

FILE

FEB 18 1987

NATIONAL REGISTER

**1. NAME OF PROPERTY**

Historic Name: Charter Oak Firehouse  
Other Name/Site Number: Charter Oak Hose No. 1

**2. LOCATION**

Street & Number: 105 Hanover Street      Not for publication: NA  
City/Town: Meriden      Vicinity: NA  
State: CT      County: New Haven      Code: 009      Zip Code: 06451

**3. CLASSIFICATION**

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: <u>x</u>	Building(s): <u>x</u>
Public-local: <u>   </u>	District: <u>   </u>
Public-State: <u>   </u>	Site: <u>   </u>
Public-Federal: <u>   </u>	Structure: <u>   </u>
	Object: <u>   </u>

Number of Resources within Property	
Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>   1   </u>	<u>   </u> buildings
<u>   </u>	<u>   </u> sites
<u>   </u>	<u>   </u> structures
<u>   </u>	<u>   </u> objects
<u>   1   </u>	<u>   0   </u> Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register:    0   

Name of related multiple property listing: NA

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official: [Handwritten Signature] Date: February 16, 1994
Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register (checked)
Determined eligible for the National Register
Determined not eligible for the National Register
Removed from the National Register
Other (explain):

Entered in the National Register

Edson H. Beall 3/17/94

for Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: GOVERNMENT Sub: firehouse

Current: COMMERCE Sub: office building

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: LATE VICTORIAN/Romanesque

Materials: Foundation: STONE Walls: BRICK

Roof: ASPHALT Other Description: Trim: dressed brownstone

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Charter Oak Firehouse is sited on the northwest corner of Hanover and Butler streets in downtown Meriden. The building is a Romanesque Revival two-story brick structure with five-story drying tower. The original structure, built in 1876, received three additions during the 19th and early 20th centuries. (Figure 1, Photograph 1)

The initial building facing Butler Street consisted of the 21' x 34' section and the tower. It was built when the hosecarriage was pulled by men. The north and west elevations are almost at the property lines. (See Figure 2.) The central segmental doorway is flanked by a door and narrow window under brownstone lintels that continue the spring line of the segmental arch. At the second floor a large window is flanked by smaller openings in a tripartite arrangement, under a brownstone name tablet with the raised lettering CHARTER OAK HOSE 1. Corbelling above the tablet is terminated at the north by a curved line of brick and at the south by the tower. The gabled roof above is narrower than the building. The building cornices extend as returns for the gable. Seven narrow recesses in the gable end are graduated in height to fill its space. (Photograph 2)

The tower has half-round windows under soldier-course relieving arches in its two first-floor street elevations, similar to the segmental doorway arch of the 21' x 34' section. Pairs of tall windows are at the second floor, while staggered small windows occupy the third- and fourth-floor spaces. At the fourth floor, the paired windows are under a half-round tympanum filled with terra-cotta diaper work. The roof line is finely detailed with recessed crosses and corbelling that support a truncated pyramidal roof. (Photograph 4)

The first addition, to the west, was occasioned by the acquisition of a steam pumper which was drawn by three horses. Accordingly, a two-story stable was constructed behind the original section. The stable's second floor, for storing hay, required a loading door under the end of the new cross gable roof. An oculus occupies the center of the gable end. (Photograph 3)

The tower originally had a bellcote. A poor 1906 image is good enough to show a wooden superstructure of four corner posts and balustrade under a square roof whose vertical profile cannot be determined. A better image is seen in a postcard view published in 1914. (Photograph 6) The bellcote contained a bell, to serve as a fire alarm, which now survives in the care of Meriden Engine Company No. 1.

