

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

The attached property, the South Main and Washington Streets Historic District in Fairfield County, Connecticut, reference number 77001393, was listed in the National Register of Historic Places by the Keeper of the National Register on 12/16/1977, as evidenced by the FEDERAL REGISTER/WEEKLY LIST notice of Tuesday, February 6, 1979, Part II, Vol. 44, No. 26, page 7440. The attached nomination form is a copy of the original documentation provided to the Keeper at the time of listing.

Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places

1/26/2009
Date

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DATE ENTERED

Dec 16/77

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC South Main & Washington Street

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER 68 - 139 Washington Street
2 - 24 South Main (east side only) NOT FOR PUBLICATION
CITY, TOWN Norwalk CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT 4th - Stewart B. McKinney
VICINITY OF
STATE Connecticut CODE 09 COUNTY Fairfield CODE 001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME Multiple Ownership - see continuation sheet

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Norwalk City Clerk

STREET & NUMBER City Hall - North Main Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Norwalk

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Connecticut Statewide Inventory of Historic Resources

DATE

1975

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

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one

Lot Number	Owner	Address	Importance
BLOCK 43			
1	Rose Quittner & Nana Keogh	Pine Hill Road East Norwalk, CT	Critical
3	Shelley Construction Company	50 Washington Street South Norwalk, CT	Critical
10	Samuel Roodner, Inc.	128 Washington Street South Norwalk, CT	Critical
11	F. Bradford Taylor <u>et al.</u>	Canfield Avenue East Norwalk, CT	Critical
12	Elizabeth Calve & Josephine Gargano	413 West Avenue Darien, CT	Critical
13	Benjamin & Beatrice Polley	888 Main Street Bridgeport, CT	Critical
14	Everett S. Bulkley, Jr.	Pequot Drive East Norwalk, CT	Critical
15	Everett S. Bulkley, Jr.		Critical
16	104 Washington Street Association	104 Washington Street South Norwalk, CT	Critical
17	Arthur R. Freitag <u>et al.</u>	98 Washington Street South Norwalk, CT	Critical
18	Shelley Construction Company		Critical
19	Shelley Construction Company		Critical
20	Malcolm Golden	37 South Compo Beach Road Westport, CT	Critical
21	Norman Davidoff & Herbert Langrock	P.O. Box 477 Mgt. Serv. Dept. Hartford, CT	Critical

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two

Lot	Owner	Address	Importance
BLOCK 43 (continued)			
22	Shelley Construction Company		Critical
23	Stanley Joseleff	107 Grumman Avenue Norwalk, CT	Critical
24	Shelley Construction Company		Critical
BLOCK 24			
12	Mildred Fishman	Pine Hill Avenue East Norwalk, CT	Critical
13	Norwalk Company, Inc.	North Water Street South Norwalk, CT	Not critical
14	Norwalk Company, Inc.		Not critical
15	Martin J. Falk & Elliott B. Stoll	888 Main Street Bridgeport, CT	Critical
16	Max R. Lepofsky Trustee	Isaac Street Norwalk, CT	Critical
18	Cecilia Rosenfield <u>et al.</u>	123 Washington Street South Norwalk, CT	Critical
19	Connecticut National Bank	888 Main Street Bridgeport, CT	Not Critical
21	Connecticut National Bank		Not Critical
22	Connecticut National Bank		Critical
23	George Cooper	14 Tarone Drive Norwalk, CT	Critical
24	Norwalk Company, Inc.		Critical
25	Norwalk Company, Inc.		Critical

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three

Lot	Owner	Address	Importance
BLOCK 24 (continued)			
26	Copley Trading Company	31 W 47th Street New York, NY	Critical
27	Penn Central Transportation Company	6 Penn Plaza Philadelphia, PA	Not Critical
29	Unknown, probably Penn Central		Not Critical
RAILROAD BRIDGE	Trustees of Penn Central	466 Lexington Avenue New York, NY	Critical

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The South Main and Washington Street District is an L-shaped area of densely-packed commercial buildings dating from the last quarter of the 19th century and the early years of the 20th century. Most are brick and three or more stories high, and almost all make use of ornamental iron, either for storefronts, window trim, cornices or in one case, the entire main facade. The modal style is Italianate, either Renaissance or the more elaborate High Victorian Italianate; there are three which are Romanesque in inspiration, an ornate Second Empire vaudeville theatre, and a number of later structures which are less classifiable. All the buildings are of the same approximate scale and set-back from the street, creating a wall of commercial buildings that is quite cohesive.

