

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received JAN 24 1985

date entered FEB 21 1985

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY BUILDING

and/or common United Illuminating Company Building

2. Location

street & number 1115-1119 Broad Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Bridgeport

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

code 09

county Fairfield

code 001

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name C & W Associates, II
c/o Cohen and Wolf P.C.

street & number 1115 Broad Street

city, town Bridgeport

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bridgeport Town Clerk

City Hall - Room 124

street & number 45 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1984 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town 59 South Prospect Street
Hartford

state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The United Illuminating Company building is a two-story marble-front commercial building at the northwest corner of Broad and Cannon Streets, in the heart of Bridgeport's busy downtown business district. Like most of its neighbors, the building fills up almost its entire lot and fronts directly on the sidewalk with no set-back. Built in 1910, its present appearance reflects a 1935 remodeling in the Modernistic style.

The building comprises two major interconnected components: a tall 2-story part on the corner of Broad and Cannon Streets and an adjoining two-story part, somewhat lower in height, further north on Broad Street (Photograph 1). Since 1935 the two have been utilized as a single building with a common interior. The southern part, directly on the corner, was the original company headquarters built in 1910. When built it featured an elaborate Beaux-Arts facade in terra-cotta, with quoins, a prominent modillioned cornice, and a balustrade-parapet with a large cartouche in the center (see Continuation Sheet 8-4 for a cut of the original facade). In 1935 the headquarters was enlarged by the acquisition of the adjoining Taylor Building to the north, a c.1900 structure with stores on the first floor and offices above. The two were united by new facades of white marble with similar windows and other details.

The 1935 renovation retained the basic proportions and three-bay arrangement of the original headquarters, with a central entry flanked by large display windows. The new design featured wide fluted pilasters demarcating the bays. The pilasters extend above the building's plain parapet, where each is carved with an illuminated light bulb. Below the parapet is a band of zigzag carving, and below that, above the second-story windows, are simple raised panels (Photograph 2). The display windows have large plate-glass windows with three-light transoms. The second-story openings, grouped in threes, are fitted with double-hung, one-over-one sash, the lower parts of which are longer than the upper sash. The entrance consists of four narrow doors, each with a long pane of glass over a small panel. Above is a large four-light transom, and above the transom is carved the building's name, "THE UNITED ILLUMINATING COMPANY." The north portion of the Broad Street facade (Photograph 1) also has transom lights above the plate-glass storefronts. The northern portion's three three-part second-story windows have a fixed center pane and one-over-one sash in windows to either side. Above the second-story windows are raised panels like those on the more elaborate southern part.

Except for the Cannon Street side (Photograph 3), which is finished with sand-colored brick and a decorative cornice, the side and rear elevations of the building are plain brick walls devoid of architectural detail (Photograph 4). Both the north and south parts of the building have large extensions to the west, c.1920, visually linked by a tall trellis to form a small courtyard at the rear of the lot (Photograph 5).

(continued)

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Description (continued):

The interior was extensively damaged by fire c.1980 and little remains of the plaster dating from 1910. Two elevators made by Eastern Elevator were installed in 1936; they feature Art-Deco influenced details such as painted metal walls with stainless-steel fluting and panels in a geometric and stylized floral motif. Other remaining interior features of importance include some original molded window surrounds, brick vaulted ceilings in the basement story, and some marble wainscot on the first floor (Photographs 6 and 7).

Recently the building has been renovated for office use. The major change made to the exterior was the replacement of c.1960 aluminum windows and entries with reproduction elements closely duplicating the appearance of those from the 1935 remodeling (Photographs 1 and 8). The interior features modern office decor, including a full-height atrium (Photograph 9). However, the renovation retained all the remaining historic fabric which survived the fire, including the exposed brick vaulting, the elevators, the window trim, and the marble, which has been re-used in the lobby floor.

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	X architecture	___ education	___ military	___ social/
___ 1700-1799	___ art	___ engineering	___ music	___ humanitarian
___ 1800-1899	X commerce	___ exploration/settlement	___ philosophy	___ theater
X 1900-	___ communications	X industry	___ politics/government	___ transportation
	Criteria A, C	___ invention		___ other (specify)

Specific dates 1910-built
1935-remodeled **Builder/Architect** Edward B. Caldwell, remodeling architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The United Illuminating Company's former Bridgeport office building is significant as a symbol of the important role played by the utility company in Bridgeport's early 20th-century history (Criterion A) and, in its 1930s remodeling, as a fine example of Modernistic architecture (Criterion C). Since 1910, United Illuminating has had its Bridgeport headquarters in this building, and in fact continues to lease office space as of this writing. Among the important developments in which the company had a part were the electrification of manufacturing in Connecticut's largest industrial city, the construction of several major power plants in the Bridgeport area, and the introduction of electrical labor-saving devices into the city's homes. Edward Caldwell's 1935 design for a new facade for the building is important because it typifies the Modernistic aesthetic of stylized geometric ornament and symbolic references to modern technology. As it stands today, UI's Bridgeport building mirrors the company's two historic functions--supplying power and marketing appliances. It has a distinctive monumental facade appropriate to the local headquarters of the area's major utility, and wide street-level display windows and futuristic styling to woo the residents of Bridgeport into the Electric Age, the modern, appliance-filled lifestyle.

