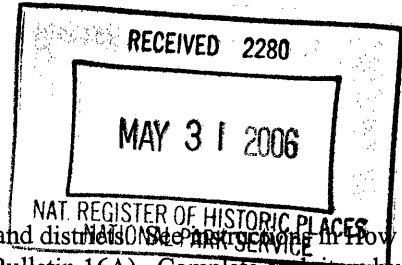


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. 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 any 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 Westport Bank and Trust Company

other names/site \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 87 Post Road East not for publication N/A

city or town Westport vicinity N/A

state Connecticut code CT county Fairfield code 001 zip code 06880

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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.)  
Jennifer Aniskovich 5/5/06  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Jennifer Aniskovich, Executive Director, Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism  
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

**Westport Bank and Trust Company**

Name of Property

**Fairfield, CT**

County and State

**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): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of the Keeper \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_  
*John D. Savage* 11-6-06

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)  
count.)

- 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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> 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)

COMMERCE/TRADE/financial institution

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

WORK IN PROGRESS

COMMERCE/TRADE/store

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup> AND 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS/Neo-Classical Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof built up (membrane)

other limestone

**Narrative Description**

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

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Westport Bank and Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT

Section 7 Page 1

The Westport Bank and Trust Company, a two-story, Neo-Classical brick building erected in 1924, is situated in downtown Westport, one block to the east of Main Street and the Saugatuck River. The second home for this 152-year-old institution, the building occupies a prominent position at the intersection of Post Road East (U.S. Route 1) and Church Lane (Photograph 1). Fully conforming to the triangular shape of its corner lot, with a truncated corner at the west end, the bank serves as an anchor for historic commercial buildings to the east and north (Exhibit A; Photographs 2, 3). They include the Westport YMCA, a half-timbered, Tudor Revival building, across Church Lane on the opposite corner, and a continuous row of historic commercial structures on the south side of Post Road East across from this intersection.

The Westport Bank is constructed of load-bearing brick masonry laid in Flemish bond with mortar joints raked to a uniform depth (.25"). The façade, which faces south on Post Road East and contains the main entrance, has five bays in the main block and three bays in the slightly recessed wing on the east end (Photograph 4). The similar but longer Church Lane elevation, which faces northwest and conforms to the angled sidewalk along the property line, has six bays in the main block, and a three-bay wing with one bay return at the northeast end (Photograph 5). A limestone watertable extends to the outside corners of the main block which are defined by brick quoining. A continuous corbelled limestone cornice with a dentil course, which extends around the entire façade including the wings, is surmounted by a three-foot high brick parapet.

The main entrance to the bank, slightly off-center on the south façade of the main block, has a limestone surround, consisting of a full entablature and Corinthian-order, engaged columns resting on plinths (Photographs 6, 7). A rectangular transom above the recessed double glazed door displays leaded tracery. The round-arch brick frame of the window above is detailed with a double row of headers, set off by limestone key blocks in the center and at the spring lines. That same detailing is found around the fanlight of flanking, triple-hung sash windows. Originally the lower sash contained 20 lights. Sometime after 1945, the six central lights in the bottom sash were replaced with a single pane. In the adjoining bays, two windows with limestone sills are set vertically within shallow, round-arched recesses; the top windows have fanlights, the first floor openings have gauged brick lintels. Casement windows are used instead of double-hung sash in the left-hand bay. Although the same limestone and brick detailing embellishes similar windows on the longer Church Lane elevation, the fenestration pattern of the main block there has three triple-hung, round-arched windows in the third through fifth bay and two separate sash windows in the sixth, or end bay.

With the elimination of the watertable and quoining, the wings seem to read like latter additions. However, as a 1924 photograph and the interior layout make clear, they were original construction. The fenestration, however, was altered in 1979. On the façade the top three sash windows are original, but the lower three were installed after the original secondary entrance there was removed. There is brick veneer (over concrete block) infill around and above the present windows. On the Church Lane wing, the three windows at the basement level replaced a similar secondary entrance at grade, but the rest of the windows are original.