The district is visually isolated from its surroundings. To the north is the railroad right-of-way, a four-track raised embankment. To the northwest, across the intersection, is the heavy railroad overpass and beyond that, a redevelopment plaza. The backs of the blocks are almost entirely parking space, most of which has been excluded from the district. Although neighboring streets have a few similar buildings, in general they lack the density, scale and functional interrelation of those in the district. The other side of South Main Street, for example, was a residential area throughout the 19th century; although there are commercial buildings there now, they are mostly two-story, 20th-century structures.

Alterations in the district have not been too severe. The most serious visual loss is the large vacant lot on the north side of Washington Street. Storefronts have been altered, but much original detail remains and probably a great deal more lies under the present facades. Interiors are nearly all changed. A number of minor structures (garages, etc.) have been appended to the rear of these buildings; since these do not relate visually to the district as a whole, they have not been discussed herein, nor are they shown on the accompanying sketch maps. Although occasionally renovations to the main facade have crept up to the second story, on the whole the district retains its early appearance.

The area is still a commercial center with apartments on the upper floors. There are many vacancies, however, and only a few of the buildings are in top condition. South Main Street is almost completely vacant now, and plans call for the demolition of these buildings, with possible rehabilitation efforts for Washington Street.

Individual Descriptions

The visual center of the district is the railroad bridge. Built in 1895 to carry the four tracks of the New Haven line above grade level, the bridge's heavy proportions, as well as the shadow cast over the intersection, dominate the view up either street and isolate the district from the rest of South Norwalk. Resting on abutments of rough-faced brownstone coursed ashlar, about 12' above the street, the bridge is a three-truss Pratt span with pinned connections. The center truss is 8 panels long, but because the ends each have one skewed opening, the side trusses have ten panels. Box girders form the uprights and top chord, heavy eye-bars the lower chord and diagonals. Except for the lattice portal bracing, the struts are quite light and seem principally intended to support the catenary. The approximate dimensions are 100' long, 25' wide (each of two portals), and 20' high.

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four

At the east end of the bridge is a related railroad structure, a small switch tower. Of brick and frame construction, its rectangular plan and gable-on-hip roof closely resemble the switch tower that once stood on the opposite corner before the tracks were raised. It may be that the top part of the structure was simply moved and raised up.

South Main Street

There are five buildings in the district on South Main Street. That on the corner of Haviland is the only frame structure in the district (Lot 43-1, part). It has a simple Italian Renaissance facade, three stories high, four bays wide, with plainly molded window caps and a bracketted cornice. A second-story central bay window is a later addition, as is the corrugated metal siding. The building is empty and extremely deteriorated. Although of some academic interest, its visual contribution to the district is moot.

The three-story, brick building next to it is also Renaissance, but high-style and more typical of the district. The building is 8 bays wide and appears to have been built at one time, although it is divided between lots 43-1 and 43-24. Above the segmental-arched windows are boldly projecting cast-iron caps resting on consoles. The cornice is also cast-iron (as are nearly all window caps and cornices in the district): it features dentils, modillions and large, widely-spaced curved brackets.

Its neighbor is the cast-iron building, the Comstock Brothers Clothiers, later known as Rogers and Stevens Store (43-23). It is 4 stories tall and has brick side walls. The style is High Victorian Italianate and features on each level four large "flat-topped arch" windows separated by columns which are ribbed on the lower third. The three tiers are separated from each other by strong projecting shelves. The bracketted cornice erupts into a rounded pediment over the central part of the building and is surmounted by a balustrade. It was erected in 1875.

In the same year, the Fairfield Fire Insurance Company Building (43-22) was constructed. The second-story of the facade of this four-story brick building has been altered by substituting a continuous band of glass for the original window grouping, still in place on the upper floors: a central group of three segmental-arched openings flanked by single windows. The levels are demarcated by strong projecting courses. The central feature of this building is the tall parapet with the building name and date cast into it. The parapet follows the basic grouping of the facade, with a broad pediment-like part over the central group and smaller embossed panels over the flanking windows, with pinnacles at the corners. Although there is an Italiante feel to the window shape, it follows no clear-cut style.

