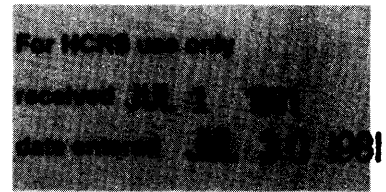


**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**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 Noah Webster Memorial Library

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 7 North Main Street _____ not for publication

city, town West Hartford _____ vicinity of _____ congressional district 1st - W.R. Cotter

state Connecticut code 09 county Hartford code 003

3. Classification

| Category | Ownership | Status | Present Use |
|---|--|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> district | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public | <input type="checkbox"/> occupied | <input type="checkbox"/> agriculture |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied | <input 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 type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted | <input type="checkbox"/> government |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial |
| | | <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 Town of West Hartford

street & number 28 South Main Street

city, town West Hartford _____ vicinity of _____ state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. West Hartford Land Records, Town Hall

street & number 28 South Main Street

city, town West Hartford _____ state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1981 _____ federal state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

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 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> fair | <input type="checkbox"/> unexposed | | date _____ |

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Overview

The two-story, gable-roofed Noah Webster Memorial Library is a skillfully designed example of the Georgian Revival style of architecture executed in red brick with wood and white marble trim, and with elegant details taken from the work of Robert Adam. The colossal tetrastyle portico and the large Palladian windows in the end elevations articulate an open, two-story interior space of fine proportions and unusual graciousness. (Photograph 1.)

The library faces east toward North Main Street on the southwest corner of Brace Road half a block north of the principal intersection in West Hartford Center. A bank, church, the present town library, Town Hall, a park and many stores are within two minutes walk. The library is part of the cluster of buildings that establishes the identity of West Hartford center.

Exterior

The library's central pedimented portico is approached by marble steps with eight low risers set between brick piers that are capped with marble slabs. The four wooden columns rise from the 6 x 18-foot brick porch on plinths and bases of torus, double scotia, and torus moldings through shafts with slight entasis to acanthus leaf capitals. There is an astragal at the bottom of each capital and a torus molding crossed by four, small vertical volutes at the top, under a molded abacus. Two companion pilasters are placed against the walls.

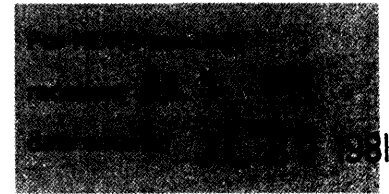
The columns support a narrow architrave that is separated by moldings from a wide frieze. There are raised circles in the frieze over each end column that flank large, raised plastic letters reading SENIOR CENTER. A dentil course runs above the lettering, under the plain, projecting cornice. The raking cornices of the pediment have cyma reversa moldings. The tympanum has been covered over with plywood. The soffit of the architrave, between the columns, is panelled.

The entrance has modern double doors under a transom and elaborate fanlight. The transom light is a single, oblong piece of glass. The fanlight is half round with wooden muntins that radiate from a half-round base. Simple swags connect the ends of the muntins, and a row of small, rectangular lights completes the glazing. The whole is framed in a marble arch that rests on small, square, marble impost blocks, and has a raised marble keystone. The side lights flanking the entrance, glazed in a pattern of square lights surrounded by oblong lights, have marble sills and panelled marble caps. There is a vertical, elliptical marble inset panel above each side light, at the level of the fanlight. The wall space above is broken by a row of brick set on the diagonal, saw tooth fashion, under a brick and marble diaper panel. The front porch is lighted by a small, cylindrical, iron lantern hung on an iron chain.

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The frieze, dentil course, and cornice of the portico's entablature continue along the roof line of the facade, left and right of the portico, and the level of the porch floor is continued as a marble water table. The wall space between these upper and lower horizontal elements is occupied, on both sides, by two 8-over-16 windows with rowlock lintels, panelled marble keystones, and marble sills. Above each window there is a rectangular marble inset block with incised lettering, reading CLEMENS and WHITTIER on the south and STOWE and WARNER on the north.