In the single bay of the narrow west end elevation, sidelights flank a central double-hung sash at the first level and the single French door above, which opens onto a semi-circular, wrought-iron balconette. The round-arched transom contains a clock face.

Inside the main block, the two-story banking hall is detailed with a corbelled crown molding around the perimeter of the ceiling (Photographs 8, 9, 10). A terrazzo floor runs through the center of this space, bordered on the north side by the tellers' counter. A matching counter on the south wall was removed in the 1970s, when a glass-walled vestibule was

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Westport Bank and Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT Section 7 Page 2

added just inside the main door. Also at that time, blind wood fans were installed behind the window fanlights. Rectangular passageways centered in the west and east walls have full entablatures and square posts. In the walls above, slightly recessed, round-arched plastered niches contain leaded casement windows. The large, wood-framed, oil-on-canvas murals (10'x 12') on either side are attached to the wall (Photographs 10, 12, 13). Painted in 1965 by Robert L. Lambdin, a local artist, they depict scenes from Westport history, with the one on the left titled *Shipping on the Saugatuck*. The right-hand mural, a c. 1880 view of this same Post Road-Church Lane intersection, is called *Hotel Square*.

The main vault with a steel door is located on the first floor just beyond the center opening in the east wall (Photograph 10). Once directly accessible from the banking floor, the vault can now be reached through a narrow hallway with arched openings at either end. The more simply finished back offices, which occupied most of the rest of the building to the east, have been remodeled and rearranged several times, using permanent and moveable partitions. Dropped ceilings found throughout this area and in the mezzanine at the west end of the building conceal the ductwork for the heating and air conditioning system first installed in the late 1940s.

The president's office on the mezzanine level overlooks the banking floor from the casement windows on its east wall; the French door to the balconette is on the opposite wall. The room also features a corner fireplace with a simple shouldered surround (Photograph 11).

**Westport Bank and Trust Company**

Name of Property

**Fairfield, CT**

County and State

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

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

**A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.

**B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.

**C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.

**D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

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

Property is:

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

**B** removed from its original location.

**C** a birthplace or grave.

**D** a cemetery.

**E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.

**F** a commemorative property.

**G** Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

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

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

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

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

**Primary Location of Additional Data:**

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

Name of repository: Connecticut State Library;  
Westport Library; Westport Historical Society

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Westport Bank & Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT

Section 8 Page 1

**Statement of Significance**

Distinguished by an unusual plan and form, the Westport Bank & Trust is a well-preserved, idiosyncratic example of the Neo-Classical Revival style. In a remarkable convergence of historical associations, this Westport landmark embodies the economic, social, and artistic development of the suburban community that evolved here in the 1920s and 1930s. A "hometown" bank in every sense of the term, it was founded by Horace Staples, one of Westport's most prominent nineteenth-century citizens. The present building, which was designed by Charles E. Cutler, a local architect, contains murals executed by Robert L. Lambdin, a resident artist in Westport for more than 60 years. Although less than 50 years old, Lambdin's 1965 murals celebrating Westport's nineteenth-century history are the artistic legacy of the federal arts programs of the Depression era. Executed in the same genre of pastoral and historical realism that informed much of the public art sponsored by the Works Progress Administration and the U. S. Treasury Department in the 1930s, these rare private commissions by a prominent WPA muralist underscore the enduring popularity of the realist school in twentieth-century American culture.

**Historical Background and Significance**

Westport, which lies on both sides of the Saugatuck River, was carved out of Fairfield and Norwalk and incorporated in 1835. The area now occupied by downtown Westport was bypassed when the Old King's Highway was laid out in 1672. Although this major colonial transportation route passed through the early coastal settlements at Greenwich, Norwalk and Fairfield, it diverged to the north at Westport to ford the river upstream. However, in the early 1800s, with the construction of the Boston Post Road, which ran closer to the natural harbor at the mouth of Saugatuck, Westport began the transition to an external mercantile economy. For nearly 40 years, locally grown onions and other farm produce was shipped by sloop to New York City and other East Coast ports or transshipped to the West Indies, where it was exchanged for molasses, sugar and rum. Shipping declined with the coming of railroad in 1848, but by then a commercial business district was well established on the west side of the river, which included the first bank in town, the forerunner of the Westport Bank and Trust.

