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NATIONAL REGISTER

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 Plainfield Civic District

2. Location

street & number Watchung and Crescent Avenues, Sixth Street  not for publication

city or town Plainfield  vicinity

state New Jersey code 034 county Union code 039 zip code 07061

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.)

*James Hill* \_\_\_\_\_ Date 5/11/93  
Signature of certifying official/Title  
Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources/DSHPO  
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 *Delores Byers*  entered in the National Register Date of Action 6/17/93

**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.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
4	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
1	0	objects
5	0	Total

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city hall

RECREATION/sports facility

RELIGION

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/city hall

RECREATION/sports facility

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19th & 20th CENTURY REVIVALS:

-Georgian Revival

-Jacobethan

-Collegiate Gothic

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick, concrete

roof asphalt, slate

other \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

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

**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** N/A  
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- 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.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Government

Planning

**Period of Significance**

1915-1928

**Significant Dates**

1915-19

1922-23

1927, 1928

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Multiple

**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):** N/A

- 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 repository:

Plainfield Public Library

Plainfield Civic District  
Name of Property

NJ Union County  
County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** ±2 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

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

3 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |  
Zone   Easting   Northing  
4 |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |   |

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**

name/title Robert P. Guter, Director

organization Acroterion date August 1992

street & number 161 West 73rd Street telephone (212) 799-0156

city or town New York state NY zip code 10023

**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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The Civic Historic District (see Map A) lies in the northwestern section of the City of Plainfield between the business district to the south and west and residential neighborhoods to the north and east. The center of the district is the intersection of Watchung Avenue and East Sixth Street. Parts of East Fifth and East Seventh are also included within the district boundaries. The terrain is flat. Sidewalks are concrete and mature street-trees are numerous. At the front of City Hall plaza are two street lamps, ca. 1920. They are the district's only historic street furniture.

All three of the district's buildings face Watchung Avenue. At the east end of the district, at the intersection of Watchung and Crescent avenues with East Seventh Street is the Plainfield War Memorial. The southwest quadrant of the City Hall lot is landscaped as a small park (Photo 1). Behind City Hall is a parking area bordered by mature trees on the west.

Immediately east of the War Memorial stands the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church (Photo 2). Although just outside the district boundaries, the church is an important visual element of the district for reasons explained in the Significance Section. It is part of the Crescent Avenue Historic District, already entered into the National Register of Historic Places. The church is the essential point of connection between these two complementary districts.

All three of the district's buildings are contributing, as is the War Memorial. They are described as follows:

[#1]      Plainfield City Hall (1915-1919)

Peck & Bottomley's free interpretation of the Georgian style resulted in a rectangular building three stories high with a seven-bay facade and a flat roof (Photo 3). The architects overcame the potentially awkward proportions produced by site and program by means of several design solutions. First, they treated the third story as a separate attic, distinguishing it from the mass of the building by facing it in a different cladding material and designing the principal, Doric-inspired cornice so that it caps the second story instead of the third. Second, they designed an unusually emphatic focal point for the facade, one that establishes a strong vertical emphasis. It consists of a colossal tetrastyle Doric-derived entry portico above which sits a thirty-five foot tile-clad lantern, one of

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many such features inspired by the Choragic Monument of Lysicrates.

The brick walls of the principal stories are laid up in Flemish bond above a raised concrete basement. Ornament is executed in limestone and cast stone. Principal ornamental features consist of colossal pilasters that articulate the facade, a pair of Roman-trophy lamp standards flanking the entry, a pair of classical urns on the roof, bas-relief designs above the ground-floor windows, which depict griffins guarding a doubled letter "P," and rectangular bas-relief panels on the east and west elevations (Photo 4).

The ceremonial entry shielded by the portico is a double-height, double-leaf door reached by a broad flight of granite steps. These were installed in 1984 to replace the deteriorated original steps. At the same time the small "plaza" from which the steps rise was laid with brick pavers. Directly opposite the plaza are the Y.M.C.A. and the Seventh-Day Baptist Building (Photo 10). The entablature above the entry portico is inscribed:

Erected By The People  
To Inspire Zeal For The Common Welfare  
And Dedicated By Them To The Cause of  
Just and Capable Government

The steel frame of the building is infilled in at least some locations with brick, a condition revealed by the deterioration of several interior wall surfaces. At the back of the cross-axial plan is a grand staircase (see attached floorplan) that rises to the third floor (Photo 5). In the library (southwest corner, ground floor) original paneling and other decorative features and finishes are intact. The mayor's office (northwest corner) has been divided into two rooms but its original architectural fabric is largely intact and can be restored. On the second floor the domed ceiling of the former courtroom is obscured by a dropped ceiling. Many pieces of furniture and some lighting fixtures designed for the building by Peck and Bottomley (see representative architect's drawings) survive.

Overall, the integrity of the interior has been compromised superficially by a series of alterations common to institutional buildings that have had to accommodate altered uses over a long period of time. The plan, however, remains intact

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but for a few reversible subdivision walls. Most features and finishes are restorable. The integrity of the exterior has fared better but materials conservation is needed. A detailed assessment of the building can be found in a preservation plan prepared for the city in May 1992 by Short and Ford and Partners, Architects, and Heritage Studies.

