

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

For NPS use only

received **AUG 14 1985**

date entered **SEP 12 1985**

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 WILLIMANTIC ARMORY

and/or common Willimantic Armory

2. Location

street & number Pleasant Street N/A not for publication

city, town Windham vicinity of Willimantic

state Connecticut code 09 county Windham code 015

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	<u>N/A</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name State of Connecticut, Office of the Treasurer
Henry E. Parker, State Treasurer

street & number State Capitol

city, town Hartford N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Windham Town Clerk

street & number Town Building
979 Main Street - P.O. Box 94

city, town Willimantic 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

city, town 59 South Prospect Street
Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input checked="" 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 former State Armory in Willimantic is located in a mixed residential/commercial neighborhood on the south side of the Willimantic River; just to the east is the historic footbridge leading to the city's central business district. Built in 1912, the armory (Photographs 1-4) consists of two portions, both of red-brick construction: the front part, called the head house, is a two-story flat-roofed structure surmounted by a high parapet and a blocky tower (Photograph 2). The rear portion is the drill shed, 1 1/2 stories high, with the ridge of the gable roof running parallel to the street. The principal entrance is located on the south elevation of the head house, left of center, with modern glass doors recessed within a shallow-arched opening. The entry is outlined by a coved surround and further highlighted by a quoin effect. To either side of the entry is a two-story projecting bay, hexagonal in plan, and to the right of the east projection is the large three-story square-plan tower, with the middle third-story window treated as a tall oriel.

Above the entrance, the projecting bays and the tower is a decorative cornice treatment of corbels between stringcourses, and the parapet coping there consists of alternating light and dark segments, an alteration of the original crenellation. Above the entry the parapet rises in steps and holds a cartouche with the state seal and a date tablet (Photograph 5). Except for the granite steps, all the trim (stringcourses, water table, window lintels and sills, parapet coping, entry surround) is cast concrete. Windows, many of them deteriorated, have six-over-one wooden sash. On the east elevation is a tall round-arched stairway window above an entry.

On the first floor of the head house just within the entrance is a spacious hallway (Photograph 6), to the left is a large parlor with a fireplace (Photograph 7), and off a corridor on the right is a series of small rooms. On the second floor are other small rooms, as well as a small apartment which formerly served the resident sergeant. In the second-floor corridor and apartment are some walls with lincrusta covering, but most interior walls are plastered. There is some exposed narrow-board pine flooring, but most floors are covered with modern linoleum. Dropped ceilings and plywood paneling are found in many of the rooms. However, extensive original oak woodwork, including two stairways, molded window and door surrounds, and five-panel doors, survives intact. In the basement are unfinished rooms and utility spaces. A target shooting range extends underneath the drill shed.

The drill shed (Photograph 4) has paired windows with nine-over-nine sash between simple brick buttresses. Three rotating ventilators are spaced along the ridge of the asbestos-shingled roof, which at the west end is concealed behind a three-step stepped gable with tile coping. The interior of the drill shed is completely open, with a suspended gallery at the east end. The roof is supported by a series of trusses formed from riveted steel angle beams. The brick walls are painted and the narrow-board floor is maple (Photograph 8).

The armory is in somewhat deteriorated condition. The exterior masonry is in need of repointing. Weather penetration has caused buckling floor boards and other interior damage, and there is extensive graffiti and other vandalism. On the whole, however, the armory retains most of its original features and historic appearance intact (Photograph 9, c.1915). The only major alterations are the parapet change, the modern entrance doors, some interior surface materials, a small basement entrance structure at the east side rear, and enlarged drill shed entrances on the north and west sides and a garage-door opening on the south side. The latter changes were made in the 1950s to better suit the building for civil emergencies.

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	X military	X social/
..... 1700-1799	..... art	..... engineering	..... music	..... humanitarian
..... 1800-1899	..... commerce	..... exploration/settlement	..... philosophy	..... theater
X 1900-	..... communications	..... industry	..... politics/government	..... transportation
		..... invention		..... other (specify)
	Criteria A,C			
Specific dates	1912 - built	Builder/Architect	J.J. McMahon, architect	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Willimantic Armory is significant because of the large role it has played in the life of the community. Since its construction in 1912 as the home of a popular community organization, Willimantic's militia company, it has served as a center for military preparations, disaster relief, and the major social events of the city (Criterion A). In addition to its historical significance, the armory is architecturally interesting (Criterion C): its tower, buttresses, corbelling and other details are suggestive of the Romanesque Revival style and appropriately give the armory something of the appearance of a medieval fortification. It was intended to be an impressive public building, and the state chose as its designer the well-known Hartford architect, J.J. McMahon. Because of its large size, elaborate architectural features, and important historical associations, the armory has become a local landmark. The armory is highly visible not only on Pleasant Street, where it dominates the neighborhood, but also from the downtown, its corbelled tower looming above the trees on the south bank of the river.

