

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received FEB 2 1987
date entered JUN 3 1987

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

1. Name

historic Bristol Girls' Club
and/or common Bristol Girls' Club Family Center

2. Location

street & number 47 Upson Street N/A not for publication
city, town Bristol N/A vicinity of
state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Bristol Girls' Club Family Center, Inc.
street & number 47 Upson Street
city, town Bristol N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. City Clerk's Office, Bristol City Hall
street & number 111 North Main Street
city, town Bristol state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no
date 1986 federal state county local
depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street
city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Bristol Girls' Club, built in 1931, is a two-story Dutch Colonial Revival style brick building with gambrel roofs which stands on a flat lot in a residential neighborhood of early-20th-century working-class houses. A two-story brick addition built in 1962 extends the building to the rear and forms a perpendicular ell to the west. In the angle of the complex is a large front lawn with a few small trees. A paved driveway on the building's east side leads from the street to a private parking lot behind. The site is located a few blocks south of the commercial and municipal center of Bristol.

The 33-foot by 64-foot building is a steel and timber-frame structure resting on a concrete-block foundation. The roughly rectangular building consists of two end blocks, each covered by a gambrel roof, the ridgelines of which are parallel to the street. Wide brick chimneys rise flush with the ends of these blocks. The building's mid-section, which connects the end blocks, is a slightly taller two-story structure with a gambrel roof oriented at a right angle to that of the end blocks (photographs 1 and 2). All the roofs slope to the top of the first story. Shed-roofed dormers project from the lower slopes of the gambrel roofs on all four sides of the building. A slightly lower bell-curved shed roof shelters the entry porch on the west side of the building (photograph 3). The brickwork is Flemish bond and the roofs are multi-colored slate. All the window openings have brownstone sills and splayed brick flat-arch lintels. The windows are mostly multi-paned, double-hung type. The cornice has large shallow soffit blocks drilled with round holes.

The north side of the building, which faces the street, has three windows centered in the one-story wall, and three corresponding slate-covered dormers in the gambrel roof above. The dormers' shed roofs are continuous with the plane of the upper gambrel slope.

Generally, the east side of the building is comprised of the two gambrel-form end walls of the front and rear blocks, connected by the gambrel-roofed midsection (photograph 2). The two-story end walls of the north and south blocks contain, respectively, two bays of windows and one bay of windows with a door. The midsection is a one-story wall featuring a gang of three windows and two separate windows, and the gambrel roof above, containing four dormers of varying sizes. A set of steps provides exterior access to the basement on this side.

Because it is shallower in plan than the front block, the south or rear block of the building is an asymmetrical gambrel form (photograph 2). Here, the upper slope of the back roof is more steeply pitched than its equivalent in order for the lower slope to remain at the same pitch as its corresponding one in front.

While the rear wall of this south block is partly obscured by the 1962 addition, the dormered gambrel roof over the second story remains unaltered (photograph 2). The first story has two steel-frame casement windows with small lights which probably replaced the original double-hung windows. The second story features a continuous shed-roofed slate-covered dormer which contains four windows and a centered door opening onto a fire escape.

The rear corner of the building's west side is partly hidden by the addition; however, a slate-covered bell-curved new roof, similar to that of the adjoining original west porch, obscures the juncture of the old and newer structures (photograph 3). Originally, the west end of the rear block had one bay on the first as well as on the second story. Like the east, the west side of the building generally consists of the two gambrel-end walls connected by the midsection. Here, however, the midsection is indented approximately one foot, and its lower gambrel roof slope extends in a bell curve to shelter a shallow entry

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Bristol Girls' Club

Continuation sheet Bristol, CT

Item number 6

Page 1

For NPS use only
received 2/2/87
date entered

The Bristol Historic Resources Survey (local)
1979

Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Connecticut

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Bristol Girls' Club

Continuation sheet Bristol, CT

Item number 7

Page 1

porch (photograph 3). This roof is supported by five posts, the lower thirds of which are, in cross-section, beveled squares, and the upper shafts, round. The capitals are an asymmetrical S-curve in cross-section. Behind the porch is a relatively small single-door entry, and a smaller and a double window. The gambrel roof above contains four evenly spaced identical dormers.