[#2] Plainfield Young Men's Christian Association (1922/23)

Situated on the south side of Watchung Avenue at the corner of East 6th Street, the Y.M.C.A. stands next to the Seventh-Day Baptist Building (Photo 11) and directly opposite City Hall. The main block presents a three-story, seven-bay facade to the street, raised on a high basement (Photo 6). The remaining elevations are similar in treatment but range in height between one and three stories, with variable bay treatments. A variety of brick treatment is found, including Flemish bond, basketweave, and different geometric patterns. Windows are 1/1 sash of different sizes. The roofs of all the sections are flat.

Virtually all of the building's decorative features are lavished on the facade. Its focal point is a projecting five-bay, flat-roofed limestone vestibule reached by a flight of broken steps with wrought iron balustrades. Both the high base and the walls are rusticated. At either end is a round-arched door; between these are three 1/1 sash separated by a pair of freestanding limestone columns indebted to the Greek Corinthian order. Above the doors and windows and decorating the door embrasures are brick-and-cast-stone compositions of swags and roundels that produce a mosaic-like effect. The door openings are now equipped with double-leaf anodized aluminum doors.

The facade windows are trimmed with limestone lintels or with scotia-molded surrounds. A brick parapet rises above a boxed copper cornice. The fireproof construction consists of a steel frame with 12' brick walls.

The interior is a typical mixture of administrative offices, a large gymnasium, handball courts, and small residential rooms. Most of these spaces have been altered a number of times. Although the changes are cosmetic and therefore easily reversible, the result is an interior without much visual connection to its original designer's intention. The vestibule floor, laid with small, brick-like glazed terra-cotta tiles, gives some indication of the quality of the original finishes.

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At the rear of the original building, facing East 6th Street, is a one story cement wing, ca. 1969, with an eight-bay arched facade. This and the original sections of the building are in good condition.

[#3] Seventh-Day Baptist Building (1928)  
(now Everett C. Lattimore Building/City Hall Annex)

Sited next to the Y.M.C.A (Photo 11), this building is composed of two radically distinct sections, two buildings, really, connected originally by a narrow hyphen. The front section is historicist while the rear is frankly utilitarian.

The Jacobethan Revival front section faces Watchung Avenue (Photo 7). It is a narrow rectangle three bays by three bays and three stories in height. The ridge of its slate-clad gable runs parallel to Watchung Avenue. The brick walls are laid up in English bond and trimmed with limestone.

The facade is composed in a manner typical of the Jacobethan Revival, with two identical bays projecting beyond the facade plane to frame the entrance. Here, the bays are treated as oversized oriels, springing from the facade above the first floor windows. Above each oriel rises a steep cross gable with a loophole window near the apex. The principal windows of the oriels and throughout the building are grouped leaded-glass casements. The double-leaf wooden facade doors are framed with limestone ornament which incorporates the building's name in Gothic lettering.

Interior detailing is nominally historicist but much simpler in feeling than the exterior. Molded window and door surrounds and plain plaster walls predominate. The floors of the main level are terazzo. Integrity and condition are good.

The rear section is a flat-roofed building constructed of reinforced concrete walls and floors, five bays long (Photo 8). The walls are inset with decorative brick panels, but are occupied primarily by large horizontal multipaned industrial windows. Although the building rises only one floor above grade a second full story, lighted by the same kind of industrial windows, is made possible by deep areaways. The interior of the main floor is one huge space without internal walls.

On the east, between new and old sections, the City of



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Plainfield added a ramped entrance and a semi-octagonal brick stair tower after acquiring the building in 1983. The main-level windows of the rear building have been modified by inserting new glass into the original openings without changing the size of the apertures. The ramp, stair tower, and new windows are sensitive responses to the character of the original building.

[#4] Plainfield War Memorial (1927)

In addition to a flagpole (Photo 2), the memorial is composed of two parts. The base is a tier of four circular steps fitted together from curvilinear slabs of polished pink granite. From the center of the top step rises the second part, the flagpole base (Photo 9). It is a four-stage composition beginning with a classical column base of polished pink granite. From this base rises a tapered bronze drum, bearing on its surface a stylized depiction in bas relief of embattled Greek warriors. Atop the drum are clustered four bronze eagles which support the final stage, a cluster of bronze acanthus leaves from which the flagpole rises.

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The Plainfield Civic District meets National Register Criterion A as an illustration of the development of the City of Plainfield from a dispersed 19th-century suburb to a city whose civic and institutional aspirations assumed built form early in the 20th century. The district meets Criterion C because its buildings and its war memorial are significant expressions of civic pride coupled with artistic accomplishment.

#### Suburb to City

Plainfield's prominence as a New Jersey suburb can be traced to 1864, when the Central Railroad of New Jersey stimulated growth in this section of the state by acquiring its own rails into Jersey City and connecting with ferry service to New York. These improvements made Plainfield more accessible for business and residential purposes. Population growth after the Civil War was steady and impressive. Between 1880 and 1900 the population had nearly doubled, and from 1900 to 1910 it increased from 15,369 to 22,550.