United Illuminating Company

United Illuminating was formed in 1899 by the merger of Bridgeport Electric Light Company and New Haven Electric Company. Although the main office was established in New Haven, the two components were of similar size and importance. As United Illuminating, the utility became the largest provider of power in southwestern Connecticut and soon moved into the communities around and between Bridgeport and New Haven, expanding its service area and absorbing smaller utilities. Today it is the second largest utility in Connecticut and one of the largest in New England.

When this building was built as the Bridgeport headquarters in 1910, the company was principally involved in street lighting and in supplying power to factories, which at that time were undergoing a fundamental shift from self-generated steam power to the purchase of utility-supplied electricity. "The manufacturing plant using electric power is the progressive, efficient and profitable plant," declared a UI advertisement of the period, urging Bridgeport industrialists to consult the company's experts at the Broad Street office. Electricity offered many advantages to manufacturers. It was cleaner, safer and more convenient than steam. Using utility-supplied power meant that someone other than the industrialist bore the substantial capital costs of providing power. Most importantly, a sudden increase in power requirements could be met simply by drawing more current from the utility, when previously another steam engine and perhaps larger

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bridgeport Directory, 1916, 1936.

Commercial Record, August 9, 1935, p.21; April 24, 1936, p. 21.
(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property approx. one-third acre

Quadrangle name Bridgeport

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UTM References

A 1 8 6 5 1 6 6 0 4 5 5 9 8 9 0
Zone Easting Northing

B
Zone Easting Northing

C

D

E

F

G

H

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes all the former United Illuminating Company parcel recorded in the records of the Bridgeport Assessor as Section 9, Map 8, Block 927, Lot 10A.

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

N/A

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Bruce Clouette & Matthew Roth, partners, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Historic Resource Consultants date June 16, 1984

The Colt Armory

street & number 55 Van Dyke Avenue telephone (203) 547-0268

city or town Hartford

state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

___ national ___ state -x- 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 1/8/85

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

Alloreda Byer
Keeper of the National Register

date 2-21-85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Significance (continued):

boilers and coal storage areas would have been needed. Ultimately, electrification made line shafting obsolete; when machines could be powered by individual electric motors, an important constraint on the design and layout of factories was eliminated.

The tremendous expansion of Bridgeport's industrial capacity in the World War I period gave electrification a boost, and by 1920 much of the city's manufacturing sector was using UI-supplied power. Despite the city's heavy reliance on war-related production, the 1920s brought only a brief slump, and Bridgeport's industrial production surged forward with the demand for automobiles and other consumer durables in the lead. Total industrial power requirements increased more than 35% in the 1920s, from a wartime high of 86,349 horsepower in 1919 to 117,271 in 1929. More significant was the source of the added horsepower: electricity. Utility-supplied electricity accounted for 38.6% of all industrial power in 1919 and 59.5% in 1929. In absolute numbers, utility-supplied industrial power increased from 33,306 horsepower in 1919 to 69,744 in 1929, meaning that industrial use of electricity in Bridgeport more than doubled in that decade and indicating that the growth in UI-supplied power (36,438 horsepower) exceeded the net increase in total industrial power (30,922). The United Illuminating Company was a key factor in the modernization of Bridgeport's industrial base.

As the major supplier of power in southwestern Connecticut, United Illuminating Company built several huge steam-powered plants in the Bridgeport area, plants which today dominate the shoreline of Bridgeport Harbor and the Housatonic estuary.

In addition to producing and distributing power, United Illuminating actively marketed appliances to consumers. Because utility poles had already been erected throughout the city for telephones and street-lighting, most homes in Bridgeport had electrical service nearby after 1900. Although the Broad Street building was foremost an administrative and industrial sales office, the ground floor from the beginning housed "The Electric Shop," a retail source for washing machines, vacuum cleaners, light fixtures, and "many other devices for changing housekeeping from drudgery to pleasure." In the early 20th century, home appliances were so new that the utility itself had to market them in order to create the demand for its chief source of profits, electricity. By the end of the 1920s, radio stores and plumbing-and-heating contractors were also selling appliances, but UI remained the city's major appliance retailer through the 1930s.

