

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

JUN 14 1983

DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Greenwich Y.M.C.A.

AND/OR COMMON

Greenwich Y.M.C.A.

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

50 East Putnam Avenue

N/A NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Greenwich N/A VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

4th

STATE

CT

CODE

09

COUNTY

Fairfield

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

 DISTRICT BUILDING(S) STRUCTURE SITE OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

 PUBLIC PRIVATE BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

 IN PROCESS BEING CONSIDERED

N/A

STATUS

 OCCUPIED UNOCCUPIED WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

 YES: RESTRICTED YES: UNRESTRICTED NO

PRESENT USE

 AGRICULTURE COMMERCIAL EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT GOVERNMENT INDUSTRIAL MILITARY MUSEUM PARK PRIVATE RESIDENCE RELIGIOUS SCIENTIFIC TRANSPORTATION OTHER:**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Young Men's Christian Association

STREET & NUMBER

50 East Putnam Avenue

CITY, TOWN

Greenwich N/A VICINITY OF

STATE

CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Greenwich Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Greenwich Avenue (P. O. Box 455)

CITY, TOWN

Greenwich

STATE

CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1983

 FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 So. Prospect St.

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

CT

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 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 Greenwich Y.M.C.A. is a Georgian Revival structure constructed in 1916. Located on the southeast corner of East Putnam Avenue and Mason Street, it is an integral part of the downtown streetscape, with offices, shops and a frame church as its most immediate neighbours. Large and imposing, the "Y" anchors this busy corner without overwhelming its surroundings, imparting a sense of solidity, sobriety and tradition to a downtown area whose architectural character is undergoing rapid change.

The building's form makes excellent use of its corner site. The design consists of a large central rotunda flanked at right angles by two four-story wings (Fig. 1). Within the area formed by the inner angle of the wings and connected to them, is a gymnasium-pool complex (Fig. 2). The approximate dimensions of the various components are: the rotunda, 30' in diameter; each wing, 80' by 40'; and the gymnasium-pool, 75' by 50'. In all, the building encompasses about 20,000 square feet. The exterior walls are Harvard Brick laid in English Cross Bond, while most of the trim is cast stone.

In general, the decorative details of the exterior are confined to the area of the central entrances. The rotunda is the dominating feature, rising above the roof lines of the wings and terminating in a shallow dome crowned by an octagonal lantern. In front of the rotunda is a two-story circular porch supported by paired Doric columns with capitals vaguely suggesting the "Temple of the Winds" design (note the somewhat incongruous egg and dart molding at the top of these capitals, Fig. 3). Across the frieze reads "The Young Men's Christian Association" and the cornice has plain modillions. A very interesting feature of this porch is the use of Guastavino tiles to vault the shallow, arched soffit (Fig. 3). Above the porch is a low balustrade and the rotunda at this level (the third story) is pierced in front by three large windows with semi-circular upper lights and keystones in their brick surrounds. The dome's roof is slate, and the lantern and the pitch of the dome hide a brick chimney at the rear.

To either side of the rotunda are the main entrances: the men's facing East Putnam Avenue and the boys' towards Mason Street. Both are framed by projecting triangular porticos whose paired columns, friezes and cornices connect with those of the rotunda's porch. The doorways have cast stone frames with wide entablatures surmounted by oval cartouches. Beyond the porticos, the wings extend for six bays south and east with the final single bays set off by cast stone quoins. The windows on the first floor level have double French doors with fixed six-pane lights above, and are set in surrounds with blind arches and contrasting keystones. The sash in the second and third floors (and the fourth floor whose windows face the rear of the wings only) is simple 8-over-8. Much of the sash in the front of the building has been replaced by small-paned metal windows which, except for

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 type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1916--built

BUILDER/ARCHITECT M. L. and H. G. Emory

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Greenwich Y.M.C.A. possesses two areas of significance. First, it is an important example of the Georgian Revival style (Criterion C). Second, the building is a visual expression of the moral and philosophical "climate" of early twentieth century America (Criterion A).