During the last quarter of the 19th century residential neighborhoods arose full of neat middle-class dwellings as well as more ambitious houses of the villa class. By the turn of the century the connection between railroad accessibility and desirable suburbanization was made clear by Gustav Kobbe, who wrote in his guidebook, The Central Railroad of New Jersey:

The streets run in broad avenues, shaded by superb trees, with lines of fine residences and ample, well-kept grounds on either side. Closely trimmed lawns, flower beds and shrubs vary the level expanse. This part of the city seems to have been developed as a whole, and with the one purpose of making it unsurpassed for spaciousness and beauty. 1

The city was also gaining a reputation for its climate, thought beneficial for sufferers of respiratory ailments. In 1886, in an attempt to promote these salubrious associations, Thomas W. Morrison, publisher of the local newspaper, had begun to use the slogan "Colorado of the East." Since Denver, Colorado, was known as the "Queen City of the Plains," Plainfield's charms were soon tied to the name "The Queen City." By the beginning of the 20th century boarding houses, hotels, and resorts abounded. According to one source, "Within easy driving distance are Newmarket Lake, and Washington's Rock, 539 feet above sea level, which commands a view of the Brooklyn Bridge, and all the hill and dale between." 2

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The combination of new residential neighborhoods, resorts, and a growing downtown made Plainfield the core city for several surrounding communities. Its prosperity, beauty, and even its size (six square miles) gave rise to a spirit of local boosterism not without objective foundation. But despite institutions like a collection of thriving churches and a public library which moved into its own building in 1886, there was no adequate focus for civic pride, for Plainfield had no city hall.

#### City Hall

By the turn of the century the city's growing population and prosperity were straining municipal services and calling into question the old modes by which services like fire protection were delivered (see nominations for Central Fire Headquarters and Fire Station No. 4). Despite these changing conditions, city offices and chambers of the Common Council continued to be housed in a series of rented spaces in various commercial blocks, including the Cutter Building (home to Krewson's Billiard Hall) and by 1902 the Smalley Building on North Avenue. 3

Plans to remedy this lack had begun to take form as early as 1900, when the Common Council passed legislative permission to construct a municipal building. The ceiling on the fiscal authorization was \$300,000, proof that Plainfield's years of making do had sparked grandiose civic ambitions--at least in some quarters. 4 Disputes over location and cost, however, postponed the project repeatedly.

After further controversy a new mayor took up the cause. In 1915 Leighton Calkins named a committee to select a site. It is from Mayor Calkin's administration that we can trace the gradual development of the present-day civic district. Natural forces pushed the selection committee's search into a particular area, for the city's business district had already begun to shift from North Avenue to Front Street between Cherry Street (now Park Avenue) and Peace Street (now Watchung Avenue). In addition to the proximity of downtown, Watchung Avenue led west toward one of the city's finer residential neighborhoods, anchored by the Crescent Avenue Prebyterian Church.

After years of controversy, the selection committee wasted no time. Their recommendations led to the purchase of a site on December 6, 1915. The lot, at the corner of Watchung Avenue and East Sixth Street, was acquired from Mrs. Elizabeth Brooks for the sum \$31,000 and measured 283.47 by 224.85 feet. The size of the original parcel was augmented later by the addition of four

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smaller lots. 5

By February 17, 1917 the basement and foundation for the new city hall had been completed, occasion for a festive cornerstone-laying celebration. Official speeches symbolized how important this event was to Plainfield's sense of its own municipal image. Mayor Calkins reminded the audience that if the building were beautiful "it will show our civic pride, and if unostentatious and of simple design it will show our disdain for mere display and our purpose to dedicate it to useful service." 6

Instead of signalling what everyone expected would be the start of a quick and brilliant completion of this long-sought municipal goal, the cornerstone ceremony marked, instead, the beginning of a drama so unexpected that a bronze plaque in the lobby summarizes it for all to read. 7 Against a background of municipal concern over the fiscal realities of the project, serious delays began when the general contractor went broke, leaving unpaid a \$13,000 bill for stone purchased from the Monahan Stone Works of Newark. Monahan tried to collect from the city, which refused outright, since it had already paid the contractor a sum that included the cost of the stone. Unwilling to absorb the loss, the Monahan Stone Works on October 8, 1917, persuaded the International Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers Union to order a strike until the city capitulated. 8

The city retaliated by presenting charges to the Union County Grand Jury, which eventually indicted John J. Monahan, who had been Essex County Sheriff, and six others on charges of attempting "to cheat and defraud the City of Plainfield." 9 Still without a contractor in 1918 the city took over the project itself, naming John S. Dahl, a member of the Common Council, as superintendent of construction.

Even after the city assumed the role of general contractor delays were unavoidable. For one thing, labor difficulties had not evaporated. A February 26, 1918 letter from Mayor Calkins to John S. Dahl was read into the minutes of the Building Committee (vol. 3, p. 67). In it, the mayor took a strong stand, instructing Dahl that "you are authorized to . . . employ labor on the 'open shop' principle, if you find that the hostility of any organization prevents the City from finishing the work . . . if as now appears union men are not to be permitted by their organization to work for us."

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Labor negotiations were further complicated by the simple difficulty of securing materials. The minutes of the Building Committee dated May 14, 1918 (p. 171-171) reported that Palen's Sons, suppliers of interior trim, were unable to meet deadlines because "the Government considered the work they were doing to be nonessential and consequently they were finding it almost impossible to get lumber as the Government was taking all that could be turned out for shipbuilding purposes."

Harried by labor problems and material shortages Dahl and his building committee met more than one hundred times before city hall was thrown open for public inspection on January 1, 1919. The original construction estimate of \$100,000 had climbed to almost \$200,000.

#### The City Beautiful

Plainfield was hardly unique in these years in its search for a dignified public image to match its increasing wealth and pride. The decades that saw the Queen City's steady growth in population and prosperity were the same decades that saw an explosion of Beaux-Arts-inspired civic projects elsewhere. With a combination of public monies and private patronage, aspiring cities throughout the country were attempting to enoble their centers with libraries, museums, city halls, and courthouses. Added to the purely civic realm were symbols of commercial triumph executed on an imperial scale.