The two final additions were constructed on the south elevation, behind the tower. The first is a two-story section known as the card room. It is after 1897, as it does not show in Figure 1, and before 1906, since it is present in the photograph of that year, which shows the same configuration as the 1914 post card. The final addition is the one-story portion constructed with wide doorway to provide access for a firetruck to the former stable area. (Photographs 5, 6)

On the interior, most original partitions and many original finishes remain in place. The original section displays bead-board dados and ceilings and hardwood flooring. (Photograph 7) The stairway to the second floor and the archway to the stable area are detailed with original newel and channelled surround with circle corner blocks. (Photograph 8) The firemen's pole through a circular opening in the second floor is in place (though not original). (Photograph 9) The card room area continues to exhibit deep wooden window reveals and plain surrounds. (Photograph 10)

The second floor of the original building, which was the bunk room, is now a meeting room. (Photograph 11) Other areas of the second floor have original cupboards, firemen's lockers, and bead-board finishes. The tower has its original wooden platforms and ladders which provided access to the pulleys at the top over which the hoses were suspended for drying. (Photograph 12)

**8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: Nationally:\_\_\_ Statewide:\_\_\_ Locally: x

Applicable National Register Criteria: A x B\_\_\_ C x D\_\_\_

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): A\_\_\_ B\_\_\_ C\_\_\_ D\_\_\_ E\_\_\_ F\_\_\_ G\_\_\_

Areas of Significance:	Period(s) of Significance	Significant Dates
<u>ARCHITECTURE</u>	<u>1876</u>	<u>1876</u>
<u>SOCIAL HISTORY</u>	<u>1876</u>	
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: James Kane, Sr., builder

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Charter Oak Firehouse is significant architecturally because it is a good Romanesque Revival example of the building type. It is the first firehouse built by the City of Meriden and the oldest municipally owned structure now standing in the city. The firehouse is significant historically because much of the history of the Meriden Fire Department may be read in the record of activities at this station.

Architecture

The masonry construction, round arches, tall paired windows, corbelling, and fine tower of the Charter Oak Firehouse make it a good example of the Romanesque Revival style. It well articulates the characteristics associated with the reference to medieval precedent evoked by the Romanesque. The absence of changes in the building and the fine state of preservation enhance its significance architecturally.

The first section of the building with its clear mass and function established a quality that was respected and matched by all but the last of the four additions. The stable, signalled as an addition by the fact that its ridge line is at right angles to the original, carried through with good detailing in the gable ends, particularly the oculus in each. The tower is perhaps the finest of the several components because of its half-round

windows, tooled brownstone dressing, and elaborate roof line. The card room is distinctive because of its banks of three large windows, different from what had come before, but appropriate. The final one-story mid-20th-century section under its conventional tile coping exhibits less attention to detail than its predecessors.

The interior was typical of its day, with hardwood floors, bead-board dados and ceilings, and natural-finish woodwork. Again, its survival intact gives it distinction and significance.

The builder, James Kane, Sr., was renowned in local circles as a "lightening bricklayer." The Meriden Daily Republican for July 28, 1886, in an account of his exploits, recorded that he took a wager he could not lay 3000 brick in a day, only to lay 3,500 in five hours and 35 minutes. Kane came to Meriden in 1860 to work for H. Wales Lines & Company, which for decades was perhaps the most prestigious construction firm in the state. Another example given of his prowess was his feat of building two chimneys 16 inches square and 2 1/2 stories high in 10 hours time. He built the Charter Oak Firehouse in April and May 1876, being paid \$1,294.74 on May 23.

### History

Prior to the mid-19th century, Meriden appears to have had no protection against fire. In 1850 the first in a series of volunteer groups acquired a machine whose function was to pump water, usually from a well, to the fire. The volunteer companies were as much social clubs as fire fighters, noted for "gorgeous uniforms consisting of oiled silk hats and long red flannel coats." In 1862, when the Charter Oak company of Hartford disbanded, a Meriden group purchased the equipment and, since all the gear had the name Charter Oak printed on it, adopted the name Charter Oak Engine Company. With the incorporation of the city in 1867 came the organization of a formal volunteer fire department. Charter Oak was reorganized into the new format as a hose company. In 1873, when a paid fire department was established, Charter Oak Hose Company became the first unit. Its building, the first constructed by the city for fire department purposes, followed three years later.

Other 19th-century improvements in fighting fires included the introduction of "steamers," steam-powered pumps to replace hand action. Hydrants were an important step forward because not only did they provide frequent and dependable sources of water, but they also reduced the length of hose required. Earlier companies carried as much as 500 feet. The telegraph alarm system saved a great deal of time because it gave an accurate location of the fire, putting an end to the not-infrequent spectacle of fire companies dashing off in the wrong direction due to faulty information.