The building on the corner is a three-story brick Romanesque structure whose simple facade consists of two rows of round-arched window openings. There are 10 bays

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five

on South Main Street, four on Washington, and one oblique module on the corner. The windows are actually rectangular, the area within the arches being filled with patterned brickwork. Large, widely spaced corbels support the simple cornice. There is a small, boxy turret corbelled out above the corner; somewhat reduced from its original height, it rests on a broken pediment. The building was built in the 1880's on top of an earlier single-story building. Part of a plain iron storefront, perhaps dating from that earlier configuration, can be seen on South Main Street. The building is now largely vacant. It originally was a cigar manufactory, with retail stores below.

Washington Street, north side

The north side of Washington is less densely built up than the rest of the district. Vacant land at the west end was created in 1895 when the tracks were raised and the brick building on the corner was taken down. At the other end of the street was a much earlier frame residence used as a beverage store but really antedating the commercial development of the area; it was destroyed sometime this century. Vacant lot 24-13 was never built upon, at least in the 19th century. The vacant lots 24-19 and possibly 24-21 did contain 19th-century commercial buildings now razed.

The Old Well Cigar Company building is on the west end of Washington Street, north side (Lots 24-25, 24-26). This four-story brick structure is actually three buildings joined together, two behind the main facade, and a plain, gable-roofed factory ell at the rear. One can still read a pre-1895 advertisement for Old Well cigars here. The whole was built sometime around 1890 on the site of older, probably wood commercial buildings. In its present form the building is Romanesque in inspiration. Twelve windows are evenly spaced across the front at each level; those on the top story are round-arched whereas the other two tiers are rectangular. The facade is divided into thirds by piers running from the second story to the top of the building. The entrances on the ground floor were round-arched openings framed by rough-faced granite; one can still be seen in its original form. The lintels, arches and sills of the windows are also of granite, but dressed. Above the arcade formed by the top story windows is a solid band of corbelling which originally supported an elaborate parapet. At a subsequent date, however, it was replaced by a row of small windows lighting the attic story; the actual height of the building was probably unchanged. At the top is a narrow band of cast-iron ornament which apparently was part of the original parapet. In the 1890's, this building, also known as the Swartz and Corbett Block, was occupied by several stores among which was a branch of Norwalk's "Boston Store."

Next is the South Norwalk Trust Company Building (23-24), now used as offices by a local corporation. Its granite facade dates from about 1910 and conceals three

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six

adjoining three-story 19th-century buildings, all brick. Originally, the bank was one of these, with stores in the others. The present facade has seven sets of wide windows divided into five bays by rusticated piers. The third-story windows are slightly arched. Above is a very plain parapet. Like the 20th-century buildings in the district, this facade conforms in size, scale and set-back to the older buildings in the district. While less clearly of any historical style, they are related to earlier structures in that they are all products of a continuous period of intense commercial activity. They are not considered "intrusions."

Across from an intervening alley is the Sentinel Building (24-23), a two-story brick structure built sometime before 1899, originally the home of the South Norwall Sentinel. The facade is divided into three unequal parts by piers: round-arched single windows flank a larger, segmental-arched central window. There were formerly round-arched entrances on the first floor, which was reached by several steps. Now that a street-level store occupies the building, however, part of the original first floor openings are bricked up and show above the storefront. There is corbelling beneath the cast-iron stepped parapet which bears the building's name.

Adjoining it is the United Bank Building (24-22), a rather wide three-story brick building with granite-faced facade. Built sometime before 1899, the building is the most classically-inspired in the district. The piers which divide five sets of windows into three bays are treated as smooth pilasters. They support an entablature with a festooned frieze and a modillioned cornice. Originally there was a balustrade across the top. The third-story window openings are round-arched and have prominent keystones. Beneath them are three panels carved with elaborate swag motifs. The rusticated ground floor is now concealed behind a later marble facade. It is still on the bank.

Two vacant lots intervene before the next set of buildings is encountered. The first (24-18) is a three-story brick building whose date of construction is not known. Although it has the bracketed cornice common to the earlier 19th-century buildings, the arrangement of the windows in a nearly continuous band suggests a 20th-century design, or at least a considerable reworking of the facade.

Adjoining is another three-story brick building, 23-16, which dates from 1911. Its windows are also wide and arranged in a continuous band. Lighting an attic story is a central semi-elliptical window. On either side of it, a diamond-patterned band is worked into the brick. The building's parapet has a profile which suggests the Mission Style - a higher, curved center part with battlements on either side.