Beginning in 1908 with Daniel Burnham's Union Station in Washington, D.C., American railroads adorned American cities with stations of unprecedented grandeur. By 1936 the nation was to see construction of two dozen new state capitols. New Jersey municipal buildings are part of this trend. Like Plainfield, many of the state's cities had operated out of makeshift or rented quarters in the 19th century, but urban and suburban growth had forced change. Paterson, Trenton, New Brunswick, Newark, and Montclair were a few of the places where notable city halls, firehouses, and related municipal projects were built during this period.

In spite of impressive single buildings, the planning aims of the City Beautiful Movement were concerned more with urban interrelationships. In practice, however, it was only the largest urban centers that could command the power and money needed to execute the combination of building ensembles and civic

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opens spaces that the designers of the American Renaissance envisioned. New Jersey can boast of no comprehensive, fully realized City Beautiful projects. Significantly, the state's last opportunity for such a monument was lost at the same time that Plainfield's City Hall was in the works. In 1916 former Governor Franklin Murphy and John Cotton Dana clashed so violently over the location of McKim, Mead and White's competition-winning design for a "Newark Memorial Building" that the civic center was never built. 10

Despite the lack of full-blown City Beautiful accomplishments, many New Jersey towns improved existing civic sites during this period, or at least capitalized on siting opportunities when circumstances permitted. In Morristown, for example, McKim, Mead and White's St. Peter's Episcopal Church of 1911 with its Parish Hall by Bertram Goodhue had established a presence on South Street so strong that Edward Tilton copied its Gothic Revival style when he designed the Morristown Library next door in 1917. William Welles Bosworth used these buildings to create an axial relationship for the white marble palazzo he built for Theodore Vail across the street, a mansion that became the Morristown Municipal Building not long after its completion in 1918. Although this group of buildings was less than a fully realized City Beautiful civic center, it was a powerful civic focal point for a town of fewer than 17,000 people.

It is in this light of earnest but compromised New Jersey civic ambitions that Plainfield City Hall and the civic historic district need to be understood. The aspirations and even the language of the City Beautiful movement did not take long to influence local decision-makers. In 1909 the Board of Trade released a promotional booklet titled "Plainfield, New Jersey, the City Beautiful." Sometime soon after 1918 the Chamber of Commerce joined in with "Plainfield, New Jersey, Beautiful, Progressive." During those same years the city was engaged in a host of improvements typical of the City Beautiful agenda. These included street widenings, municipal park projects, the extension of permanent pavements to replace the dirt streets of the 19th century, and storm and sanitary sewer lines. 11

Chief among these improvements, however, at least in terms of symbolic visibility, was City Hall. The site chosen for the new building was at the edge of the central business district. To the north was a residential neighborhood. Just east of the site stood the towering Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church of 1872,

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1872 (Photo 2), built in the French Gothic Revival style. As Watchung Avenue ran east past the city hall site, it widened to take advantage of a broad intersection. This street design made it possible to view the church from a distance appropriate to its great height, a vista enhanced by the tree-lined corridor of Watchung Avenue (see historic photo A).

When completed, the new city hall (Photo 3) accomplished two things beyond its own presence: First, it established the potential for a strong line of demarcation between the residential quarter north of Watchung Avenue and the commercial area to its south; second, it created a line of visual tension between itself and the church which enhanced the presence of both.

Other institutions were quick to grasp the nascent civic potential created by church and state. In 1922, just three years after City Hall was completed, the Young Men's Christian Association purchased the lot at the southwest corner of Watchung Avenue and East 6th Street, where it constructed a three-story building (Photo 6) to replace its antiquated facilities on Front Street. The Y.M.C.A. was one of the city's most venerable social service organizations, active in Plainfield since 1867. Its decision to relocate directly opposite City Hall (Photo 10) was an expression of belief in a new locus of public life for the city. The fact that this location was formally recognized as a significant one was emphasized by a contemporary description: "Situated opposite City Hall and in a neighborhood which is being constantly improved by the construction of modern edifices, the new Y.M.C.A. will add still further to the beauty of the center section of the city. 12

In 1928 the Seventh-Day Baptist General Conference followed the lead of the Y.M.C.A by building a new headquarters immediately adjacent on the west (Photo 7). The headquarters was significant because it continued a strong New Jersey association as one of three initial centers of growth for English-speaking Sabbatarian Baptists (the others were Rhode Island and Philadelphia) and because the new building combined a number of significant functions. Not only was it the center for the conference's eight associations and several denominational agencies, but it included a museum and library as well. Perhaps most important, its large, utilitarian rear wing (Photo 8) housed the printing and publishing operations of the American Sabbath Tract Society, a subsidiary of the conference. It was here that two of the standard sources on American Sabbatarianism were

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published: The Sabbath, by Alva J.C. Bond and The Sabbath: Symbol of Creation and Re-Creation, by Herbert E. Saunders. 13

Together, the Y.M.C.A. and Seventh-Day Baptist Building created a strong urban street-wall (Photo 11) that played up the civic presence of City Hall and enhanced the corridor-effect that drew the eye to the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church and the small park-like space in front of it (Photo 2). This axial relationship led to a focal point that seemed ready-made for civic ornament. Even before the Seventh-Day Baptist Building had been completed that space became the location of a striking civic monument. A committee of seven, including Mayor James MacMurray, had been hard at work on a memorial to the dead of the Great War. The Plainfield War Memorial was dedicated in the small park in front of the church on November 11, 1927. A towering flagpole rising from a sculpted base set on a tier of circular steps (Photo 9), the monument bears this simple inscription: "In memory of those who gave their lives in the service of their country. Nation shall not lift up sword against nation neither shall they learn war any more." 14 Located at the center of the broad intersection between church and city hall, the siting of the memorial and the dominant vertical line of its flagpole reflect the assured City Beautiful intelligence of its designer.