There are two long bull's eye dormers, with louvered openings, in the roof above. A picture taken before 1930 (Photograph 2) shows a corresponding round window in the tympanum of the portico pediment. The pediment is deeply recessed under raking cornices that repeat the base cornice. The picture also shows a standing-seam, metal roof and in the center of the roof a lantern with its four sides glazed under round arches. The corners of the lantern, canted and panelled, support a molded cornice. The roof appears to be a bell-shaped dome with finial, and there are finials above the corners of the lantern.

The front entrance to the basement is located directly below the main entrance. It is approached by brick entry ways on either side of the portico having eight steps down, then a right angle turn through segmentally arched openings toward the center. The original double doors to the basement have been replaced by a single door with plywood enframingent. There are two 6-pane basement windows to left and right of the portico, under the tall facade windows. The basement windows are hinged at the bottom.

The frieze, dentil course and cornice continue around the corner to the south elevation, where they serve as the returns of the raking cornices of the roof gable, and the marble water table continues. The brick wall under the returns projects one wythe, and thus appears as supporting pilasters.

The wall space between the pilasters under the gable is occupied by a large Palladian window. Its central element has 15-over-15 glazing under a horizontal band of five panes that are decorated by swags from center to center. The radial muntins of the half-round fanlight above terminate in half circles. The fanlight has a panelled, marble keystone in its molded marble enframingent. The 12-pane side lights are two panes wide and six high, with the top members decorated by convex-shaped diamond-pattern muntins. The side lights are separated from the central section by marble pilasters that support marble entablatures over the side lights, from which springs the semi-elliptical marble arch of the fanlight.

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There are three windows in the basement, six-pane in the center flanked by four-pane. They are placed under corresponding elements of the tripartite window above.

In addition to the elaborate front section, the library has a two-story rear section that is handled more simply. On the south elevation the rear section is stepped back the length of two stringers. The lower edge of the frieze of the gable eaves return is continued in the rear section as a line created by alternating recessed headers with headers in the wall plane. The water table is also continued. In the south elevation of the rear section there is a four-pane window in the second story and a 6-over-6 in the first. Beneath them, in the basement, there is a six-pane window, and to its right (east) a tiny 1-over-1.

The north elevation of the building is a mirror image of the south elevation, with the exception that at the lower front corner there is a marble cornerstone with the incised lettering D A R, over the year date 1915.

The rear elevation has a central section with gable over fenestration that creates a pavilion effect, although there is no projection. (Photograph 3.) At first and second stories in this section there is a tripartite window flanked by single windows. The single windows are three panes, arranged vertically and like the central sections of the tripartite windows are casements. The two-story section of wall that contains these windows is recessed one wythe thereby creating the effect of pilasters left and right, which strengthens the pavilion illusion. Above the second-floor tripartite window there is a half-round blind arch on marble impost blocks with a marble keystone. Its tympanum is filled with diamond-shaped brick work in a field of marble chips.

To the south on the second floor there are two horizontal six-pane windows while on the first floor there is one window that has been filled in and one 6-over-6. To the north a door opens onto a metal fire escape at both first and second floors, and then there is a six-pane window at each floor. The marble water table continues across the back.

In the basement, from the south, there is a 3-over-3 window and a door at grade that is next to the "pavilion". In the "pavilion" there are two 6-pane windows. To the north, steps with five risers lead down to a door, and beyond it there is a 6-pane window.

Square, twin chimneys, rising from the roof left and right of center, are visible from the rear.

The bond of the brick in the exterior walls of the library is almost entirely stretchers. The brick are set in row lock above the water table.

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Otherwise, the only exceptions to the all-stretcher bond are decorative features such as the headers used to continue the frieze line in the rear section and diaper panels. The exterior brick walls are load bearing, with interior frame construction.