The bank was founded in 1852 by Horace Staples (1801-1897), a direct descendant of the Staples and Banks families, settlers of Fairfield in 1639. First known as the Saugatuck Bank, it was temporarily located in an existing building near the railroad station on the west side of the river, some two miles from the present center of town. Renamed the First National Bank, the following year it moved into a new building Staples erected at the west end of the Post Road Bridge over the Saugatuck. Now known as National Hall, the three-story brick structure (listed on the National Register in 1984), also housed the Westport Savings Bank founded by Staples in 1863, and had a community meeting hall on the top floor. The two institutions, which continued to operate with the same staff and under the same management, were combined into the Westport Bank & Trust, Inc. in 1913.

Staples, who became president in 1853 and continued to run the bank well into his 90s, was one of the town's more successful nineteenth-century entrepreneurs. He began his career at age 26 as a founding partner in Staples & (Edwin) Wheeler, one of the largest building supply companies in Fairfield County. In addition to owning a fleet of sailing vessels, Staples was instrumental in establishing the Westport Steamboat Association, which carried freight and passengers to New York City on a regular basis, and is credited with bringing the railroad to Westport, despite considerable public opposition. He and his partner, Morris Ketchum, the owner of a 500-acre shore estate in Westport, put up half of the money for the line. Originally planned as a spur line to Danbury, it ran on to Norwalk after that town agreed to pay half the cost. Staples helped found the Westport Historical Society in 1884, serving as its first president, and also donated the funds to build Staples High School, the first secondary school in town. Operating funds were provided by an endowment from the Staples estate, which ran the school until it was turned over to the town in 1909.

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**Westport Bank & Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT**

**Section 8 Page 2**

In the boom years after World War I, Westport was well on its way to becoming a suburban community. The Grand List soon exceeded \$89 million as the population rose to 6000 in the next decade. More than 100 new homes were constructed, including a number of country estates for New York City financiers. Among them was E. T. Bedford, a business colleague of John D. Rockefeller, who maintained a large estate with a race track in Green's Farms, the most expensive residential property in Westport. Other new homeowners were officials of the Westport Bank who built in the suburban neighborhood evolving along the Kings Highway (a National Register historic district since 1997). President Channing Harris built his Colonial Revival there in 1908 and treasurer Leslie Sniffen lived in a Four-Square erected in 1914. Older farmhouses often were rented or purchased by middle-class suburbanites who commuted to work in New York City or nearby cities in Connecticut. Among them were nearly 800 artists, actors, and writers who were living in Westport or nearby Weston by 1930.

With the accompanying new commercial and institutional development in this period, largely initiated and supported by an informal network of community leaders and philanthropists, a nucleus of the present downtown business district evolved on the east side of the river. Growth there was spearheaded by the construction of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in 1923 with funds donated by Fred Salmon, president of both the YMCA and the Westport Bank and Comptroller for the State of Connecticut. Built at a cost of \$150,000, the "Y" was endowed by E. T. Bedford, who also funded the construction of three Westport schools, including Green Farms School (also designed by Charles Cutler), and the elementary school that now serves as the Westport Town Hall.

In 1924 the Westport Bank, fast becoming the major commercial and residential lender in the region, relocated to its present site right across the street from the YMCA. The dedication of the new building, thoroughly covered in a special supplement to the *Westport Standard*, recalled the highlights of the bank's 90-year history and provided a detailed description of the building. Hailing Charles Cutler's design as "a perfect specimen of Georgian architecture," bank officials claimed that "no town in the United States ... twice the size of Westport could boast of a building equaling its cost [\$140,000], appearance and completeness of equipment." They were especially proud of the interior planning, said to represent the most progressive ideas in modern banking, and the specially engineered vault with a seven-ton door. The vault was designed and manufactured by the world-famous Mosler Safe Company, founded in Cincinnati, Ohio, in 1867. The firm was noted for many technological innovations, including the first use of manganese steel for vault doors rather than cast iron, used here and in many of the nation's most prestigious banks, as well as for inventing the first electronic alarm systems in the late 1920s.<sup>1</sup> With the design of advanced integrated electronic management systems in the 1970s, Mosler became the industry leader in government and banking security and remained in business until 2001.