With the dedication of the War Memorial and the completion of the Seventh-Day Baptist Building the public identity initiated by the dedication of City Hall and carried forward by the Y.M.C.A. was finally complete--until a civic catastrophe resulted in the final opportunity for a City Beautiful-type relationship in the district. In 1931 the Presbyterian Church burned, leaving only the ruins of some of its walls. The congregation rebuilt the next year. They chose to reproduce the footprint, the massing, and the silhouette of their beloved historic building. The Late Gothic Revival mode they agreed on for the new church, however, is characterized by pale stonework and stripped-down ornament. The overall impression is indebted to the work of Ralph Adams Cram and Paul Cret--about as Beaux Arts Classic as a Gothic building can get. Although the church lies just outside the boundaries of the Civic Historic District and within the boundaries of the Crescent Avenue Historic District, it acts as a kind of visual fulcrum between the two and is an important feature of both.



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Architects and Sculptor

Plainfield City Hall is the result of the coalescence of reformist ideas in politics and in architecture. Typical of the reformist era's public projects was the arrangement of architectural competitions. Designed to assure an objective choice of talent while at the same time avoiding accusations of graft and corruption, competitions were used widely in American municipal projects of the teens and 1920s. 15 Plainfield's City Hall competition was on the ambitious end of the scale for a municipality of its size. Eleven architects from New York and New Jersey were invited to submit anonymous sealed designs to a jury which met on April 27 and 28, 1916. The entrants were Parish & Schroeder; Peck & Bottomley; Tracy & Swartout; Hill & Stout; Delano & Aldrich; Robert D. Kohn; Armstrong, DeGelleke & Wendehack; Warren & Clark; E.D. Litchfield; March & Gette; and Wilder & White. Laurence F. Peck (1882?-1951) in association with William Lawrence Bottomley (1883-1951) were awarded the contract by unanimous vote. 16

The architects produced a free interpretation of the Georgian style that might be termed "Modern Georgian." It is a significant example of the search for a fresh expression of native American architectural traditions during the 1910s and 1920s. Peck's subsequent work is relatively unknown. Although his name is not recognized immediately, Bottomley went on to an important career, as Constance M. Greiff has shown:

William Lawrence Bottomley, FAIA, became not only a distinguished practitioner in the Colonial Revival style, but also a frequent commentator on American architecture, both as a contributor to Architectural Record and as chairman of the editorial committee for Great Georgian Houses of America. Plainfield City Hall is Bottomley's earliest large commission. It is also comparatively rare among his works as a public building; most of his commissions were for private houses and country estates. 17

A less distinguished but thoroughly competent exercise in neoclassicism is the Y.M.C.A., by Alex Milne and Arthur Smith. Its neighbor, the Seventh-Day Baptist Building by Crowe, Lewis and Wick, was designed in the Jacobethan Revival style. Thus the district's three buildings (and the Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church, an important part of the district visually although

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outside its boundaries) sum up the two competing architectural fashions of the day which left such a lasting mark on New Jersey suburbs: the neoclassicism of the Colonial/Georgian revival and the medievalism of the Gothic Revival and its associated modes.

18

The Plainfield War Memorial displays the most explicit connections with the artistic impulses of the City Beautiful Movement. It was the work of a talented American sculptor, Gaetano Cecere (1894-1985). Born in New York City, Cecere was an exponent of the emerging "American School." He studied with H.A. MacNeil and at the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design. In 1920 he was the recipient of a scholarship to the American Academy at Rome. His work includes plaques for the United States Capitol, a commemorative medal for Princeton University, war memorials for Astoria, Long Island and Princeton and Clifton, New Jersey, as well as monuments in Montana, Texas, and Wisconsin. An etcher and lecturer as well as a sculptor, Cecere exhibited at the National Academy of Design and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, both of which awarded him prizes, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art. 19

### Conclusions

The Plainfield Civic Historic District embodies political and artistic strains that define New Jersey's transition from 19th-century suburban growth to a maturing interest in the provision of municipal services and the struggle to create new architectural styles and new civic environments to express public aspirations. City Hall illustrates reformist trends in municipal government and is the work of a distinguished American architect. The War Memorial, by a talented American artist, typifies the effort to forge a native American sculptural tradition in the service of public art.

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7. The text of the plaque reads as if meant to ward off the criticism of future generations.
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17. Constance M. Greiff in Plainfield City Hall Preservation Plan, prepared for the City of Plainfield by Short & Ford & Partners and Heritage Studies, May 1992, 13.

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18. The architects of the Y.M.C.A. and the Seventh-Day Baptist Building are identified in City Building Permit Records now on deposit at the Plainfield Public Library.

19. Cecere's careeer can be pieced together from entries in: Peter Hastings Falk, ed. Who Was Who in American Art. Madison, Ct.: Soundview Press (1985); Patricia Pate Havlice. Index to Artistic Biography. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press (1973); Alice Coe McGlauglin, ed. Dictionary of American Artists, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Poughkeepsie, N.Y.: Apollo Books (1982).