The two-story, 15,700 square foot addition (photograph 7) contains a gymnasium, swimming pool, and shower and locker rooms.

On both floors of the building, the plan of the midsection consists of a stairway and a central longitudinal hallway which provides access to the offices and toilet rooms on either side, and to the larger recreational and living spaces at the ends. The basement is used for recreational activities.

The only major alterations to the interior have been the enclosure of the stair for fire safety, and the creation of an additional office within the confines of the second floor. Although the mostly unchanged interior is simple, it retains the decor and detail which have given the building its home-like ambience. For example, the living room is wainscoted with beaded and beveled horizontal panels (photograph 4). The room's cornice is a broad, blocked molding which matches that of the exterior. There are Neo-Federal fireplaces with inscribed paneled friezes at both ends of the room. The east fireplace frieze reads, "Laugh Learn Love", and the west one reads "Sing Share Serve." All the decorative woodwork is dark-stained. The original floor is random-width wood. Large paneled double-doors with their original brass hardware open into the hallway.

The recreation room, above the living room, has a coved ceiling generally following the form of the gambrel roof. The room has a low six foot deep stage which contains built-in cabinets beneath (photograph 5). The room also has an inscribed Neo-Federal fireplace of simpler design than the ones downstairs (photograph 6). The rhyme "The world is so full of wonderful things I'm sure we should all be as happy as kings" is carved into the frieze. According to a Bristol Press newspaper article describing the new building, the room was painted a "light terra cotta" color. Photographs from the 1940s show simple block-pattern stenciling bordering the top of the vertical wall sections. Paneled double doors with the original brass hardware open into the corridor.

The kitchen and dining rooms on the first floor retain their original built-in mullioned window cabinets with drawers below. Nearly all the building's original doors and door hardware remain, as do the tile floors and marble partitions in the toilet rooms.

Most of the furnishings used today are those donated by the daughters of Miles Lewis Peck (benefactor of the building), and by other townspeople at the time the facility was opened.

The positioning of the 1962 addition well behind the front plane of the clubhouse and the simple design and low profile of the entryway connecting the two structures prevents the larger scale addition from visually overwhelming the older building (photograph 7). The design of the addition is by Bridgeport architects Thomas J. Lyons and Austin W. Mather.

The nominated property is that L-shape parcel which has historically been associated with the 1931 Bristol Girls' Club building (Figure 1).

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
___ prehistoric	___ archeology-prehistoric	___ community planning	___ landscape architecture	___ religion
___ 1400-1499	___ archeology-historic	___ conservation	___ law	___ science
___ 1500-1599	___ agriculture	___ economics	___ literature	___ sculpture
___ 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> education	___ military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> social/
___ 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian
___ 1800-1899	___ commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-1937	___ communications	___ industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
		___ invention		___ other (specify)

Criteria A and C

Specific dates 1931

Builder/Architect Charles Scranton Palmer

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Bristol Girls' Club building is of local historical significance for the educational and humanitarian role it has played in that city since 1931. The building is also of local historical significance as the allegedly first facility designed specifically for use by a local Girls' Club of America chapter¹ (Criterion A). As such, the structure is architecturally significant as an unusual and possibly unique building type for its time (1931). Designed by New Haven architect Charles Scranton Palmer, the clubhouse is of local architectural significance also as a good and relatively unusual example of the Dutch Colonial Revival style in western Connecticut (Criterion C).

The American Girls' Club appears to have evolved out of the mid-19th-century urban social reform movement, whose leaders called for the spiritual and cultural elevation of the cities' poor through the "development of institutions in which all social classes participated and from which intellectual-moral instruction and psychological satisfaction were derived."² The first girls' clubs were informally established during the post-Civil War period in response to the need for safe gathering places for newly arriving young women seeking jobs in industrializing cities. The formal affiliation of these groups was not until 1945 with the founding of the Girls' Clubs of America in Springfield, Massachusetts. That year, the Bristol Girls' Club became a charter member of the national organization.