The murals commissioned in 1965 appear to be a deliberate response to new developments in banking. Although bank officials have been compared to "modern Medicis"<sup>2</sup> for their support of a local artist, on the eve of industry-wide consolidation of the banking business, a potential threat to local institutions, these art works were obviously intended to reinforce the bank's longstanding relationship with the Westport community, which was made explicit in the bank's invitation to the public that appeared in the *Westport News*:

The bank that's been serving Westport since 1852 shows you what life was like back then!  
Come and see "Shipping on the Saugatuck" and "Hotel Square", poignant looks at our town in  
the 19<sup>th</sup> century, beautifully recreated by well-known mural painter, Robert L. Lambdin..."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In the 1950s, Mosler also designed the unique 50-ton "viewing" vault at the National Archives that protects the original copies of the nation's founding documents.

<sup>2</sup> Karel Yasko, Fine Arts Counselor, General Service Administration, 1983; Dorothy and John Tarrant, *A Community of Artists 1900-1985* (Westport-Weston Arts Council, Inc., 1985), p. 77.

<sup>3</sup> October 10, 1965.

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**Westport Bank & Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT**

**Section 8 Page 3**

By the 1970s the bank had a branch office in Saugatuck, which displayed a similar Lambdin mural, and a number of drive-up teller stations in Westport and Weston. Hudson United Bank, the successor institution with offices in the nominated building until early 2005, is now located in a modern facility across the street.

**Architectural Significance**

Charles E. Cutler (1881-1962), a regionally prominent architect and a graduate of Cornell University School of Architecture in 1906, began his professional career with the renowned architectural firm of Carrère and Hastings of New York City. As an associate, he worked on the firm's plans for the New York City Public Library. After establishing his own practice in Westport in 1914, Cutler was hired as the supervising architect for Yorkshire Village in Camden, New Jersey, the largest government-sponsored, wartime housing project produced during World War I. Resuming his private practice after the war, Cutler specialized in residential design, which ranged from modest suburban homes to country estate houses for prominent New York businessmen. Among the more important Westport commissions was a Georgian Revival house for Colonel James Hayes of Standard Oil in 1931, later the home of J.C. Penney, and a stone house for A. D. Whiteside, one of the founding partners of Dun and Bradstreet, and the company's office building in New York City.

Although much of the architect's early residential work had a limited stylistic range, by the 1920s Cutler's designs exhibited a greater freedom of expression. His first suburban houses (including his own home) in the Kings Highway North Historic District, while complimenting the older houses there and often highlighted by delicately scaled porticoes, were rather conventional examples of the Colonial or Federal Revival styles. In the architect's more mature less derivative work, there was less reliance on stylistic convention. As would later be evident in Westport Bank, styles were often freely interpreted or combined, as was the case in Cutler's eclectic design for the Westport home of George Tompkins. Although nominally a Tudor Revival, this brick and half-timbered house also successfully incorporates such diverse stylistic elements as gabled pavilions, a facade tower with battlements, and the rolled eaves of a Cotswold country cottage. This commission was followed by the 1923 Shambaugh House, a smaller stone Tudor Revival, in which Cutler took the asymmetry of this style to a new level. Located on Old Hill Road on the west side of the Saugatuck River, it was individually listed on the National Register in 1999.

Westport benefited from Cutler's professional expertise in several other ways. In addition to Green Farms School, he also designed the Fairfield Country Club and the firehouse. As a member of the Westport Housing Authority, in 1947 he designed two local moderate-income housing projects. Involved in town planning prior to World War II, Cutler helped draft the first zoning ordinance, and served as chairman of the Westport Planning and Zoning Commission when the zoning codes were revised and updated in 1953.