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Verbal Boundary Description

The district boundary begins at the NW corner of City of Plainfield Tax Map Lot 8, Block 604 and runs to the SW corner of the same lot; it then runs east to a point directly opposite the NW corner of Lot 3, Block 835. From that point it runs south to the SW corner of Lot 3, Block 835 and then east to the SE corner of the same lot. From the last point it runs SW along a line of convenience that connect the SE corner of Lot 3, Block 835 with the NE corner of Lot 5 in the same block.

From the last mentioned point the boundary runs south along the easterly lot line of Lot 5, Block 835 and then east to the SE corner of Lot 4, Block 835. It then extends north along the east lot line of the aforementioned lot to its NE corner; then across East 6th Street and along the southern sideline of Crescent Avenue until it reaches a point determined by the intersectio of the centerline of East 7th Street with the southern sideline of Crescent Avenue.

From this point the boundary proceeds north along a line of convenience determined by the centerline of East 7th Street until it reaches a point determined by this line of convenience and its intersection with a line of convenience determined by an extension of the southern sideline of Watchung Avenue; thence along said southern sideline until it reaches the SE corner of Lot 8, Block 604; thence north along the same lot's eastern lot line and west along its northern lot line to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification

The district includes three civic/institutional buildings and a monument that clearly express symbolic public purposes by their size, scale, and ornament. Adjacent buildings date from earlier and later periods and serve residential or commercial purposes, uses clearly reflected in sizes and materials different from the district's buildings. Only one adjacent building serves a related purpose, the Salvation Army Building at the NE corner of Watchung Avenue and East 7th Street. It dates from the 1960s, however. Part of the Y.M.C.A. lot, used for surface parking, is not included in the district because it was a later property addition with no associative history connections to the district.

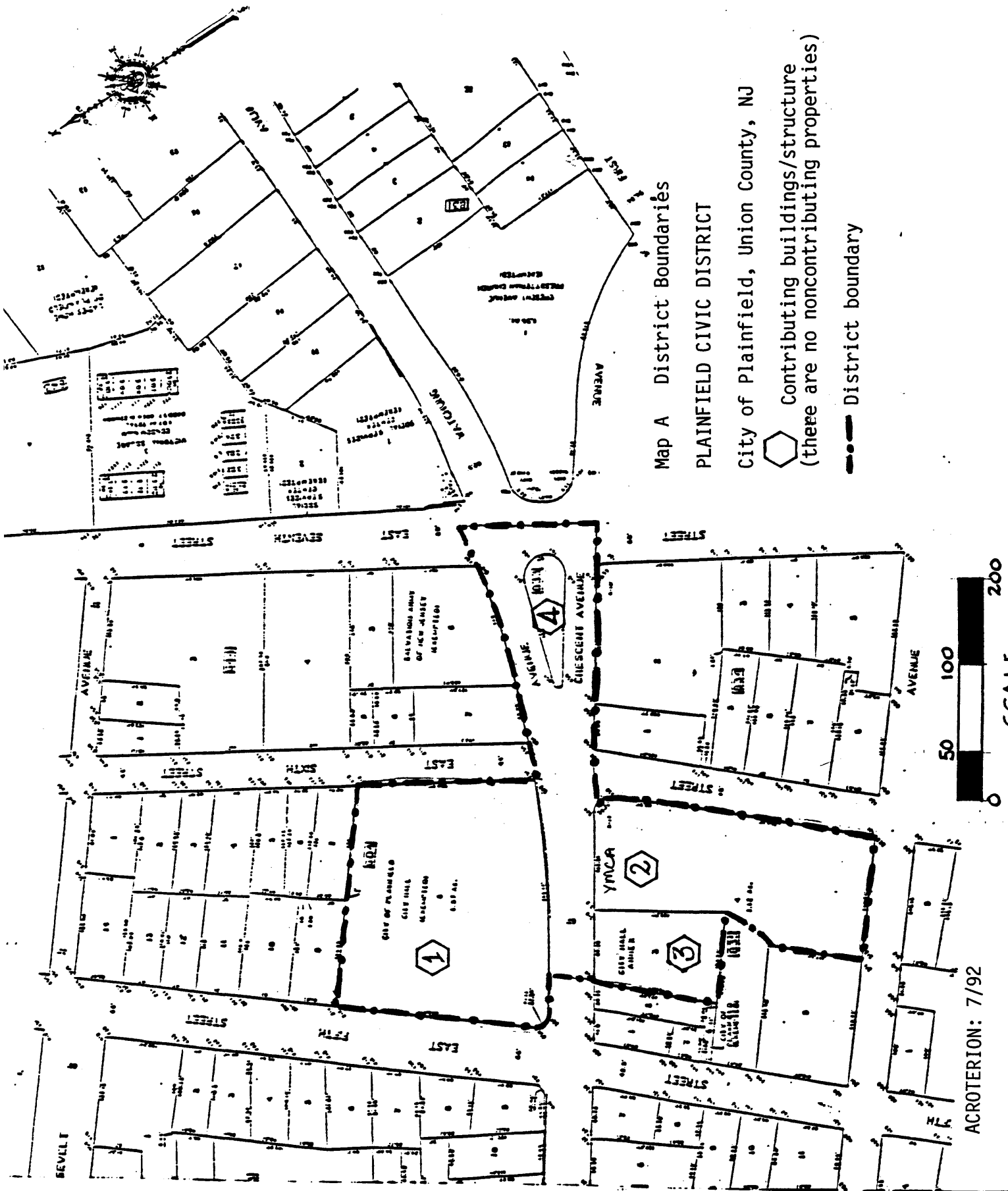
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Photographer:              ACROTERION  
Date:                        July 1992  
Location of negatives:      City of Plainfield  
                                 Planning & Community Development  
                                 515 Watchung Avenue  
                                 Plainfield, NJ 07061