The Charter Oak Firehouse, with its additions, continued in active operation until 1979, when the building became an office of the Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles. In 1992 the building was rehabilitated and converted to its present commercial office function. The upper floor is rapidly becoming a museum of the Meriden Fire Department. The building continues as tangible evidence of Meriden's oldest fire company and oldest fire department building.

**9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Annual Report of Chief Engineer of the Meriden Fire Department for the Year Ending May 31, 1869.

Meriden Daily Republican, May 23, 1876, December 5, 1876, July 28, 1886.

Meriden Land Records, volume 33, page 214; 48/349.

Meriden Record and Journal, June 16, 1956; September 3, 1976, A34.

The (Meriden) Morning Record, Special Centennial Edition, 1867-1967, October 28, 1967.

Rockey, J.L., ed., History of New Haven County, Connecticut, New York: W.W. Preston, 1892, p. 471.

"Thirty Years Service: A History of the Meriden Fire Department," Meriden Daily Republican, August 31, 1883.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: # \_\_\_\_\_
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other: Specify Repository: KingTravelways, 105 Hanover Street, Meriden, CT 06451.

████████████████████

**10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

Acreeage of Property: less than one

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting Zone Northing Easting

A	<u>18</u>	<u>4600420</u>	<u>682150</u>	B	__	_____	_____
C	__	_____	_____	D	__	_____	_____
E	__	_____	_____	F	__	_____	_____

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundary is shown by the shaded area on the map designated Figure 1.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary is drawn to include land that has historically gone with the building since 1897, as shown by the map designated Figure 2.

████████████████████

**11. FORM PREPARED BY**

Name/Title: David F. Ransom, Consultant, edited by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinator

Org.: Connecticut Historical Commission

Date: August 18, 1993

Street/#: 33 Sunrise Hill Drive

City/Town: West Hartford

State: CT

ZIP: 06107

Telephone: 203 521-2518

## Photographs

Photographs were taken by David F. Ransom in July 1993. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Photograph 1

View northwest

Photograph 2

Original section

View west

Photograph 3

View southwest

Building to right of cross  
gable is on another property.