By 1928, when Mrs. Edson M. Peck began holding organizational meetings for a future Girls' Club, Bristol was a thriving industrial center producing brass automotive parts, watches, toys, hardware, foundry products, and specialized metal products.³ The cities' largely immigrant work force consisted of Poles, Lithuanians, Irish, Germans, and French-Canadians whose presence tripled the city's population from 9,643 in 1900 to 28,541 in 1930.⁴

The prosperous years following World War 1 brought about the improvement of many of Bristol's civic, cultural, and educational facilities, including the construction of the Bristol Boys' Club in 1928. The existence of this institution, the president of which was Mrs. Peck's husband, appears to have stimulated the idea for the girls' club.

The Bristol Girls' Club was incorporated on November 15, 1928, and opened in January of the following year in a rented house at 83 South Street. The clubs' stated purpose was to carry out a non-sectarian program in "wholesome recreation, health, (the) arts of homemaking, social and cultural advancement, and character development, to so train...(underprivileged girls)... that they will be able to take their places as good citizens and especially as responsible mothers and homemakers."⁵ The tremendous need for such a facility was proven within one month of its opening, when 351 girls had joined the club as members, and an average of 75 attended daily.⁶ The club offered after-school and evening classes in sewing, cooking, physical education, dancing, and chorus singing, and facilities for ice-skating, and playing volleyball, horseshoes and baseball. A roster of early members' names reveals significant attendance by girls of Eastern European, Italian, Irish, German, and French-Canadian, as well as Yankee descent.

Only six months later, the significance of the Girls' Club to the Bristol community prompted the president of the Bristol Savings Bank, Miles Lewis Peck, to establish a \$50,000 fund toward the purchase of land and the design and construction of the present facility. The New Britain construction firm Carlson and Torrell completed the building two years later, in October 1931.

9. Major Bibliographical References

see continuation sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approx. 1.5

Quadrangle name Bristol

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	7	0	8	6	0	4	6	1	4	8	0	0
Zone	Easting				Northing									

B

N/A														
Zone	Easting				Northing									

C

N/A														
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D

N/A														
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E

N/A														
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F

N/A														
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G

N/A														
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H

N/A														
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Verbal boundary description and justification

Bristol Land Records Vol. 152, p. 372; Vol. 144, p. 417; Vol. 145, p. 294
see figure 1

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county N/A code

state N/A code county N/A code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Alison Gilchrist, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization National Register Consultant date August 1986

street & number P.O. Box 387 telephone 203 567-8309

city or town Washington Depot state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date January 20, 1987

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

for Linda McChesland
Keeper of the National Register

date 6/3/87

Attest: Barbara K. Savage
Chief of Registration

date 6-3-87

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

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2/2/87

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Bristol Girls' Club

Continuation sheet Bristol, CT

Item number 8

Page 1

With the onslaught of the Depression soon after, the expanded facility was considered an important community asset whose timely arrival contributed significantly to sustaining morale during Bristol's several years of unemployment and poverty. The institution's support was practical, as well, in allowing its members the use of its equipment to sew garments for their families.

During the Depression the Hartford Daily Times editorialized in rather hyperbolic terms that the club was "blazing a new and unique trail in the field of education - a project alone of its kind in the world - and...attracting the serious attention of educators, psychiatrists, psychologists, and medical authorities." The article also comments that the girls learn not "merely" housework, but "dieting (nutrition), budgeting, biology, music, correction of physical ailments (and to)...better meet the problems of later life."⁷ The latter issue seems particularly relevant given the hardships of the day. After 1938, when federal law prohibiting child labor was enacted, the club provided a constructive and nurturing environment for many pre-teenage girls who had previously worked after school.

During the following decades, continuous financial and in-kind support of the girls' club by various local private and public sources reaffirmed the club's value to the Bristol community.⁸ Among its benefactors have been the Bristol Community Chest and the United Fund of Bristol.

In the late 1940s, the club expanded its sphere of membership to include older girls and young women. The club has operated continuously since its opening, adjusting its programs to include the families of members and to meet the changing concerns of society.

The Bristol Girls' Club may be of architectural significance as the first structure in the United States to be designed and built specifically as a Girls' Club of America facility. In 1931 a local newspaper article reported:

Members of the building committee believe that this is the first building in the country to be erected exclusively for Girls' Club work...(the) committee spent some time in making inquiries about other buildings which might be used as models, even applying to the government for information. Lacking such models, the...building committee,...Mr. Palmer,...and Mrs. Eastman...have planned a building to the best of their ability suited to accommodate the activities of the Club.⁹

Palmer's design still reflects the intention of the building committee to achieve a non-institutional, functionally flexible building with the capacity to serve a large number of people simultaneously.