Across a driveway is the four-story brick Keeler Building (24-15). Its facade is divided into four bays by piers running the height of the building. The windows, eight across, are paired and have simple granite trim. The openings on the second and third floors are rectangular, while those on the top floor are round-headed. The cast-iron cornice is supported by brackets placed above the piers and is surmounted by urn finials on the ends and a large tablet with the building's name and date (1911) over the center.

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seven

The last two buildings on the street are almost exactly alike. Both are three-story brick Renaissance designs, 4 bays wide, and built around 1875. The caps over the segmental-arched windows, the sills and the bracketted cornice are all cast-iron. Although the two are joined, occupy one lot and have matching details, the eastern building is about a foot shorter than its neighbor, with most of the difference in the top story.

Washington Street, South Side

On the opposite corner of Washington and Water Street (43-10, part) is a three-story, brick Renaissance Revival building, three bays wide. Built around 1875, it has been a bar at least since the start of this century. Unlike other buildings in the district, its interior has remained virtually unchanged, with the bar, fixtures, tin ceiling and an impressive sports-photo collection preserving its historical atmosphere. The exterior storefront is also intact: tall, rather plain pilasters with rounded capitals frame four openings on the front and one around the corner. Cast-iron is also used for the sills and caps of the rectangular windows and for the cornice which is supported on four oversized brackets with smaller brackets in between. The window treatment but not the cornice is continued on the side wall, now some distance from Water Street which has been repositioned.

Sharing the same lot (43-10) is a three-story yellow-brick building that dates from about 1890. Five wide, full-height arches form an arcaded facade. Above them, the bracketted cornice swells slightly over each arch and recedes again over the piers where it is supported by consoles above which are small chimneys. The plane of the wall within the arches is recessed. The windows are further recessed and are grouped in threes, with a granite lintel and sill and brick mullions. The building appears to have been built in two stages: the cornice does not quite line up between the second and third bays from the left. Part of an ornate storefront can be seen on one door jamb.

Next is Hoyt's Theatre (43-26), an 1890's music hall now used for stores. The building is of brick, painted white, and is 3½ stories tall. Second-Empire in inspiration, its mansard roof is copper-covered and has a cresting along the top of the first slope. Three circular dormers are spaced along the front. Originally, the theatre had a central entrance portico with storefronts on either side. Although the portico was removed, part of the original iron facade can be seen on the sides: a frieze in the form of a balustrade, with centered festooned panels and above, a cornice with modillions. In the middle of the second-story of the facade is a group of three round-arched openings, each of which is divided into two arched windows with a small circular window above. The brick above the group is arranged in a saw-tooth pattern. On either side is a single arched opening, with a pair of rectangular windows and saw-tooth brick in the arch. In a niche above each is a sculptured bust, some goddess or pharaoh or vaudeville artiste. A stringcourse separates the second story from the third, which is reduced in height and plain: in the center three circular openings flanked by

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square side windows.

Next to the theatre is a pair of adjoining buildings (43-11 and 12) that are nearly identical. Both are three stories tall, brick, six windows wide, and date from the 1890's. The windows are paired off by slightly raised piers. Those on the second level are straight-topped with granite lintels whereas those on the top story are slightly curved with brick arches. The wall is corbelled out to bring the cast-iron cornice in the plane of the piers. The cornice is supported by acanthus-leaved consoles above the piers and is classically detailed, with a fan motif on the frieze and egg-and-dart moldings. The cornices of the two buildings are similar but not identical, differing in the moldings above the fans.

The next store (43-13) was originally a Woolworth's, built about 1915. It is two stories tall and brick with a concrete facade. The second-story windows form a band across the wide front, interrupted only by narrow brick buttresses which divide the facade into three parts. The building's parapet is plain except over the central bay where it forms a peak. Paralleling the profile of the parapet is an ornamental strip of brick, and centered below that, a small circular window lighting an attic story.

The next three lots have buildings which are all quite similar and contemporary, c. 1875-1885. All are three-story, brick Renaissance buildings with rectangular windows, fairly plain cast-iron lintels, sills and cornices. Numbers 43-14 and 15 are three bays wide and although of slightly unequal height, they have identical cornices, with four large supporting brackets and small drops in between. Number 43-16 is four bays wide and has a simpler cornice with only five widely-spaced brackets. It has been more severely altered: the second-story windows have been replaced by two wide openings and shutters have been installed. Glimpses of the original storefront can still be seen. The present occupant of Numbers 14 and 15, Fox Cycle & Hardware, dates back at least to the early years of this century, and another hardware firm began in 1886 in Number 14.