Interior

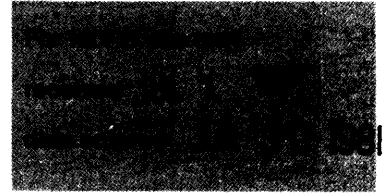
The dominant interior space is the 27 x 57-foot main room, with high ceiling, designed to be the principal library room. (See floor plan.) There is a foyer with closets on either side. The ends of the four partitions in this arrangement are treated as panelled and fluted pilasters. The space between the two central fluted pilasters has double doors and over them is a fanlight that repeats the fanlight over the exterior doors. (Photograph 4.) Across the room is a screen of two square posts flanked by panelled pilasters. (Photograph 5.) The two elements of four pilasters/posts face one another, while at the ends of the room the Palladian windows face one another. The Palladian windows are flanked by panelled pilasters and the sections are divided by fluted pilasters.

On the west wall, left and right of the screen, are two brick fireplaces. (Photograph 6.) The shelf in the mantel over each fireplace is an extension of the shelving that surrounds the room, to hold the books. The fluted and panelled pilasters and columns, the molded surrounds of the windows, and the shelving and fireplace mantels, are good quality, coordinated millwork, and still complete.

The present dropped ceiling is about 16 feet high. The original ceiling is intact above it. The original ceiling is a plain, coved surface that rises from a molded cornice that encircles the room above the dropped ceiling. The cornice has a dentil course, and breaks out over the end pilasters of the two screens. The pilasters and columns have molded capitals, now obscured by the dropped ceiling. Four plain arches, raised bands of wood, run across the ceiling, connecting the end elements of the screens, two parallel with the length of the room and two across its width. (Photograph 7.) The four arches create a central ceiling area, in the center of which is a round molded opening, now closed in, to the base of the lantern. The round arched portions of the Palladian windows, also above the dropped ceiling, have scrolled keystones.

Directly below the principal room there is a basement space, the assembly room, of equal floor space but with much lower ceiling and little architectural embellishment. (Photograph 8.) The front entrance to this room, reached from outdoors by the brick entry ways, formerly had double doors, now replaced with a single door in plywood enframingent. The windows provide ample light.

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The stairway is in the rear section of the building, between the south fireplace and the west screen. It is a modern steel and concrete stairway, a replacement for the original. The rear door at grade, probably not original, opens from the landing between the first floor and the basement. The rear section of the building, 13 feet deep, is given over to service functions. In the basement are the furnace room, a kitchen, and rest rooms. On the main floor are more rest rooms, an office, and a second kitchen. Offices and work rooms that are plain and without decorative or architectural embellishment occupy the second floor.

Land

The lot is not large, 120 feet of frontage on North Main Street by a depth of 143 feet. There is a slight slope upwards from North Main Street to the entrance. The grounds have some shrubs and trees, but no out-buildings.

1.

There is a partition from the cornice level to the original ceiling at the north arch. Its age and purpose are obscure.

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 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 1915-17 **Builder/Architect** R.F. Jones/Davis and Brooks

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criteria

The Webster Memorial Library is a skillful example of the Georgian Revival style of architecture, designed by the Hartford firm of Davis and Brooks, whose largest and best known work is the Hartford Municipal Building. (Criterion C.) For twenty years the Webster Memorial Library served as the home of the West Hartford Public Library, the first free library in the Greater Hartford area. (Criterion A.)

Architecture

A number of features characteristic of the Georgian Revival style are present in the Webster Memorial Library., starting with the plan which is rectangular and without minor projections. The facade is strictly symmetrical, with even the chimneys contributing to the over-all symmetry. The eaves are detailed as a classical cornice, while in the center of the roof the architects designed a cupola or lantern, now unfortunately removed. A portico with free-standing columns, such as the library has, was a somewhat less frequent but not uncommon expression of the Georgian style. The fanlight at the entrance and the Palladian windows in the end walls were parts of the style.

