

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

For NPS use only

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

received FEB 26 1986
date entered MAR 27 1986

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

1. Name

historic South School

and/or common South School

2. Location

street & number 362 South Main Street n/a not for publication

city, town Torrington n/a vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Litchfield code 005

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<u>n/a</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name South School Associates

street & number P. O. Box 86

city, town Torrington n/a vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Registry of Deeds, City Hall

street & number 200 Main Street

city, town Torrington state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1985 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 S. Prospect St.

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input 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

Facing east at the corner of South Main and Brooker streets, about a mile south of Torrington's central business district, South School is sited in a mixed-use residential/commercial neighborhood known as the South End. The monumental appearance of the building along South Main Street is enhanced by its setback from the facade lines of neighboring buildings, and by its being surrounded on four sides by open space. The front lawn slopes up slightly to the granite foundation walls, and a paved parking area covers the rear of the lot. Cut-granite steps from Main Street to a central walkway lead to the main entrance of the school. Two, 2-story brick commercial buildings from the late 19th century are situated across the street from the school. Houses to the west of the school date from around the turn of the century through the 1930s.

Consisting of a large rectangular block and distinguished by highly symmetrical elevations, the two-story raised basement brick schoolhouse (constructed in 1915) is embellished with a variety of intricately patterned glazed brickwork designs as well as glazed terra cotta trim. The foundation wall, partially exposed on the exterior, consists of cut-granite blocks on the exterior and is faced with brick on the interior. The imposing, monumental quality of the (east) facade is achieved through the incorporation of large windowless pavilions projecting slightly from the facade and rear (west) elevation. The blind pavilion walls, far from appearing dull, are enlivened by raised brick quoins, and intricate rectangular and diamond patterns formed by alternating rows of brick headers and stretchers, wide mortar joints, and terra cotta blocks. The seven-bay Beaux Arts-inspired facade contains a number of horizontal elements such as recessed brick bands (running bond) along the crennelated roof parapet. Window openings are separated by flat mullions with fluted caps. The glazed brickwork, which remains in an excellent state of preservation, is laid in Flemish bond (cross bond on the blind pavilion panels and running bond on the raised basement). Wide mortar joints and terra cotta blocks accentuate the blind panels between first and second floors.

The glazed terra cotta entrance frontispiece on the facade consists of a finely proportioned inset segmental arch embellished with carved rosettes, and which surrounds a blind transom with Gothic trefoil-arch panels (photograph #3). The whole is surmounted by an entablature. The original paired entry doors were replaced several years ago by metal doors. On the side elevations, the boys (north) and girls (south) entries consist of enclosed, projecting porches with segmental-arch fronts and standing-seam copper roofs. Original paired, wood-paneled doors with glass upper sections and transom are intact. The central bay on the side elevations projects slightly from the main wall.

Designed to accommodate 750 pupils, the plan of the three-floor building features generously proportioned, well lit and ventilated classrooms and halls (photograph #s 4-7). Retaining all original

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7. DESCRIPTION

trim, including maple floors, ash window surrounds and built-in bookcases, the classrooms (eight on each of the two main floors) are especially pleasing spaces, with transom windows that light the wide, fifteen-foot corridors. The only substantive changes in plan were the additions (ca.1950) of brick fire walls and metal doors between the chamfered corners of the stair halls at the north and south ends of the building. As constructed, the building contained a central heating and ventilation system which consisted of a coal-fired furnace that heated air from a central ventilator shaft to the roof, and forced hot air through separate ducts to each classroom. The system was replaced during the 1940s by two oil-fired furnaces. The ground-floor level contains classrooms on the east side, with segmental-arch openings from the wide center hall into the classrooms.

8. Significance

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

Specific dates 1915 **Builder/Architect** Wilson Potter, architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

South School is a fine early 20th-century schoolhouse, surviving as a well-preserved example of the work of Wilson Potter, prominent architect of New York City who specialized in the design of public schools throughout the northeast (Criterion C). It is also an important symbol of Torrington's unprecedented population increase at the turn of the century, and it reflects the consolidation of the city's school system and the assimilation of a growing immigrant population (Criterion A). Its construction represented a public commitment to furnish the best possible educational facilities during a period of growth and economic prosperity. As the city's largest grade-school construction project of the period, South School was a prototype for other new schools built in Torrington through the 1930s.