The next building, built around 1890, is brick and three stories tall, with its facade divided into two bays by slightly projecting piers. There are two wide openings on the second floor, each having a pair of plain rectangular windows. Above on the third floor are two arched openings, each containing a group of three narrower round-headed windows. There is a combination cast-iron cornice-parapet, with a typical bracketed cornice, pinnacles supported by corbels on the corner piers, and a triangular peak over the center of the building. In the 1890's this was a clothing store, Francis & Company.

A courtyard, formerly the site of a small commercial structure, now serves as a side entrance to an apartment building, the former Haviland House (43-3, part), one of the area's best hotels, built in 1887. This four-story brick building originally had ten rectangular windows spaced across its broad facade. Now, however, two of these at each level have been bricked in, and "gas-lamp" lanterns have been

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nine

installed where the windows were. Because the granite lintels and the sills, which are part of a continuous banding, have been left in place, the composition of the facade is not too drastically affected. A Romanesque appearance is created by saw-tooth brick bands between the windows and by the corbel table which supports the simple cornice. One pilaster, part of the original storefront, bears the maker's plate: Howell & Saxtan, Brooklyn.

Its neighbor on the same lot is a three story brick Renaissance design, four bays wide, built sometime before 1880. The cast-iron caps over the segmental-arched windows are decorated with dentils and circular bosses and rest, like the sills, on little consoles. The bracketted cornice is also cast-iron. The building has been fitted with modern sash consisting of one large upper pane and a small lower pane; the effect is in keeping with the simple lines of the Renaissance Revival.

The Morgan Hardware building (43-18) is next, a three-story yellow-brick structure. Four perfectly plain rectangular window openings are cut out of the facade at each story. The height of the building is increased by a simple stepped parapet above a band of corbelling: subtly worked into the brick is "1918 HARDWARE." Lanterns have also been added to the facade of this plain building; like the preceding two, it has recently been renovated as apartments.

Adjoining is the Roodner & Terris Block (43-19), a three-story brick structure built in 1925. Five "Chicago windows" are closely spaced across the wide facade. A parapet rises gradually to a peak over the three middle bays and is stepped over the end bays. The only decorative devices are a large rectangular tablet with the building's name set into the center of the parapet and smaller square tablets near the ends. Each has a frame of raised brick with granite corners.

The final building in the district (43-20) is another three-story brick Renaissance structure, six bays wide. The cornice has both a row of small brackets and widely-spaced larger ones. The straight-topped windows have iron caps and sills resting on consoles. The second-story windows have been replaced by three wide openings and there is a fire escape running down the front of the building. Around 1880 (before the corner building was raised) a large sign painted on the side wall proclaimed this building a "Branch of New York Washington Market."

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"/> 1800-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The primary significance of this South Norwalk area is that it is an extensive and cohesive collection of late 19th and early 20th-century commercial buildings. Although there are several buildings which have architectural interest by themselves, the district as a whole is important because it preserves without intrusions a typical turn of the century urban streetscape, one which could be found in any Connecticut city. Today, however, few places can match this district in the number of contiguous old buildings nor in the overall atmosphere created by the density of building, the variety of styles and the ornate facades. Indeed, one is struck by how similar the present appearance of the area is to that captured in early photographs. Although the district is experiencing the usual downtown problems assaulted by both blight and redevelopment, the buildings remain as products of the vital, expansive and diverse economy of the period 1870-1920.

Such a collection offers the historian an important opportunity to formulate ideas about commercial architecture, particularly that of the small but not isolated city. Because this was an age of pedestrians and streetcars, street frontage was critical to retail enterprise, and was at a premium. Therefore, buildings were mostly narrow and deep, and no valuable frontage was wasted. The commercial district evolved as a continuous wall of buildings of approximately the same height, scale and distance from the street.