The design of the Westport Bank, which reflects Cutler's classical training as well as his more mature residential experience, is significant on several levels. A highly successful response to an exceptionally challenging site, the bank is also important as an unusual interpretation of the Neo-Classical Revival style. Despite the limitations imposed by the setting, Cutler produced a suitably monumental building of a scale that has remained sensitive to the evolving streetscape, which was largely residential when the bank was erected, and only gradually replaced by the existing historic commercial blocks. The characteristic simplicity of detail and shallow profiles of the Neo-Classical esthetic are still employed, but the stylistic conventions of formal balance and composition are subtly altered. Other architects might have tried to overcome the problem of the inherent asymmetry of a so-called "flat iron" building by limiting axial balance to the façade, but here the illusion of balance is maintained on two complementary elevations that take advantage of the odd shape of the property. Although confined to horizontal massing as an accommodation to the height of the prevailing streetscape, his elevations employ the tripartite division more commonly found in taller Neo-Classical structures. Here,



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although the horizontal line is emphasized by the heavy cornice that wraps across both elevations to integrate the wings, it is offset by the vertical thrust of the tall arched windows. The illusion of balance and monumental scale, however, is maintained through the careful placement of these standard classical design elements to reflect the spatial arrangement of the interior--most obviously on the façade, where the taller windows and classical entrance establish the location and scope of the two-story banking hall. Another example of this integrated organization occurs on the west end of the façade, where classical symmetry was sacrificed by substituting a blank brick wall for a window bay to accommodate a stairwell to the mezzanine level. The reductive simplification of the flanking wings makes a less jarring architectural transition to the more modest buildings on either side, an effect once heightened by the secondary entrances for employees. In fact, as designed by Cutler, with glass storefronts and engaged Doric columns, the wings almost read as separate commercial buildings.

The overall design of the interior established a suitable atmosphere for this self-proclaimed "small-town" bank, at once impressive and reassuring. In keeping with the serious business of banking, as expected, the main floor is formally scaled and detailed, a concept symbolically reinforced by placing the vault with its massive door in full public view of the customers. This formality is played off against other spaces with details taken from the architect's residential repertoire, "homey" touches to which any customer or employee could relate. From the corner fireplace and leaded casements in the president's mezzanine office to the detailing of the archways in the vault hallway, they all were derived from the Colonial Revival style.

### Artistic Significance

To understand the significance of the Westport Bank murals and the cultural role of the artist, Robert L. Lambdin, within the Westport community, it is necessary to explore the development of Lambdin's professional career as a muralist within the wider socio-economic context of American art in the twentieth-century, and how it was influenced by the federal art programs of the Great Depression. Unlike most of his Westport colleagues, Robert Lambdin was raised in the Midwest. Born in a sod house on the Kansas prairie to homesteading parents, Lambdin came of age in Denver, Colorado, where he attended high school and the Read School of Art. Like many artists of the day, he began his professional career as a newspaper illustrator. In the era before half-tone photographic reproduction was commonplace, Lambdin's drawings of breaking news events appeared in the *Rocky Mountain News* and the *Denver Republican*. After his marriage in 1911, Lambdin moved to Missouri to take a job in the art department of the *Kansas City Star*. He also taught newspaper illustration at the Art Institute there and studied with Charles Wilimovsky (1885-1974), a noted Midwestern landscape painter and engraver. By 1917 Lambdin had moved to New York, a mecca for artists in this period. Illustrators were in demand for books and magazines published in the city. Beginning at the bottom of the ladder with drawings for pulp magazines, Lambdin soon moved on to better paying jobs with *Collier's*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Harpers*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Redbook*. Lambdin continued to work as an illustrator after he moved to Westport in 1918.