On the interior, many of the same features were repeated, including the cornice with dentil course that is now obscured by the false ceiling. A second fanlight appears over the inner doors, and the Palladian windows are a dramatic source of light. The screen of two columns and two pilasters, on the west side of the room opposite the entrance, is a favorite device of Robert Adam (1728-1792), the famous Scottish architect who refined and elaborated on the Georgian style.

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Davis and Brooks demonstrated that they were well versed in the discipline of the Georgian Revival style, and designed a highly-creditable building for the Webster Memorial Library. In doing so they were in step with their times, for classically inspired architecture had been established by the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago to be the dominant force in American architectural taste. Its popularity was in full strength in the second decade of the 20th century, and continued until approximately the end of the 1920s.

In its present form, without the lantern, the building looks somewhat truncated. The portico seems high and overly prominent. The recessed effect, or depth, of the pediment as originally designed, now also obscured, and the continuation of upward thrust implicit in the lantern were important factors, now sorely missed. Re-opening of the pediment probably could be accomplished in a practical manner, but replicating the lantern would be more difficult and costly. Re-establishing the lantern would, of course, bring the added benefit of natural light to the center of the principal room, once the false ceiling was removed. The round window of the re-opened pediment, through visual association with the two bull's eye dormers, would help give the roof line a sense of cohesion.

Architects and Builder

Davis and Brooks opened their office for the practice of architecture in New Britain, Connecticut, in 1897, and removed to Hartford in 1900. F. Irwin Davis (1869-1944) was born in Wiscasset, Maine, attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was a member of the American Institute of Architects, and practiced with Brooks to 1918, when he withdrew to follow a business career.

William F. Brooks (1872-1950) was born in New York City, attended the Columbia University School of Architecture, spent "two years abroad studying architecture",¹ and worked in the New York office of Architect Ernest Flagg (1857-1947), half-brother of the Hartford artist, Charles Noel Flagg, and graduate of the Ecole des Beaux-Arts.

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The firm of Davis and Brooks and then Brooks practicing by himself did a good deal of work in the Hartford area, including the Orient Insurance Co., 20-22 Trinity Street, 1905. Their best known work was the Beaux-Arts style³ Municipal Building, 1911-15, a commission they were awarded through winning a prestigious competition conducted by John M. Carrere of Carrere and Hastings, then consultant to the City of Hartford.

The minutes of the Sarah Whitman Hooker Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution (see below) record that the man from the Davis and Brooks firm in charge of the Webster Library commission was "Mr. Collins", about whom little is known. Horace B. Collins, architect, is listed in the Hartford directory of 1911 as practicing by himself, and in the years 1912-1918 as practicing with Davis and Brooks. After 1918 he drops out of the directories entirely. The timing suggests that he may have been needed by Brooks and Davis to help with the unusual volume of work connected with the Municipal Building, as he appears to have come with the firm soon after they won that competition. Then, in 1918, a major realignment obviously occurred, for in that year not only did Collins leave the firm but also so did Davis, leaving Brooks to carry on by himself.

The contractor who built the Webster Library was the firm of R. F. Jones, the leading builder of his day in the Hartford area. Richard F. Jones, Sr. (1874-1951) as a young man of 22 had built Hill-Stead, designed by Stanford White² for Albert Pope, in Farmington, Connecticut, now the Hill-Stead Museum. During his long career, Jones built all or part of the Garde Hotel, Bond Hotel, Allyn Theater, Society for Savings, Hartford Hospital, Loomis School, and Bushnell Memorial, as well as many homes, including the Spanish House in West Hartford, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

History

When the Sarah Whitman Hooker Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution held its organizational meeting January 27, 1906, the purpose of building a library to be given to the town already was in mind. Fund-raising efforts, including bazaars and solicitation of contributions, were put in hand, and continued for a decade. One major gift was the donation of a lot, December 17, 1909, by Mary J. Shepherd. The lot was located opposite the green on the west side of South Main Street, about a block south of the site actually used, and was to be the location of the new building. On February 22, 1910, the fund stood at \$7,760 and in June of 1913 at \$25,000, although \$6,500 of this amount was in pledges that apparently never were paid.