A corollary of this building pattern is that commercial architecture became almost entirely concerned with the facade. This focus was practical, since no one would see the rear or side walls. Moreover, it was convenient to unite two or more buildings by giving them a new, common facade, thereby making a larger, new and prestigious building, rather than actually constructing a whole building. The bank building on lot 24-24 is an example. The penalty for facade-architecture, however, is paid at the end of the street: either a blank wall is exposed, as at the corner of South Main and Haviland; or the fancy window treatment (but not the cornice) is continued on the side wall, as on the corner of Washington and Water Street; or a whole new scheme is developed for the corner, hence the somewhat incongruous turret on the building on the corner of South Main and Washington (43-21).

Another facet of commercial architecture, well illustrated by buildings in the district, is the almost total design independence of the first floor exterior. The Sentinel Building (24-23) is an exception: second-story arches originally repeated the curve of first floor entrances now bricked in. Generally, however, the storefront could be rearranged to suit the business or conversely, the street-level facade could be retained when an entirely new building was built above it (# 43-21). This was a functional feature: the upper floors were put to a great variety of uses not necessarily connected to the downstairs businesses. Moreover, retail businesses of the period were subject to boom and bust, so that the retail space of a commercial block could not be planned too rigidly.

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South Main & Washington Street

8

ten

Further adaptability was given to commercial buildings, particularly the earlier 19th-century ones, by architectural styles which allowed modularity and therefore, expansion. Most of the pre-1890 structures are either Renaissance or Romanesque Revival: these buildings could easily be added to with more horizontal units if space permitted. For example, the Old Well Cigar Company is a pair of abutting buildings behind one facade. What is disturbing, however, is the number of cases in which buildings were obviously intended to match, but are imperfect. The yellow-brick arcaded building on 43-10 was built in two parts, but its cornices don't quite meet! Two other pairs, on 24-12 and on 43-15 & 14, are alike in detail but not equal in height. This practice is a mystery.

The later buildings in the district - those from about 1890 on - tend to be less easily classifiable as to style, although they sometimes have retained the bracketted cornice of Italianate inspiration. What seems most different about the later buildings, however, is their stronger vertical emphasis. The Francis & Co. Store (43-17), the United Bank Building (24-28), the Keeler Block (24-15) and the twins on lots 43-12 and 11 all have piers running the full height of the building, with the windows in a recessed plane. The windows seemed grouped vertically: only those on the top story are round-headed. Although they have pronounced cornices, the buildings seem capable of further upward expansion, at least stylistically. They are small-city cousins to the tall, often steel-framed commercial buildings of large cities. One might generalize by saying that the horizontally-repetitive styles of the earlier period were suited to the initial infilling of commercial areas, whereas these later, more vertical buildings, while no taller, are based upon designs which can expand upward, as in a mature, crowded downtown.

The district provides rich and abundant examples of the use of cast iron in 19th-century commercial architecture. It is used throughout - almost exclusively - for the ornate hoodmolds, cornices and parapets which provide the richness in Victorian architecture. Similarly, it was used for the highly decorative storefronts, many of which are at least partly visible. Cast iron allowed a maximum of intricate ornament, easy assembly (and disassembly), durability, and structural strength, all at low cost. It was a substitute for terra cotta and ultimately, for cut stone. The plethora of columns, moldings, fans, swags, vines and bosses found on these buildings would have taken an army of stonecutters. Cast iron was a mass production technology which responded to and helped perpetuate Victorian tastes.

The same considerations of economy and desire for architectural richness are found in the Comstock Brothers Store, the cast-iron building on South Main Street (43-23). Because there are hardly a handful of these buildings left in Connecticut, this is one of the most important single structures in the district. The building is typical of cast-iron architecture: the tiers of ribbed columns, the wide, tall windows, and the ornate cornice. The advantage of this technique - larger window surface and more daylight - was undoubtedly important to the clothing manufacturers who built this store.

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eleven

Other buildings particularly significant by themselves include Hoyt's Theatre (43-26), built around 1890 and one of the oldest vaudeville houses left in the state, and the yellow brick, arcaded building next to it. The latter is perhaps the most unusual building in the district. It has a great sense of motion which its more solid neighbors lack. The undulating cornice and the terra cotta vines give it horizontal movement, and the full-height arches and the distinct separation among the planes of the piers, the masonry within the arches and the windows give it a vertical thrust. The vibrancy of the building is aided by the relatively light cornice (so light, in fact, that the major consoles continue right through it to become chimneys).