The American art world was in state of flux in this period, largely due to the Amory Show of 1913, which profoundly altered the direction of American art. Treated as a freak show by the press and much of the public at the time, this first major exhibit in the United States of modern European and American art was a revolt against the art establishment, then represented by the National Academy of Design, whose members had long dominated the art schools and exhibition juries. Even though the modernist manifesto, the abandonment of any obligation to realistic depiction, appealed to many artists of the day, general acceptance of the modernist movement was delayed until well after World War II. A major contributing factor was, of course, the Great Depression, which had far reaching economic consequences, including a dampening effect on the international art market. Most art historians agree that while New Deal programs of the Roosevelt helped support literally thousands of struggling artists, federal policies tended to inhibit or limit artistic

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expression. For illustrators like Lambdin, with publishing in a slump, it was an opportunity to practice his craft, albeit on a larger scale, and ultimately launched his career as a muralist; for artists already experimenting with the avant-garde, “WPA Art” was at best a temporary stopgap, at worst, a “desertion of this wonderful new movement.”<sup>4</sup>

The major program for government-sponsored art was the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA),<sup>5</sup> which employed 5000 artists, producing more than 108,000 easel paintings, nearly 18,000 sculptures, and 2500 murals between 1935 and 1943. While the much of the responsibility for FAP was local and organized by town committees, murals and other decoration produced under the Treasury Section of Painting and Sculpture for new post offices and other federal buildings between 1934 and 1948 was closely administered by Washington.<sup>6</sup>

Treasury Section administrators, ever mindful of their role in establishing an American muralist tradition, aimed for a stylistic middle ground between the academic traditions of the past and modernist expression and established criteria for acceptable content, the latter, a more politically sensitive issue. Participating artists, largely restricted to historical vignettes that glorified American values, quickly learned to “paint for the Section,” which meant, as one Illinois director put it, “no nudes, no dives or social propaganda.”<sup>7</sup> A popular non-controversial theme for many new post offices was the history of mail transportation, the subject of Robert Lambdin’s 1934 mural in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Selected in competition with a field of 300 Connecticut artists, Lambdin created an exceptionally vigorous and dynamic triptych, with the dramatic arrival of a stage coach charging down the Post Road as the centerpiece, the first of his many “magical murals [that were] prime examples of the warmth and mastery that [the artist] brought to his painting.”<sup>8</sup>

WPA art flourished locally under the aegis of the Westport Art Committee (WAC), appointed by the first selectman in February 1934.<sup>9</sup> Robert Lambdin was one of the first ten artists selected out of the 40 professionals who registered for the program, which generated 34 art works (along with an extensive photographic archive) by 1938. Although the artists received federal government stipends, the town contributed just over \$3000 to cover the costs of framing, placement, and materials. Among the major works sponsored by WAC were Lambdin’s school murals: *Pageant of Literature* painted in 1934 for the Bedford Elementary School, now the Town Hall; and *The Spirit of Adventure*, originally a mural for the Saugatuck School, now located in the Great Hall at the Westport Public Library.

Highlights of Lambdin’s later career as a muralist included a two commissions by the Bridgeport Brass Company, first exhibited to the public in January 1944 at the Museum of Science and Industry in the RCA Building in New York. Becoming a virtual in-house artist for the firm, Lambdin also did portraits of company executives as well as scenes of workers on shop floors, and a final mural that honored employees who served in World War II and Korea. In 1953,

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<sup>4</sup> *A Community of Artists...*, p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> Program names (and initials) changed over time; the most common ones are used throughout this text.

<sup>6</sup> State directors were appointed and local postmasters often served as advisors, but every step of the process was reviewed in Washington--from preliminary sketches to full-size cartoons--and final payment depended on photographs of the murals in situ. This program was the genesis of the modern-day federal requirement to set aside one percent of construction costs for art in public buildings.

<sup>7</sup> Mary Gray, *A Guide to Chicago Murals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), p. xxvi.

<sup>8</sup> *Community of Artists...*, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> In its first year of operation, WAC was overseen by regional supervisors from the Whitney Museum in New York City and then the Wadsworth Atheneum in Hartford, but by 1935 the local chair was employed by the federal government as the official supervisor at a dollar a year.

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**Westport Bank & Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT**

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commissioned to paint a large mural to embellish the New Beekman-Downtown hospital in lower Manhattan, Lambdin employed an abstract Cubist design to group heroically scaled figures against impressionist views of the city, a strikingly modern work when compared to his much later murals for the Westport Bank.

