Zone				Easting				Northing						

H

Zone				Easting				Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

The Old Firehouse is identified as Lot 7 on the attached copy of the Torrington Tax Assessor's Map. It represents the historic boundaries of the property, as recorded in the Torrington Land Records, 56:387, in City Clerk's

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries Office, City Hall

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William E. Devlin, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Torrington Preservation Trust date May 29, 1987

Mark McEachern, Director

street & number c/o Torrington Historical Society telephone (203) 482-8260

city or town Torrington state Connecticut

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 October 27, 1987

For NPS use only

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


Keeper of the National Register

date 12-31-87

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Old Firehouse, Torrington, CT

Section number 8 Page 2

The firehouse was originally wired for electricity and it was used in innovative ways. The alarm automatically released the horses from their stalls in the rear of the first floor. The horses trotted forward to their places at the head of the trucks, above which harness was suspended from the ceiling. When the horses were hitched up, the front doors could be swung open electrically by a switch.

The building shows excellent workmanship and materials, and is almost completely intact. Tongue-in-groove beaded pine wainscoting is used throughout, but in the formal fire company rooms the wainscoting is rich chestnut. Original hardware and radiators are present, each cast iron radiator having a different ornamental pattern. Although there has been some damage to the brick at the northwest corner of the building, the extensive use of corbelling and molded brick create texture and visual interest.

The architect of the firehouse was Charles S. Palmer, who was employed by the Hotchkiss Brothers Company, the building and millwork firm which built the structure. Palmer also designed the Palmer Hotel across Water Street from the firehouse, creating a complementary pairing of buildings.

The building's style is eclectic, but the extensive use of round arches and the heavy masonry effect of the bell tower with its battlemented parapet is Romanesque.

The Old Firehouse served as Fire Department headquarters until 1980, when a new fire station was constructed on a lot next to it. The old building continues in partial use as a vehicle storage facility for both the fire and police departments.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Old Firehouse, Torrington, CT

Section number 9 Page 2

Bailey, Bess and Merrill, The Growth Years, Torrington 1852-1923,
Torrington Historical Society, 1976.

Chief Engineer's Report, February, 1904. At Torrington Historical Society.

Torrington Fire Manual, Bridgeport: Taft Press, 1909.

Torrington Register articles: April 27, 1900, February 15, 1901,
February 22, 1901.

Miscellaneous photographs, postcards, and clippings on file at
Torrington Historical Society.

Interview with Captain John Herpich, Torrington Fire Department, May, 1987.