Photograph 4

View southwest

Photograph 5

View north

Photograph 6

1914 postcard view

Photograph 7

Original building

View northeast

Photograph 8

View west, toward  
stable area

Photograph 9

Fire pole

View southeast

Photograph 10

Card room area,  
view southwest

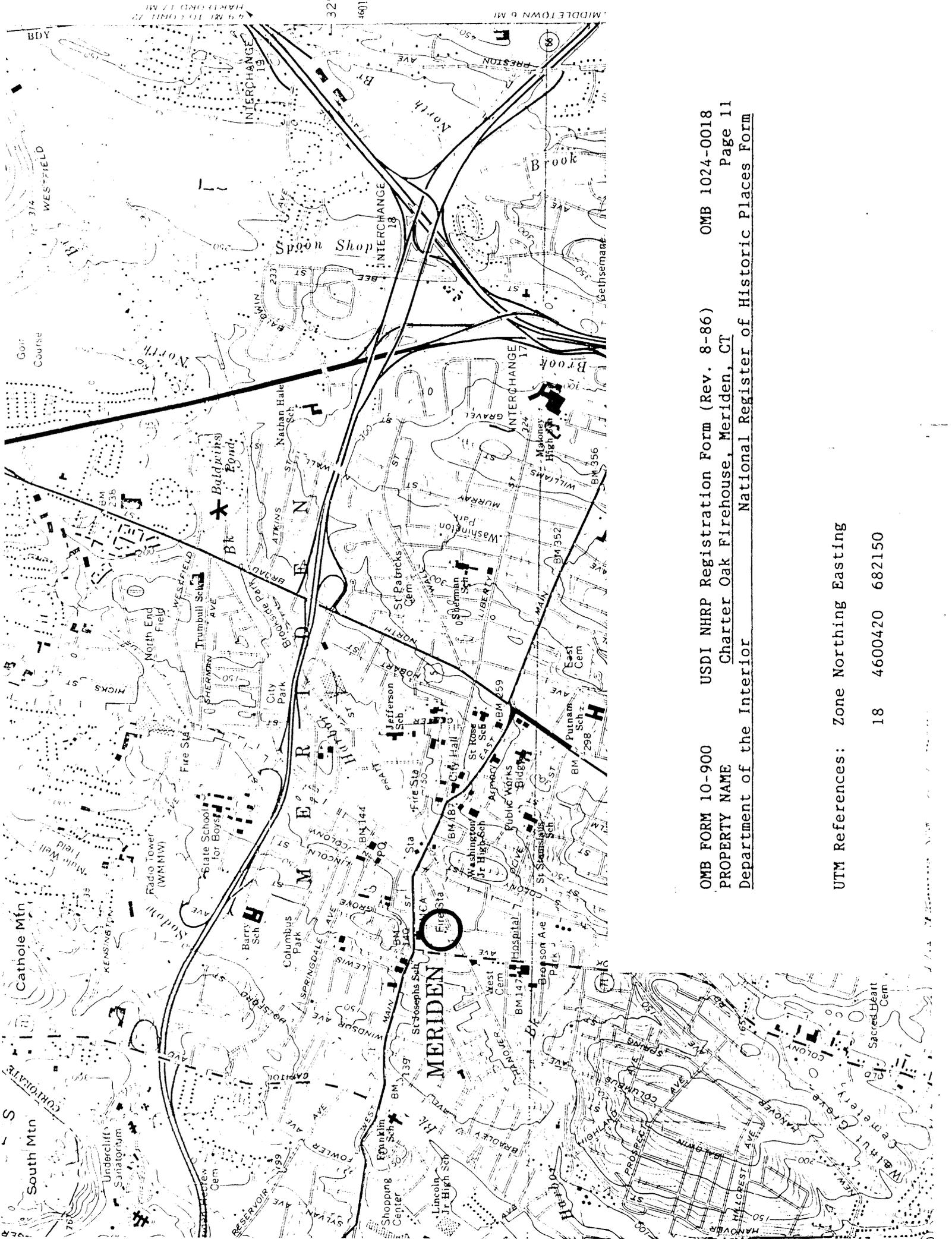
Photograph 11

Second floor, original section,  
view southeast

Photograph 12

Tower

View southeast and up



OMB FORM 10-900 USDI NHRP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86) OMB 1024-0018  
PROPERTY NAME Charter Oak Firehouse, Meriden, CT Page 11  
Department of the Interior National Register of Historic Places Form

UTM References: Zone Northing Easting  
18 4600420 682150



TRUMAN STILES.