Palmer's design achieves its home-like quality through the manipulation of scale, style, massing, and materials. In orienting the bulk of the building away from the street and using a gambrel roof and dormer windows instead of a tall two-story front block, Palmer effectively reduced the structure's scale and increased its residential feeling. This sense is reinforced by his choice of warm-colored red brick and the multi-colored slate for the walls and roof, respectively. The informally located entry on the building's side and the small-paned windows also contribute to this quality (photographs 1 and 3).

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

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received 2/2/87
date entered

Bristol Girls' Club

Continuation sheet Bristol, CT

Item number 8

Page 2

The interior spaces are also consistently domestic in scale and meant to create a warm and secure ambience. In its size, proportions, and the scale of its windows and fireplaces, the living room is similar to that of many residences. The coved ceiling and niche-dormers in the recreation room create a cozy and playful atmosphere (photographs 4 and 6).

The floor plan and the building's massing allow the major activity areas to be separate, with circulation at the center. The two kitchens flexibly serve either a single or two dining rooms, which may be created by closing a built-in sliding partition.

Scranton also designed the Bristol Boys' Club (1928) at 105 Laurel Street, a restrained Neo-Adamesque building; the English Tudor Revival Trinity Church Parish House (1924) at 53 Wall Street in New Haven; and the late Gothic Revival Augusta Lewis Troupe School (1923) on Edgewood and Beers Streets in New Haven. In its Colonial Revival domestic mode, the Bristol Girls' Club represents another of Scranton's institutional commissions in which a traditional architectural style is understatedly, competently, and appropriately used to identify the nature of a building's occupant and use. Significantly, the Bristol Girls' Club continues to fully use and be proud of its 1931 quarters.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Bristol Girls' Club
Bristol, CT

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 3

For NPS use only

received

2/2/87

date entered

End Notes

1. As far as research of the other existing Girls' Clubs facilities shows, those founded prior to 1931 either occupy renovated residences or have relocated to existing buildings not originally constructed for a Girls' Club's use. A list of these clubs is on file with the Connecticut Historical Commission.
2. Albert Fein, "The American City: The Ideal and the Real," from The Rise of an American Architecture, p. 54.
3. Bruce Clouette and Matthew Roth, p. 93.
4. Ibid., pp. 140-141.
5. By-Laws of the Bristol Girls' Club Association, Inc., Article 2, November 20, 1928.
6. The Bristol Press, February 1929.
7. The Hartford Daily Times, February 4, 1933.
8. According to local newspaper accounts of the 1930s, the Bristol Community Chest, a trust whose private fund drives aided local charities, included the Girls' Club as well as the Boys' Club among its beneficiaries. The Bristol Lodge of Elks frequently donated its hall for Girls' Club parties and other gatherings.
9. Unidentified newspaper, May 1933, probably The Bristol Press.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

Bristol Girls' Club

Continuation sheet Bristol, CT

Item number 9

Page 1

For NPS use only
received 2/2/87
date entered

The Bristol Girls' Club. A History of the Bristol Girls' Club on the Occasion of its 50th Anniversary: 1928-1978. (pamphlet)

Clouette, Bruce, and Matthew Roth. Bristol, Connecticut: A Bicentennial History, 1785-1985. Phoenix Publishing, Canaan, New Hampshire, 1985.

Girls' Club of America, Inc. "Girls' Club of America History." (pamphlet)

Newspaper articles:

The Bristol Press. "Beautiful Building Marks New Era in Work Among Girls." October 22, 1931.