Little is known about the two architects, M. L. and H. G. Emory, who designed this structure. In spite of Mr. Burnham's assertion that "Marshall L. Emory...was a noted architect,"¹ the Greenwich Y.M.C.A. appears to have been their only large commission; and Whitney has not included them in his work on deceased American architects. All that can be said for sure, is that the Emorys were working together as a partnership in New York City when they were approached by Mrs. Nathaniel Witherell in 1912 to draw up plans for a Y.M.C.A. which she intended to give to the people of Greenwich in memory of her husband.²

The building they produced, although generally in the style of the Georgian Revival, was skillful if somewhat eclectic combination of Neo-Adamesque and Neo-Colonial elements, seasoned with a dash of Beaux Arts details. Features which are Neo-Colonial in inspiration include the hipped roofs of the two main wings, the pedimented porticos of the entrances, and the cast stone quoins which set off the end bays. On the other hand, certain features are decidedly Neo-Adamesque: the choice of red brick for the exterior walls, the blind arches with contrasting keystones above the lower story windows, and the general Bulfinchian air imparted by the rotunda and shallow dome. Finally, one can identify as Beaux Arts flourishes the ear-touches above the main entrances and the use of coupled columns across the main facade where a strictly Georgian Revival structure would have employed single columns.

This building also reflects certain religious values, social mores and humanitarian ideals current in America before the nation's entry into World War I. Over the men's entrance are the words "Health, Knowledge, Character" while underneath is the inscription: "To Make Men Strong, in Body, in Mind, in Spirit." Over the boys' entrance the words are "Work, Play, Worship" and the inscription reads "To Help Grow in True Manhood." These sentiments are the reflection of the naive ideals of "Muscular Christianity"³ which lay

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Burnham, Alan. "Statement in Re the YMCA Building, S.E. Cor. of East Putnam Avenue and Mason Street, Greenwich, Conn., January 1, 1978." (Typescript).

Greenwich News and Graphic. November 10, 1916.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .9

QUADRANGLE NAME Glenville, Conn. - N.Y.

QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24000

UTM REFERENCES

A 18 615540 45431010

B

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

ZONE EASTING NORTHING

C

D

E

F

G

H

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property is Lots 3, 4 and 51 as shown on Greenwich Assessor's Map 169.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>	<u>N/A</u>

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Hal Keiner, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission DATE June 18, 1979

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect 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 June 7, 1983

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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


KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER DATE 7/22/83

ATTEST: _____ DATE _____

CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

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Determined to be Eligible for Inclusion on the National Register of
Historic Places

1978

Federal

Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

Washington

DC

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their too-wide glazing bars, harmonize nicely with the overall style and visual effect of the structure. The foundation of the entire building is random ashlar and the hipped roofs of the wings are covered with slates.

The gymnasium block to the rear is much plainer, utilitarian structure. It is well lighted by two sets of large windows. The lower are rectangular, while the upper have arched heads. The structure is covered by a simple gable roof.

The interior of the building, although altered over the years, still manifests in its details and fittings materials and workmanship of the highest quality. This is most clearly illustrated in the large public rooms on the first floor: the round central library (Fig. 4), the entrance halls on either side (Fig. 5), and the boys' reading room and the men's reading room (Witherell Hall). Here, one finds beautifully finished woodwork of Flemish oak (the front desks at the foot of the stairways in the entrance halls are of particular note, Fig. 5), plaster ceilings decorated with figures in low relief, and stairways and fireplaces of Tennessee marble. Of baronial proportions, the fireplace in Witherell Hall is the most impressive with its wide mantel and chimney breast supported on carved marble columns (Fig. 6). A double stairway with a Greek Key design in the balusters leads to the second floor, the east wing of which is devoted to bedrooms, while the south wing contains offices and, at the end, an auditorium which once sat 300. Originally, this floor, except for the auditorium, was taken up almost entirely by classrooms. The third and fourth floors contain bedrooms.

The gym-pool complex is reached through hallways from the main building. The gym floor (Fig. 7) is wooden and is in good condition. Suspended from the ceiling, there is a 1/5 mile banked track with a cork running surface which shows signs of deterioration. Below the gym is located the 18' by 60' swimming pool (Fig. 8). The walls in this area are covered with original white, green and Delft blue glazed tiles laid in a geometric pattern and punctuated at about eye level with the seal of the Y.M.C.A. Interestingly, this pool is supported in the basement by a foundation of low brick barrel vaults; and, at one time, rifle practice was conducted here, the marksmen lying prone and shooting at targets placed at the ends of these "tunnels".