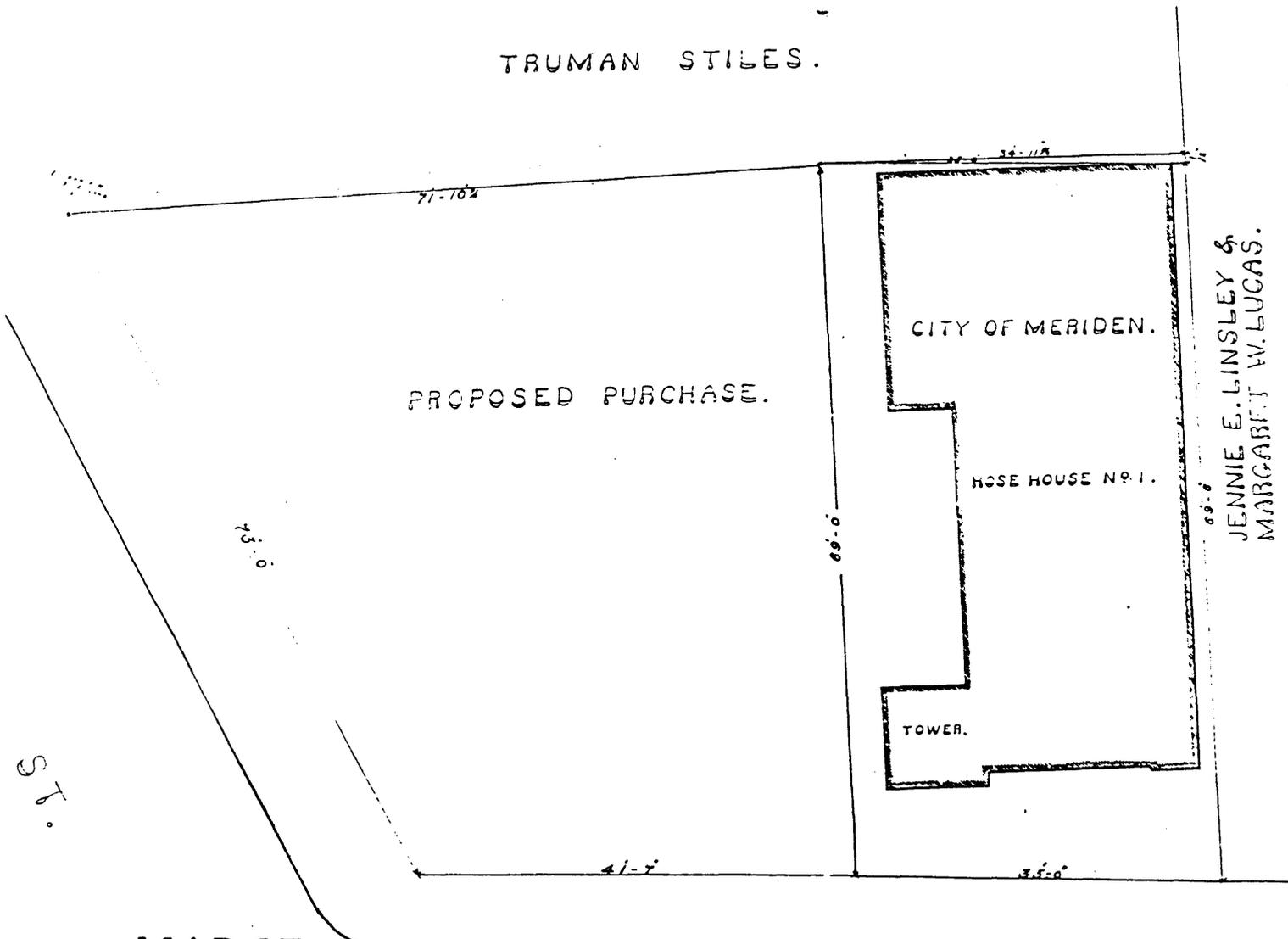
PROPOSED PURCHASE.

CITY OF MERIDEN.

HOSE HOUSE No. 1.

TOWER.

JENNIE E. LINSLEY &  
MARGARET W. LUCAS.



MAP OF  
 PROPOSED PURCHASE  
 BY THE  
**CITY OF MERIDEN**  
 FROM  
**TRUMAN STILES.**  
 OCT. 1897.

BUTLER ST.