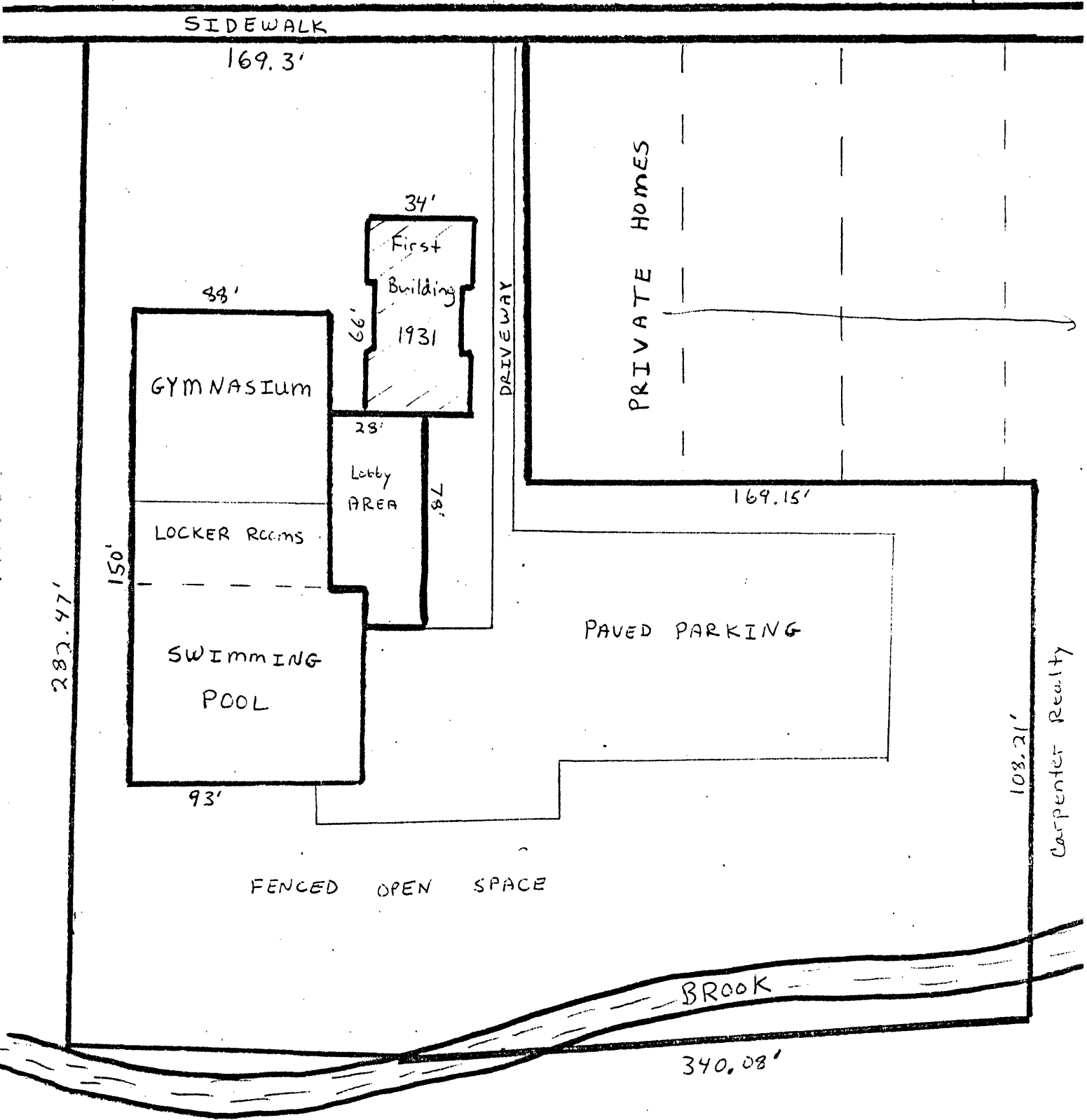
Unidentified newspaper (probably The Bristol Press). "Bristol Girls' Club New Home Contract Goes to New Britain Concern." March 5, 1931.

Interviews:

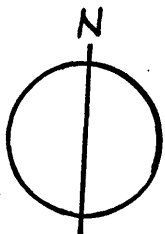
Kathleen Brenner, Assistant Director, The Bristol Girls' Club Family Center.
May 14, 1986.

Sheryl Shulte, Director, NorthEast Service Center, Girls' Club of America, Inc.
July 30, 1986.

FIGURE 1



Carpenter Realty



BRISTOL GIRL'S CLUB SITE MAP
1985