The intersection of South Main and Washington Streets was the major commercial center of South Norwalk in this period. At the east end of Washington Street were Norwalk Harbor and the only bridge to East Norwalk. A short distance from the west end of the street was the railroad depot. On the northwest corner of the intersection was the largest hotel in the city, the Mahackemo. The area was so busy that in 1895 it became necessary to eliminate the grade crossing, and the present railroad bridge was built then. The bridge is part of the district not only because it is typical of the engineering of the period but because it represents the impact of the railroad on the area, both in fostering growth and contributing to congestion.

The most striking facet of the district's history is the number and diversity of commercial enterprises found here. Although individual buildings had a succession of uses - the Fairfield Fire Insurance Building was later the Hoyt & Olmstead Cigar Company and then the Odd Fellows' Hall (43-22) - the overall mix of uses in the district remained fairly constant. Generally, the street-level floor was used for retail trade, with apartments, light manufacturing such as hats, paper boxes or cigars, or fraternal organizations on the upper floors. Many firms did both retail and wholesale business, such as Morgan's Hardware (43-18); in other cases, retailing and manufacturing were probably combined under one roof, as at Comstock Brothers Clothiers (43-23: the cast-iron building). The 1918 city directory lists in the district at least 25 apartment dwellers, about 13 trade, union or fraternal groups, and over 52 different kinds of businesses or professions, among which the more notable were groceries (10), clothing stores (9), banks (5), lawyers (7), real estate agents (10) and dentists (6). There were also a business college, a post office, two hotels, a theatre, and South Norwalk's daily paper, the Sentinel.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Danenberg, Elsie N. The Romance of Norwalk. New York: The States History Co., 1929.
- Four Cities and Towns of Connecticut. New York: Acme Publishing and Engraving Co., 1890.
- Lobozza, Carl. Norwalk, Connecticut: Pictures From the Past. Norwalk: Norwalk Historical Society, 1974.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 5 1/2

UTM REFERENCES

A	18	633820	4550800	B	18	633990	4550770
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	18	634000	4550680	D	18	633840	4550670
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at the northeast corner of Lot #10, Block 43 (the south corner of Washington and Water Streets), the district follows the property line of this lot south, then west, then southwest, then west to Lot #26 so as to include the structures which front on Washington Street. The boundary then follows along the rear property lines of Lots 26, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 3, 23, 24, and 1. From the southeast corner of Lot 1 it runs west along the north side of Haviland Street, north along

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Bruce Clouette, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE March 28, 1977

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Propsect Street

TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford

STATE CT

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 Oct 3, 1977

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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South Main & Washington Street	9	twelve

Norwalk City Directory, 1894-1920, New Haven: Price & Lee.

Maps and views

Clark's Map of Fairfield County. Philadelphia, 1856.

New York City and Vicinity. New York: Beers, Ellis & Soule, 1867.

Norwalk and South Norwalk, 1875. Bird's-eye view, Lockwood House, Norwalk.

Norwalk, South Norwalk and East Norwalk (Bird's-eye view). New York: Landis and Hughes, 1899.

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E 18 <u>633840 4550640</u>	F 18 <u>633750 4550650</u>	G 18 <u>633730 4550740</u>

the east side of South Main Street, includes the railroad bridge, and then runs northeasterly along the railroad right-of-way. It then runs in a straight line south along the east wall of the rear building on lot 25 until it reaches the property line of lot 24 (Block 24), in this way excluding most of the rear parking area. It follows the property line of lot 24 east, cuts across the driveway, then follows the lines of lots 23,22, and 21. The boundary then follows a straight line along the rear property lines of lots 19 (the building lot on Washington Street), 18, and 16, follows the eastern line of lot 16 southward, then goes in a straight line across the rear property lines of lots 15 and 13, cutting across the driveway in between. The boundary then follows the north and east lines of lot 12, crosses Washington Street, and returns to the starting point.

898 II NE
WESTPORT

NORWALK SOUTH QUADRANGLE CONNECTICUT—FAIRFIELD CO.

7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

BRIDGEPORT (CITY HALL) 12 MI.
WESTPORT 2.1 MI.