The construction of the armory marked the culmination of efforts by leading Willimantic citizens to secure a large facility where exhibitions, dances, and other social functions could be held. The local paper reported its dedication by Governor Simeon Baldwin on January 30, 1913 as "the greatest social event in the history of the city . . . a source of pride to everyone." The armory also fit into the plans of state officials, who at the time were concerned with Connecticut's preparedness for war and domestic unrest. In the early years of the 20th century, nearly all leased armory space was replaced by state-owned armories. These, like the Willimantic Armory, offered more drill space and specialized facilities such as the basement rifle range.

The Willimantic Armory fulfilled all of the goals of its proponents, both civilian and military. Its large drill floor was used for dances such as the annual firemen's and policemen's balls and for dog shows and other exhibitions; until recent years it was the largest public assembly hall in the city. During the 1918-1919 flu epidemic, the town of Windham was hard hit, with 137 deaths among some 8000 cases. The armory served as an emergency hospital, the only one in the county. Through sickness, hurricane and floods, the armory was a refuge for Willimantic and surrounding communities.

The armory was also the place where Willimantic's local Connecticut National Guard unit socialized and held meetings, conducted training exercises, and mobilized for military service. In the early years of the 20th century, militia units were important social organizations in cities like Willimantic, popular among both workers and the middle class. The armory was first used as a mustering point in 1916, when the local company went with Pershing to Mexico. Shortly thereafter, the men of Company L saw service in France during World War I. Again in 1941, the company was incorporated into the national army in the fight against Japan. In the early 20th century, the citizen-soldier was still an important part of the nation's military, and the Willimantic Armory is a reminder of the part played by local men in America's wars.

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Connecticut Adjutant General. Annual Report, 1912-1914.

Connecticut General Assembly. Appropriations Committee, hearings, 1911,
p.472.

(continued)

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.3 acres

Quadrangle name Willimantic

Quadrangle scale 1:24 000

UTM References

A	<u>18</u>	<u>731700</u>	<u>46211000</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes the armory and surrounding associated grounds and parking lot, shown as Lot 20, Block 144, Map 13-5 in Windham Assessor records.

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,
Historic Resource Consultants National Register Coordinator
organization Historic Resource Consultants date January 7, 1984
street & number The Colt Armory telephone (203) 547-0268
55 Van Dyke Avenue
city or town 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 National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Director: Connecticut Historical Commission

date August 7, 1985

For NPS use only

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

Melvin Byer
Keeper of the National Register

Inscribed in the
National Register

date

9/12/85

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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

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

For NPS use only
received
date entered

Willimantic Armory

Continuation sheet Willimantic (Windham), CT Item number

8

Page

1

Architectural Significance

The armory is a well-preserved, representative example of the elaborate, historically based designs which early 20th-century architects produced for important public buildings. Drawing mostly on Romanesque Revival detailing for its fortress connotations,¹ the armory also eclectically includes Tudor elements such as the oriel window and shallow pointed arch in the entry.

Because one of the purposes of the new armory was to encourage men to enroll in the militia (and existing members to participate more actively), the design had to be both attractive and functional. Local officers were concerned that men were joining volunteer fire companies rather than the militia because the firehouses offered better facilities for meetings and evening fraternizing. The new armory overcame these deficiencies. The exterior, with its projecting bays, corbelling, quoins, prominent tower, and oriel window, was intended to attract attention and inspire pride among the local company. Inside, the parlor was large and commodious, with its fireplace making it a comfortable meeting place for the unit. The drill floor not only provided space for marching and other maneuvers, but was also calculated to be a place where the company could hold the social events which were considered important inducements to membership.

The architect of the armory was John J. McMahon (1875-1958), a major in the Connecticut National Guard and a noted Hartford architect. In association with Frank W. Whiton, McMahon designed many public and parochial schools in Hartford and churches throughout Connecticut. Among his larger commissions are the Kinsella and Burr schools in Hartford (the latter a buff-brick design similar to the armory), St. Patrick's Church in Bridgeport, and St. Brendan's in New Haven. The firm also did some commercial buildings, most notably the Corning Building at the corner of Main and Asylum Streets, Hartford.

¹It has also been suggested that the architecture of armories has connotations of refuge, conjuring up the appearance of a Norman Keep.

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Willimantic Armory

Continuation sheet Willimantic (Windham), CT Item number 9

Page 1

Bibliography (continued):

Hartford City Directory, 1916, p. 1016; advertisement for Whiton & McMahon.

Lee, James J. [former Quartermaster General of Connecticut], "Sale of Armory
Deployed," Willimantic Chronicle, August 25, 1979, 7.

Obituary of John J. McMahon, Hartford Courant, September 9, 1958, 15.

Postcard Collection, PG 800, Connecticut State Library. Postcard view,
c.1915.

"State Armory Dedication Program," pamphlet, Willimantic, 1913.

Willimantic Chronicle, January 31, February 1, 1913.

WILLIMANTIC ARMORY
Willimantic (Windham), CT

SKETCH PLAN WITH PHOTO KEY

Scale: 1" = 50'