At the time of their unveiling in 1965, the bank murals were praised as recreations of Westport history (Photographs 12, 13). While by all accounts *Shipping on the Saugatuck* and *Hotel Square* are historically authentic, based on months of research, there is little here of the stylized realism or symbolism that distinguished much of Lambdin's other mature work, both as a muralist and easel painter. Indeed, the retardataire, almost primitive mannerism of these murals may have been intentional—an attempt to recreate the popular historical realist school so closely associated with WPA art. So successful was this approach that many townspeople today assume these works were actually painted during in the 1930s. Indeed, in a recent published retrospective of the Westport art community, the bank murals were cited as evidence that Lambdin was one of the few muralists who worked both in federal art programs and for private patrons during the Depression.<sup>10</sup>

Out of all the twentieth-century artists who lived and worked in Westport, including some of the better known modernists of the day, it was Lambdin, the realist, who most appealed to popular taste. By always painting for his hometown audience in a readily accessible style, Lambdin captured the public's imagination. Even though many of his easel paintings and illustrations were critically acclaimed and still command respectable prices at New York galleries, long after his death in 1981 at age 95, the dean of the Westport art colony is mainly remembered for these magical murals. "Without ever knowing the man who came to epitomize the community's artistic heritage,"<sup>11</sup> grownups and children alike still respond to his commemorations of Westport history. Displayed at every turn in major civic buildings and the Westport Bank and Trust, these familiar cultural artifacts have become an integral part of everyday community life.

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<sup>10</sup> *Community of Artists* ..., p. 83.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

Westport Bank and Trust Company

Name of Property

Fairfield, CT

County and State

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of Property** Less than 1 acre

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	18	637540	4555560	3		
	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
2				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:**

**Reviewed by Matt Blood, National Register Coordinator**

name/title Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant

organization Cunningham Preservation Associates, LLC date 8/5/2005

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

city or town Middletown state CT zip code 06457

**Property Owner**

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

name David Waldman, 87 Post Road East Associates, LLC

street & number 61 Wilton Road telephone (203) 221 8148

city or town Westport state CT zip code 06880

**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.).

(8-86)

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

Westport Bank and Trust Company, Westport, Fairfield County, CT Section 9/10 Page 1

9. Major Bibliographic References

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"Historical and Architectural Survey of Westport." PAL, Pawtucket Rhode Island, 2000 for the Westport Historic District Commission.

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McCahon, Mary E. "Historical and Architectural Survey of Westport." Connecticut Historical Commission and Westport Historic District Commission. 1988.

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Tarrant, Dorothy & John Tarrant. *A Community of Artists*. Westport: Westport-Weston Arts Council, 1900-1985.

*Westport Bank & Trust: Annual Report 1979*.

Newspapers:

*Bridgeport Post*.

*New York Times*.

*Westport News and Town Crier*.

*Westport Standard, Supplement 1924*.

10. Geographical Data

**Verbal Boundary Description:** The boundaries of the nominated property are described in the Westport Land Records in volume 2483, page 97.

**Boundary Justification:** The nominated property encompasses the original boundaries of the above described lot, which have not changed since the building was erected in 1924.

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET**

**Westport Bank & Trust Company, Fairfield County, CT**

**Section Photo Page 1**

**List of Photographs**

Photographers: Cunningham Preservation Associates, LLC  
Adam Realty, Inc. Westport, CT

Date: 3 -5/2005

Negatives on File: SHPO

1. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, camera facing NE
2. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, (YMCA on L), camera facing NE
3. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, camera facing NW
4. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, Church Lane elevation, camera facing E
5. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, Post Road East elevation, camera facing NE
6. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, Post Road East elevation, main block, camera facing N
7. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, detail of main entrance, camera facing NE
8. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, banking hall, camera facing W
9. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST COMPANY, banking hall, camera facing NW
10. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST, murals in banking hall, camera facing E
11. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST, president's office, second floor, camera facing NE
12. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST, *Shipping on the Saugatuck* (mural), camera facing E
13. WESTPORT BANK & TRUST, *Hotel Square* (mural), camera facing E