634 420,000 FEET

DANBURY 21 MI.
MERRITT PKWY. 1.3 MI.
25' 633

12 MI. TO N.Y. 35
MERRITT PKWY. 1.5 MI.

836 73° 22' 30"
41° 07' 30"

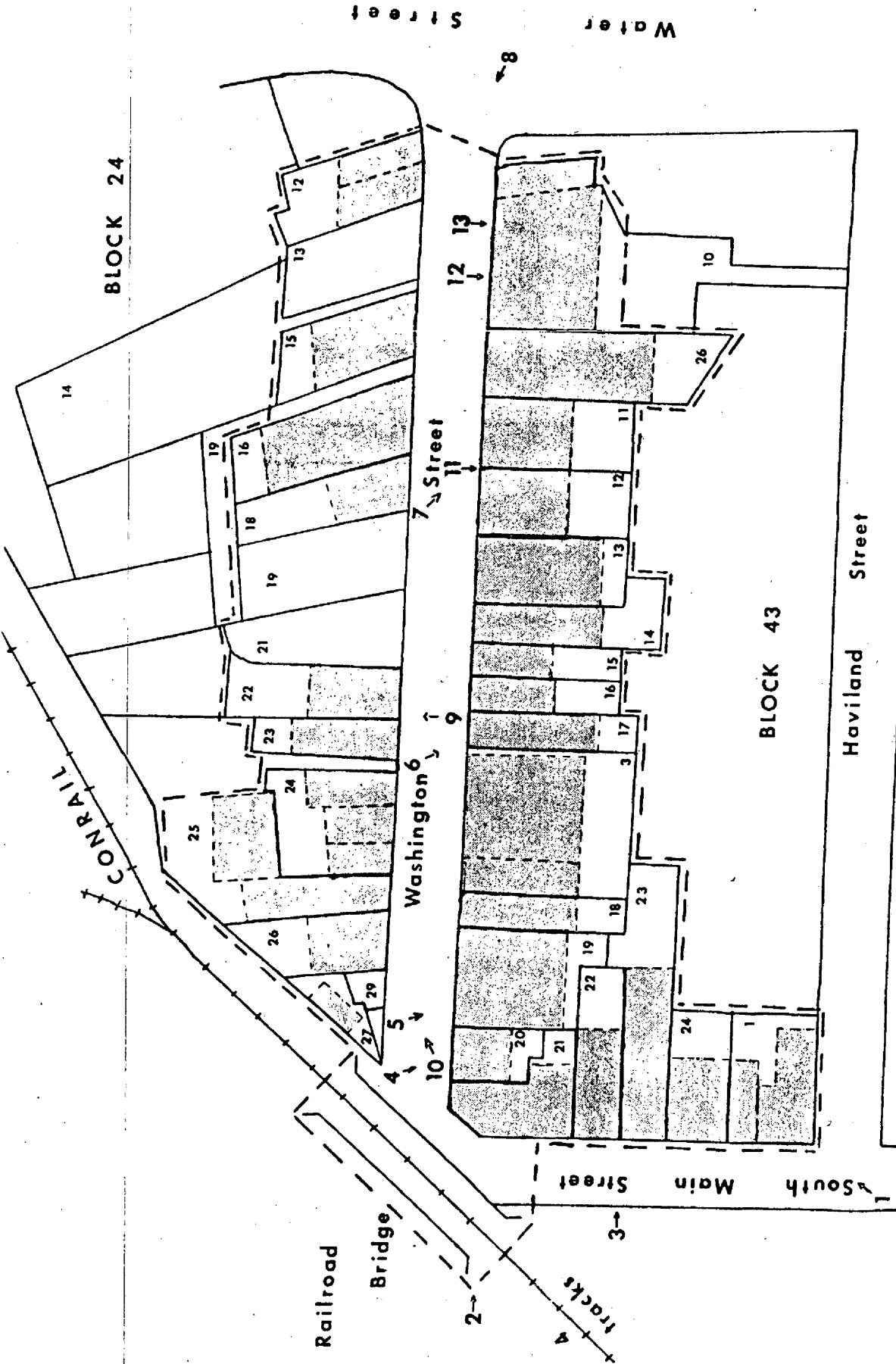


SOUTH MAIN/WASHINGTON STREET

Norwalk, CT

UTM References:

- A: 18/633820/4550800
- B: 18/633990/4550770
- C: 18/634000/4550680
- D: 18/633840/4550670
- E: 18/633840/4550640
- F: 18/633750/4550650
- G: 18/633730/4550740



SOUTH MAIN & WASHINGTON STREET
 South Norwalk (Norwalk), CT

LEGEND:

- 13 Lot Number
- Property Line
- Building
- District Boundary
- 9 Photo Position

Adapted from Assessor's Map 15 SE

SCALE = 1:1200