In general, the building is in fair condition. Numerous changes have been made over the years and some of these, unfortunately, de-

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tract from its overall artistic integrity. With the introduction of women members, locker room facilities have been enlarged and remodelled; while, as we noted previously, the classrooms on the second floor have long been removed. One change of historical interest was the construction of a handball court in a section of the building to the north of the gym. Here, in the early 1950s the popular game of racquetball was invented and perfected by Joseph Sobek, a Greenwich resident.² Perhaps the most damaging change has been the conversion of the original men's billiard room and the front third of Witherell Hall into a men's locker room. Not only does this seriously truncate the hall, probably the most beautiful room in the building, but it has the unfortunate effect of isolating the room from the three french doors which formerly provided it with natural light. This change does not seem irreversible, and perhaps the hall will someday be returned to its original grandeur.

Footnotes:

¹This building technique, used extensively in the early twentieth century, employed rectangular tiles applied in layers to construct the inner shell of domes and vaults. It was named after its inventor, Rafael Guastavino, a Spaniard, who introduced his theories to American architects in the 1890s. See, for example, Rafael Guastavino, Essay on the Theory and History of Cohesive Construction Applied Especially to the Timbral Vault; Read before the Society of Arts, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Boston: Tiknor and Co., 1892).

²Joseph Pisani, "Racquetball, the sport that originated at YM," Greenwich Time, January, 1978.

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behind the promotion and building of Y.M.C.A.'s across the country. By attracting boys and young men to the healthy atmosphere of the Y's gym, pool and classrooms, those who financed these facilities hoped that a high standard of morality and conduct would be maintained and promoted among the native born, while young immigrants would perhaps be encouraged to learn English and forget any socialist thoughts they might have carried with them from the Old World.

Another "protective" feature the Y offered the youth of Greenwich and those coming into the town was the availability of inexpensive clean rooms to rent temporarily. Young men could thus avoid going to cheap commercial hotels which were seen by the respectable supporters of the "Y" as dens of temptation and iniquity; mainly inhabited by cigar-smoking, hard-drinking, profanity-using, and prostitute-employing salesmen, drummers and gamblers in whose company a young man might easily slip into vice and degradation.

The Greenwich Y.M.C.A., therefore, is the product of an age of innocence, idealism, and the naive belief that social control and social values could be institutionalized through philanthropy. It is easy to ridicule these ideas and criticize their underlying hypocrisy. And yet, it should not be forgotten that those ideals did create an institution of considerable utility to the community over the past sixty years. Today, the building continues to contribute not only to the architectural quality of Greenwich's main thoroughfare, but also enhances the social life of the town's inhabitants by providing low-cost recreational facilities.

Footnotes:

¹Alan Burnham, "Statement in Re the YMCA Building, S.E. Cor. of East Putnam Avenue and Mason Street, Greenwich, Conn., January 1, 1978," typescript, p. 1.

²"A Description of the New Y.M.C.A. Building," Greenwich News and Graphic, November 10, 1916, p. 1. Nathaniel Witherell was a prominent Greenwich real estate promoter, who made his fortune during the period of Greenwich's development as a fashionable suburb of New York City.

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³Muscular Christianity had its origins in the writings of English Victorian clergymen such as Charles Kingsley. Losing all of its thoughtful subtlety in its passage across the Atlantic, the phrase became the label for the simplistic argument that physical prowess and well-being were directly related to moral character. Therefore, it was seen as the duty of America's churches to promote "good, clean exercise" among young men, particularly in the form of team games, which not only built up the body but also taught valuable lessons concerning cooperation and the necessity to play by a strict set of rules.

FHR-8-300A
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Greenwich Time, January 26, 1978.

Kimball, Fiske. "The Social Center. Part I - Commercial and Cooperative Enterprises." Architectural Record, XLV (May, 1919), 423-425.