Charter Oak  
Firehouse

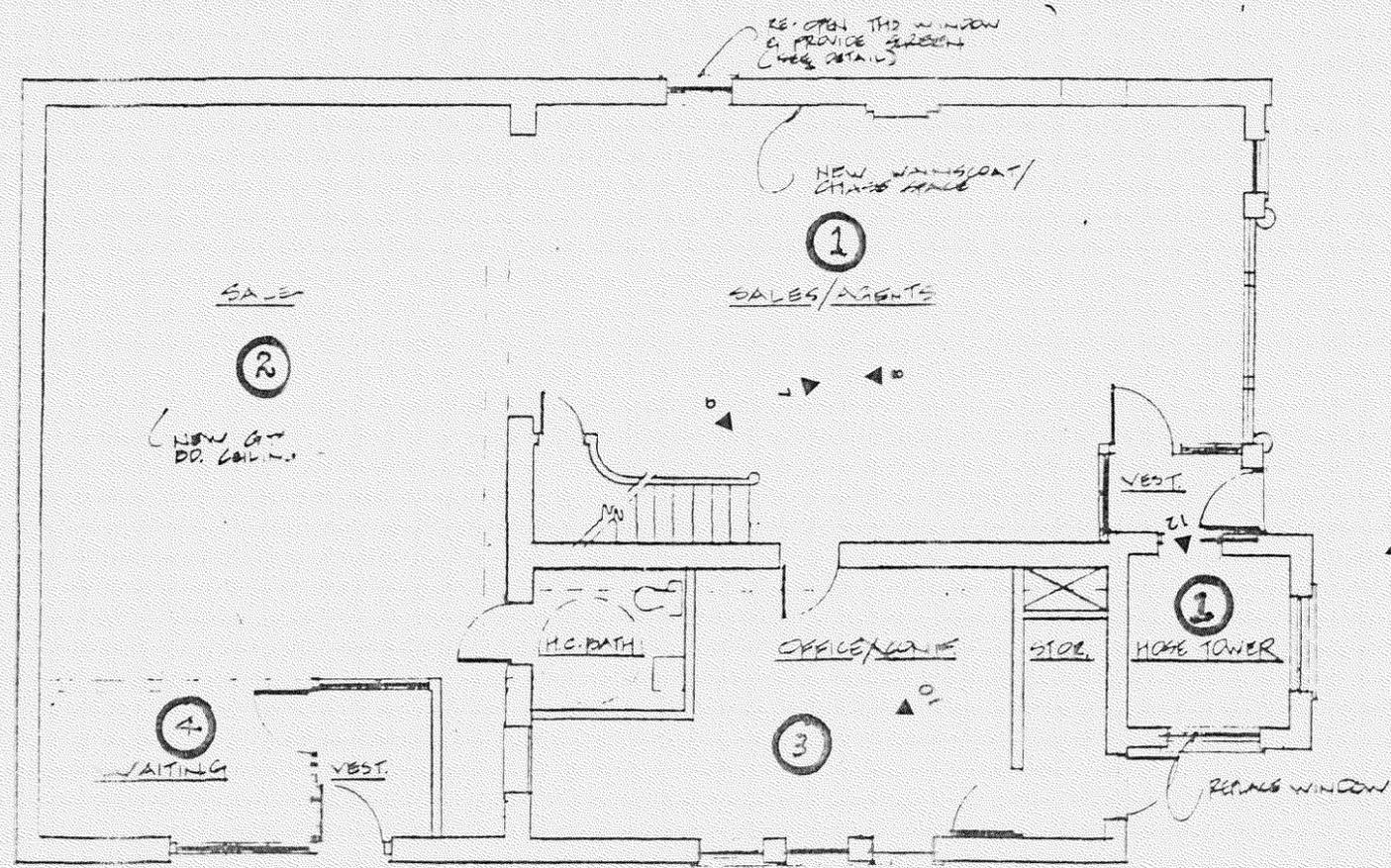
Meriden, CT

Figure 2

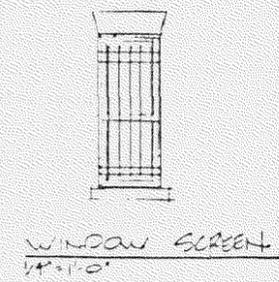
SCALE - TEN FEET TO AN INCH.



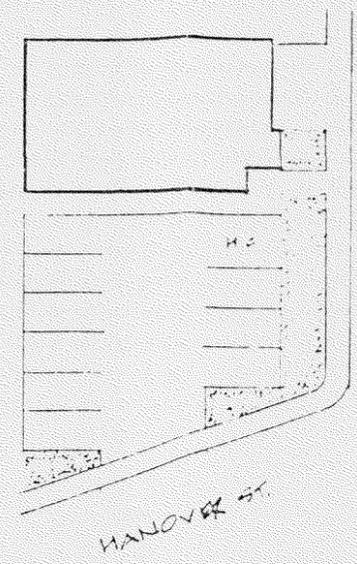
SIDE ELEVATION  
1/4" = 1'-0"



PLAN  
1/4" = 1'-0"



WINDOW SCREEN  
1/4" = 1'-0"



SITE PLAN  
1" = 20'-0"



FRONT ELEVATION  
1/4" = 1'-0" one inch = 8.6 feet

GENERAL NOTES		
REV.	DESCRIPTION	DATE
LAZARUS AND SARGEANT, P.C. ARCHITECTS - PLANNERS - INTERIOR DESIGNERS		
420 CENTER STREET WALLINGFORD, CONNECTICUT 06492		
<b>FILOMENA BUILDERS</b>		
PROJECT TITLE		
<b>KING TRAVELWAYS CHARTER OAK HOSE 1 RESTORATION</b>		

Charter Oak Firehouse  
Meriden, CT  
Photo key  
Figure 3