Historical Context

In step with phenomenal population growth and industrial activity during the period 1880-1930, several new schools were constructed after 1900. The population of Torrington increased from 3000 in 1890 to 6500 in 1900, to 15,490 in 1915 and to 20,040 after the United States Census of 1917, representing a sevenfold population increase in twenty seven years--one of the largest increases of any town in the history of the state.¹ Evidencing a wave of new construction, assessed valuation increased from \$3,269,991 in 1892 to \$15,814,214 in 1917.² Local industry around the turn of the century consisted primarily of brass, textile and furniture manufacture, attracting corporate investment and providing employment opportunity. Expansion into Torrington of such established Waterbury manufacturers as American Brass Company helped to maintain the momentum of industrial development and to provide jobs for a continuing influx of immigrant families.

Torrington's hilly terrain and rural setting in the Litchfield Hills is said to have attracted European immigrants who arrived in increasing numbers as jobs in manufacturing became available. English, Irish and Germans predominated during the first wave of immigration to Torrington between 1860 and 1900. Polish, Italian, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian immigrants followed through the 1920s, with the Italians comprising the last and largest ethnic group. Torrington's South End grew rapidly during this period, with Italians representing the majority of the neighborhood's ethnic composition. Several new churches formed during this period included St. Francis Church (1919), Sacred

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

American Architect, Obituary of Wilson Potter. February 1937, p.340.

Architectural Record, September 1914, pp.244-263, 511-523.

(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property less than one

Quadrangle name Torrington

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	5	6	1	0	0	4	6	2	8	3	1	0
Zone			Easting				Northing							

B

Zone			Easting				Northing							

C

Zone			Easting				Northing							

D

Zone			Easting				Northing							

E

Zone			Easting				Northing							

F

Zone			Easting				Northing							

G

Zone			Easting				Northing							

H

Zone			Easting				Northing							

Verbal boundary description and justification

As mapped by the City of Torrington, Engineering Division, Department of Public Works, February 1984, described as Parcel A, containing 0.951 acres. As recorded in Deed Book Volume 42, page 352, containing less than one acre.

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

state	code	county	code
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state	code	county	code
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11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jack A. Gold, Architectural Historian, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Jack A. Gold, Historic Preservation Consultant date June 1985

street & number 277 Dwight St. telephone 203 624 4673

city or town New Haven 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.

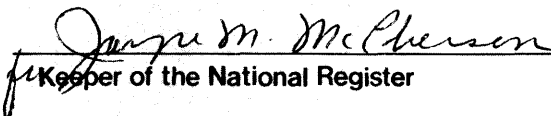
State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

John W. Shannahan, Director
title Connecticut Historical Commission

date February 20, 1986

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


Keeper of the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date 3/27/86

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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8. SIGNIFICANCE

Heart Church (1911), Holy Trinity Slovak Lutheran Church (1912), and First Hungarian Church (1912).³

In contrast with larger, similarly industrialized cities of Waterbury and Hartford, where graded "free schools" had been established since the 1860s, Torrington offered only small district schoolhouses which could not match the newer consolidated and graded schools. A first step in improving local educational opportunities in Torrington occurred in 1863, when Torrington Academy, a private institution, merged with several outlying district schools in order to expand and improve public education for townspeople. Torrington's school districts were abandoned in 1881 in favor of a consolidated school system. New consolidated grade schools constructed during this period were the Midgeon Avenue (1896), Southwest (1904), North (1905), East (1909), and South (1915) schools. With the exception of South School, all have been extensively altered over the past 75 years, including substantial exterior alterations and additions, interior renovation, and removal of original fenestration. South School, the largest of the five, replaced a smaller frame structure also known as South School and located closer to the center of town. According to School Superintendent Reports, enrollment at the old South School grew steadily after 1900, increasing in 1912 to 537 pupils, 14 teachers and 1 principal. The new South School, designed to accommodate neighborhood growth for at least fifty years, stayed open for another sixty five years. In accordance with plans in 1981 to further consolidate existing elementary schools, South School was closed.