1.      City Hall Park, City Hall at left, Y.M.C.A. at right.  
View looking east.
2.      War Memorial with Crescent Avenue Presbyterian Church  
behind. View looking east.
3.      City Hall. View looking northeast.
4.      City Hall, bas relief panel on east elevation. View  
looking northwest.
5.      City Hall, staircase at second floor. View looking  
northeast.
6.      Plainfield Y.M.C.A. View looking west.
7.      Seventh-Day Baptist Building (now City Hall annex), front  
wing. View looking southwest.
8.      Seventh-Day Baptist Building (rear wing). View looking  
northwest.
9.      Plainfield War Memorial. View looking east.
10.     Y.M.C.A. (left) and Seventh-Day Baptist Building from City  
Hall Plaza. View looking southwest.
11.     Y.M.C.A. (left) and Seventh-Day Baptist Building. View  
looking west.



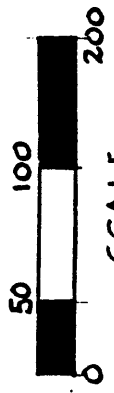
Map A District Boundaries

PLAINFIELD CIVIC DISTRICT

City of Plainfield, Union County, NJ

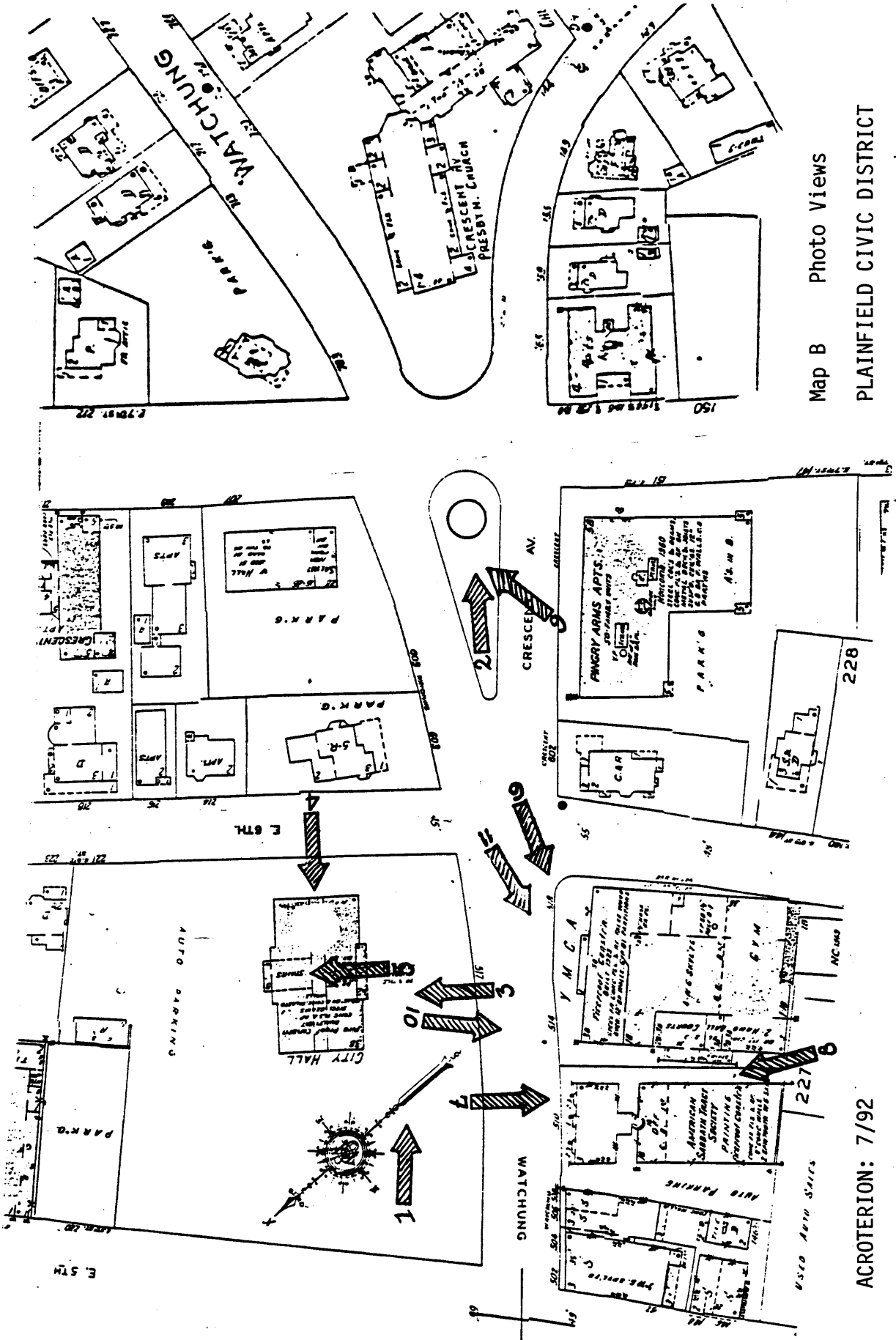
Contributing buildings/structure  
(there are no noncontributing properties)