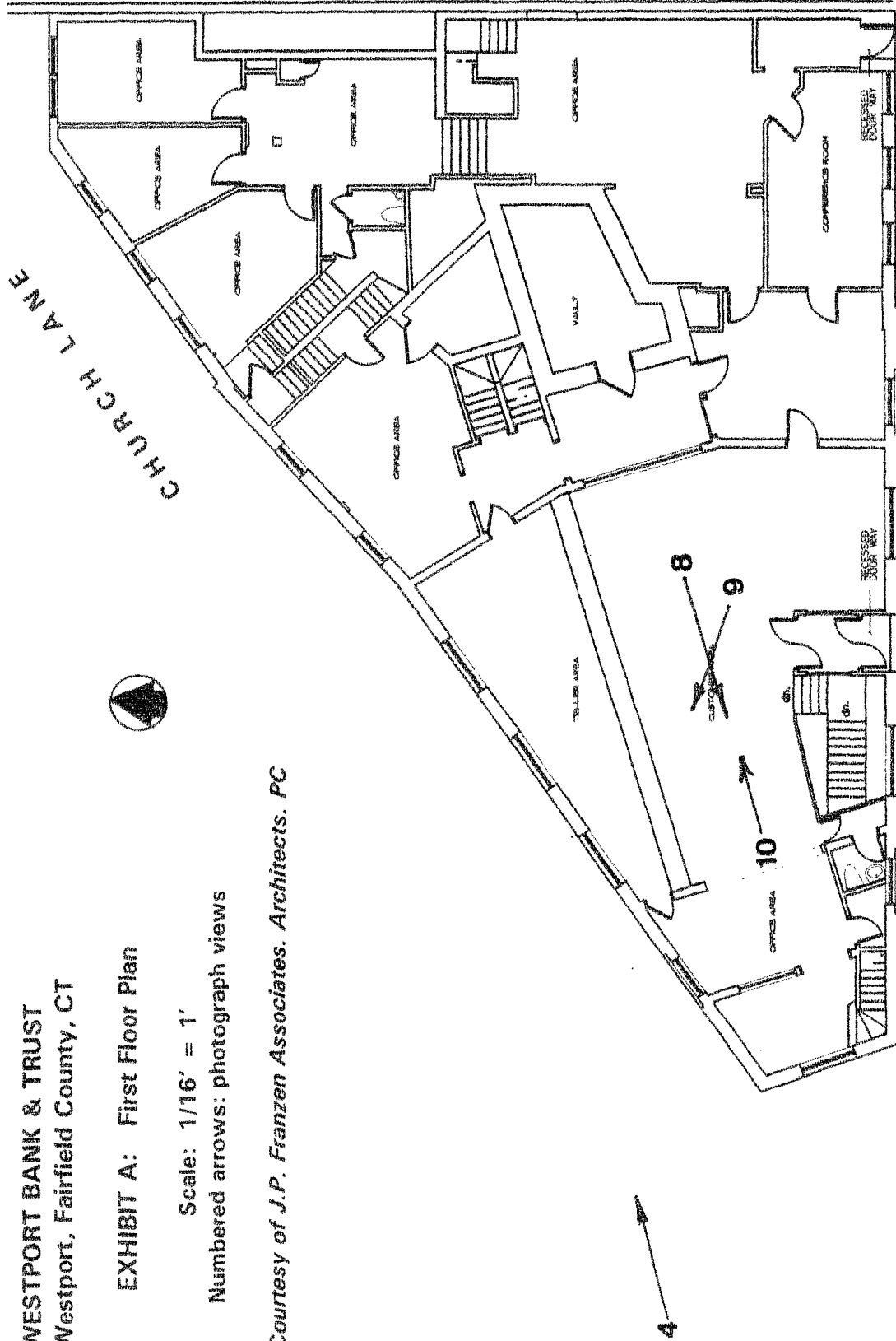
WESTPORT BANK & TRUST  
Westport, Fairfield County, CT

EXHIBIT A: First Floor Plan

Scale: 1/16' = 1'

Numbered arrows: photograph views

Courtesy of J.P. Franzen Associates. Architects. PC



POST ROAD EAST

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