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In April of 1912 the architect was selected. In the summer of 1913 the town offered the lot on the corner of Brace Road for the library's site, whereupon the D.A.R. sold the lot donated by Mrs. Shepherd back to her for \$4,000. A contract was let with R. F. Jones for \$22,361.75 and in 1915 construction got under way.³ The record gives no indication why the Brace Road site was preferred. Speculation suggests that it was a larger lot, and the corner location was more prominent. Moreover, it was next to the Town Hall, then located in a Greek Revival style frame building that originally had been the first structure of the West Hartford Congregational Church. The site of this building, demolished after 1936, is the present small park south of and adjacent to the Webster Library.

Toward the end of construction, the D.A.R. apparently ran short of funds, for on December 20, 1916 the town appropriated \$4,000 toward the cost. The Sarah Whitman Hooker Chapter held its first meeting in its new assembly hall, in the basement, January 26, 1917, and the formal dedication and presentation to the town was held February 27, 1917.⁴

Presumably, the D.A.R. selected the name of the library, and in doing so honored West Hartford's most famous son, Noah Webster (1758-1843), educator and lexicographer, whose name became synonymous with the word dictionary. Three of the four authors named in the panels over the facade windows are also Hartford personalities, Samuel Clemens,⁵ Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Charles Dudley Warner.

In the late 19th century, the West Hartford Congregational Church established a library on its premises. In 1883, this library was opened to the public, free of charge, thus becoming the first free public library in the Greater Hartford area.⁶ The town took over support of the library in 1897, and these books were moved into the Webster Library when it was built.⁷

When the Webster Library came to be considered inadequate, the present West Hartford Public Library was built across the street and a block south in 1937.⁸ After 1937 the Webster Library building was used as the Y.M.C.A./Y.W.C.A. into the 1950s and then as the Senior Center. The town now plans to issue a request for proposals for the site's redevelopment with the provision that the building not be demolished.

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|--------------------|---|-------------|---|------|---|
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|--------------------|---|-------------|---|------|---|

1. Hartford in 1912, p. 232.
2. In collaboration with Theodate Pope Riddle.
3. West Hartford Building Permit Application No. 270, October 18, 1915.
4. This account of the history of the D.A.R.'s work in planning and building the library is taken from the minutes of the Sarah Whitman Hooker Chapter, Daughter of the American Revolution, as abstracted by Frances Fransson.
5. Samuel Clemens wrote under the pseudonym of Mark Twain.
6. Giddings, p. 97.
7. When the D.A.R. deeded its interest in the library building to the town in 1917, it retained right to the use of the lower floor assembly room for its meetings. (West Hartford Land Records, volume 33, page 560.) The D.A.R. continues to have right to the use of a meeting room in the present library building.
8. The present library building was dedicated March 19, 1938.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

ACREAGE NOT VERIFIED

10. Geographical Data

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Acreeage of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Hartford North

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

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| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

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|------|--|---------|--|--|--|----------|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is described in the West Hartford Land Records, volume 29, page 78.

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 David F. Ransom

organization Architectural Historian

date January 18, 1981

street & number 33 Sunrise Hill Drive

telephone 203 521-2518

city or town West Hartford

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 Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date June 22, 1981

For HCPS use only

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

Entered in the National Register

date 7-30-81

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

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Noah Webster Memorial Library
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Page 1

Ruth L. Giddings, "The West Hartford Public Library, Its History, Development and Present Status," thesis for Master of Science degree, Southern Connecticut State College, 1965.

Hartford in 1912, Hartford: The Hartford Post, n.d.

Minute Book, Sarah Whitman Hooker Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution, in possession of the chapter.

West Hartford Land Records and Building Department records.