District boundary



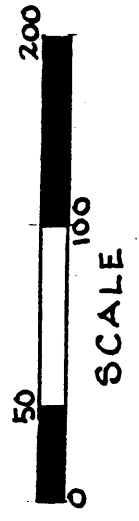
ACROTIERION: 7/92



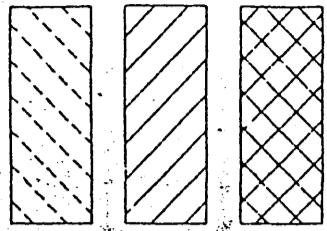


Map B Photo Views  
 PLAINFIELD CIVIC DISTRICT  
 City of Plainfield, Union County, NJ

ACROTERION: 7/92



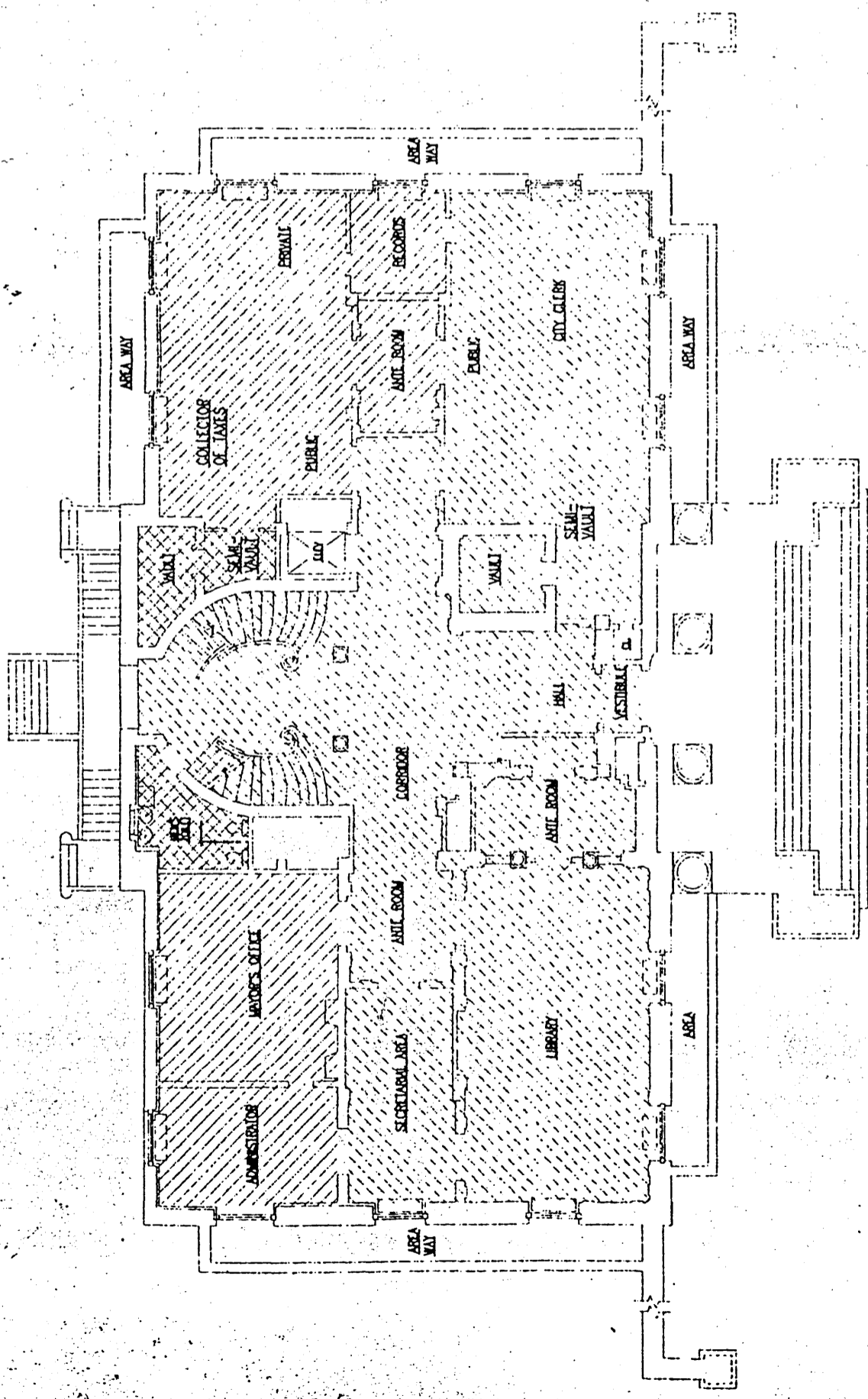
**LEGEND**



CLASS I RESTORATION

CLASS II RESTORATION

CLASS III RESTORATION



**FIRST FLOOR PLAN**

SCALE: 1/16" = 1'-0"

**RESTORATION PLAN  
CLASSIFICATION DESIGNATION**

PLAINFIELD		PLAINFIELD		NEW JERSEY	
MUNICIPAL BUILDING		MUNICIPAL BUILDING			
Union County		Union County			
FIRST FLOOR PLAN		FIRST FLOOR PLAN			
		JOHN C. MORRIS ASSOCIATES CONSULTING ENGINEERS 166 PATTERSON AVENUE SHREWSBURY, N.J.			
SEC'D AS NOTED	DRAWN BY JRK	CHECKED BY RDG	DATE ---	PROJECT NO. 36-376	SHEET NO. A-2
		P. E. Reg. No. 9648 engineer			