Architectural Merit

Retaining a remarkable degree of architectural integrity on both exterior and interior, South School survives as a well-preserved example of the work of Wilson Potter, well-known architect of school buildings in New York, Pennsylvania and Connecticut. Potter (1868-1936), whose practice was based at 3 Union Square in New York, also operated an office in New London, Connecticut, between 1899 and 1901. An obituary in American Architect magazine described him as a "prominent New York architect," having designed schools in New York (Peekskill, Poughkeepsie, Geneva, New York City), Pennsylvania, and Connecticut.⁴ Potter's design for South School is prototypical of his work throughout the northeastern United States. His other known works in Connecticut, Torrington High School (1914), and Bristol High School (1922), have been substantially altered and no longer retain their original

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architectural integrity. Now used as a junior high, Torrington High School was extensively modernized on the interior, while exterior changes such as replacement of the original raised roof parapet with a metal ridge have adversely affected its original appearance. Bristol High School was converted to the Memorial Boulevard School in 1959; it was renovated at that time and again in 1975.

Characterized by a clean, academically inspired form, use of high-quality building materials including glazed brick and terra cotta, large well-lit and ventilated classrooms, and efficient circulation, Potter's elevations and plans departed radically from the smaller, slate-roofed multiple-gabled schools typical of the period. The rectangular massing and efficient plan of South School were copied in later elementary schools constructed in Torrington through the 1930s. Built at a cost of \$80,000, South School contained construction features and mechanical systems espoused in architectural journals of the period. In the September 1914 issue of Architectural Record, two articles by Rawson W. Haddon on the design of schoolhouses emphasized concerns that Potter addressed in South School: "The importance of efficiency in plan, of providing a building that can be used for many purposes, both educational and social, ... of good circulation, centralized administration and safety from fire and panic, combined with economy of maintenance and first cost, are ... problems not to be overlooked."⁵ The use of glazed terra cotta trim and glazed brick are examples of how Potter utilized high quality, low maintenance materials. Haddon also recommended the grouping of windows so that classroom light is massed and evenly distributed, a feature also incorporated in South School, and which contributes to the structure's relatively modern appearance. In addition to wide hallways and large classrooms, Potter specified mechanical systems which had not yet been incorporated in Torrington's public schools. These included central fresh-air ventilating and heating, local telephone, master clock, fire alarm, and built-in vacuum cleaning system.

Potter incorporated several eclectic stylistic references in South School's elevations, all of which remain well preserved. Its massing, with projecting blind pavilions, raised basement and flat roof, conveys a sense of solidity and permanence typical of Beaux Arts-inspired buildings constructed in America after 1900. Other eclectic embellishments include the Collegiate Gothic entrance frontispiece complete with trefoil-arch panels, the Gothicized crenelated roof parapet, and the Colonial/Neo-Classical Revival raised-brick quoining and fluted pilaster caps between windows. Another

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highly distinguishable characteristic is the relatively light color of exterior building materials, achieved by use of white, glazed terra cotta, glazed brick, and mortar joints of varying widths.⁶ In summary, while Potter alluded to popular styles of the period, he specified a remarkably modern building form that retains its sense of monumentality and purpose, and that establishes it as an enduring landmark for the City of Torrington.

NOTES

1. William J. Pape. History of Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918, p.181.

2. Pape, p.385.

3. Bess and Merrill Bailey. The Growth Years Torrington 1852 to 1923. Torrington Historical Society, 1976, p.47.

4. American Architect, February 1937, p.340.

5. Rawson W. Haddon, "Recent Schoolhouses Planned." Architectural Record, September 1914, p.245.

6. Terra cotta, first used in the United States for structural reinforcement, later became a popular exterior cladding material during the early part of the 20th century. Fireproof, impervious to moisture penetration, and vandal resistant, terra cotta proved to be a popular, attractive, and relatively inexpensive substitute for stone and cast-iron trim applied to civic and commercial buildings of the period.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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

Berryman, Nancy D. and Susan M. Tindall. Terra Cotta. Chicago: Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, 1984.

Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records (COPAR). Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900. New York: COPAR, 1984. Filed at Information Exchange, Municipal Art Society, New York City.

Gold, Jack A. Telephone interview with John Hogan, former Superintendent, Torrington Public Schools, January 10, 1985.

Orcutt, Rev. Samuel. History of Torrington. Albany, NY: J. Munsell, Printer, 1878.

Pape, William J. History of Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley. Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918.

School Superintendent's Report, City of Torrington, 1912. From incomplete collection of report volumes filed at Midgeon Avenue School Superintendent's Office, Torrington.

Withey, Henry F. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects. Los Angeles: New Age Publishing Company, 1956.