With the coming of the Depression, United Illuminating was threatened by hard times. Demand for industrial power plummeted and the company was forced to lay off many of its workers. Yet curiously, the fall-off in consumer demand was much smaller. For one thing, economies of scale meant that electricity appeared as a relative bargain: rates in 1936 were only

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Significance (continued):

one-third as high as those of 1900. Moreover, people simply were willing to spend for the gadgets of the modern age. The consumer lifestyle of the 1920s had made a permanent impact. In 1930 58.5% of Bridgeport families had a radio; by the end of the Depression, the proportion was 95.5%. Perhaps more telling, by 1940 slightly more than half of all Bridgeport families had acquired refrigerators, an expensive appliance which consumed a large amount of power. No wonder, then, that United Illuminating remodeled its Bridgeport location in 1935: the new facade would attract attention and encourage consumers to consider buying the latest in home appliances. By incorporating the Taylor Building into the structure, the company would gain additional display windows and more floor space for samples (Photograph 8). Finally, the futuristic design of the facade would reinforce electricity's connotations of progress and modern living.

Architectural Significance

Because of its futuristic connotations, the Modernistic style was a highly appropriate choice for the building's 1935 remodeling. Modernistic architecture was closely related to Art-Deco, an aesthetic movement which originated in France in the 1920s and influenced design throughout the western world in the 1930s and even into the period following World War II. The chief principles were the use of decoration to make its artistic statement; the stylization of designs drawn from a variety of sources, abstracting from them their geometric essences; and a fascination with speed, power, and modern technology. Modernistic buildings are unusual because so little construction was undertaken in the depression and war years when the style was popular in the visual and decorative arts. The United Illuminating headquarters is one of those rare buildings, one of only a handful of major Modernistic structures in downtown Bridgeport.

The building typifies the Modernistic style in several respects. Characteristic features include the wide fluted pilasters, which represent an extreme stylization of Classical precedent; the zigzag motif, an abstract geometric design at once suggesting both primitive art and the sine wave of alternating current; and the carved light bulbs at the tops of the pilasters, an example of the iconographic designs frequently found in Modernistic buildings. The elevator details are also significant as representative Art-Deco features: the fluted vertical bands recall the facade's pilasters and also suggest speed-lines, and the decorative panels utilize both stylization in the central floral motif and geometric abstraction in the parallel angled lines to either side. The building's smooth marble exterior and the large scale of the pilasters reflect in an inseparable way both the status of the institutional owner and the preference in that period for monumental architecture even in small projects like this one. In its reliance on decorative elements for its aesthetic impact, its use of highly stylized details, and

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Significance (continued):

its homage to power and one aspect of modern technology, the United Illuminating building embodies many major elements of Modernistic architecture.

The architect for the 1935 renovation was Edward B. Caldwell (1885-1943). A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, he settled in Bridgeport in 1913 and worked with Warren Briggs, one of the city's leading architects, for six years. Among Caldwell's other important commissions were the Bridgeport Y.M.C.A., 1922, and Trinity Church, Bridgeport, 1924.

¹The term Modernistic has not been used consistently by architectural historians. Marcus Whiffen in American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles (Cambridge, Mass., 1969) uses the term for 1930s buildings like this one in which fluting and zig-zags are the dominant motifs. Declaring Modernistic "first of all a style of ornament," Whiffen relates it directly to the 1925 Paris Exposition which gave rise to Art-Deco. Martin Greif distinguishes true Art Deco from the Modernistic, which he says "reduced the wealth and endless variety of Art Deco to a handful of decorative motifs." His judgment ignores the considerable diversity of ornament found on buildings of the period and is highly colored by his enthusiasm for unadorned, streamlined 1930s buildings, which he sees as a reaction to Modernistic and which he calls Depression Modern in his book by the same name (New York, 1975).

Virginia and Lee McAlester in A Field Guide to American Houses (New York, 1984) group both the highly ornamented 1930s buildings and the curvilinear streamlined buildings under the major heading Modernistic. They then distinguish two subcategories: Art Deco ("zigzag" modernistic) and Art Moderne (streamline modernistic). They note that the two often occur in combination.

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Advertisement,
Bridgeport
Directory,
1916. p.64

Electric Light and Power

61 BRIDGEPORT (1916) DIRECTORY



THE United Illuminating Company

MODERN conditions demand swift and economical production. The manufacturing plant using electric power is the progressive, efficient and profitable plant. Electric power is the most convenient, the safest and most economical. Always under control. Our experts are at your service. Let us help you solve your power problems. Also at

The Electric Shop
Cor. Broad and Cannon Sts.

Every device such as Washing Machines, Vacuum Cleaners, Fixtures, Cooking Utensils, and many other devices for changing housekeeping from drudgery to pleasure.

Telephones Barnum 821-822-823

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United Illuminating Company, Annual Report, 1935.

United States Census, Manufactures, 1919, 1929; Population, 1930, 1940.

Withey, Henry F. Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased).
Los Angeles, 1956.