

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received OCT 1 1987  
date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic UNION SCHOOL  
and or common Union School Senior Housing

2. Location

street & number 174 Center Street N/A not for publication  
city, town West Haven N/Avicinity of  
state Connecticut code 09 county New Haven code 009

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input 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	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<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 checked="" 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 Haven  
Housing Authority  
street & number 15 Glade Street  
city, town West Haven N/Avicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. West Haven Town Clerk  
street & number City Hall - 355 Main Street  
city, town West Haven state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? <sup>May 21, 1979</sup>  yes  no  
date 1979  federal  state  county  local  
depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission  
59 South Prospect Street  
city, town Hartford state Connecticut

# 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

## Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Union School is a two-story brick former school building in West Haven, Connecticut; it is now used for senior housing. Built in 1889 and 1890 in an eclectic Victorian style, the school features terra-cotta and East Haven red-sandstone trim, as well as decorative brick effects. The school is located in an older residential neighborhood and is sited close to the sidewalk on a one-acre corner lot; the area to the west of the school is used for parking, while on the east side is an outside sitting area with a table and lawn swings. The parking lot of a neighboring property lies south of the school.

The school's facade (north elevation) features a center projecting bay treated as a pedimented three-story pavilion, with a full cornice return. The three third-floor windows are round-arched; the brickwork of their arched heads radiates outward, creating a fan-pattern ornament above the windows. The main entrance is recessed within a round-arched opening in a shallow porch. The entry's arch, outlined by a series of brick moldings, springs from simple pilasters and has a carved keystone. The porch's gable roof is concealed by a parapet bearing a terra-cotta tablet with the building's name. The porch and parapet each have a cornice with classical moldings and terra-cotta modillions. To the right of the pavilion is an octagonal-plan tower with round-headed third-story windows. Its steep hip roof is surmounted by a metal knob finial.

The school's hip roof is so shallow in pitch that it is hardly visible above the classical moldings which make up the projecting sheet-metal cornice. A course of brick modillions runs below the cornice. One large chimney, with decorative paired paneled round arches, emerges from the roof at the rear of the front part.

Window openings are mostly segmental-arched in shape, with brick heads and sandstone sills, and are fitted with bronzed aluminum windows. Original sash were two-over-two double-hung windows. Some of the side-elevation windows are paired within large rectangular openings.

Other decorative features include rustication on the sandstone foundation blocks and stringcourse above the high basement story; small-scale terra-cotta corbels under the upper-story window sills, which are continuous between windows; fish-scale terra cotta within the front pediment; terra-cotta panels in a pattern of chip-carved blocks beneath the pavilion's third-story arched windows and in the arched heads of the tower windows; and a brick sawtooth course above the upper-story windows.

Around 1914 the school was enlarged with an addition at the rear. Joined to the original front part by a small connector, the rear portion is nearly identical in plan and detail. The overall dimensions of the building are 85' in width and 138' in depth.

The interior is entirely modern, though the plan retains the school's front-to-back corridor arrangement, with stairways in the connector, at the main entrance, and at the center rear of the building.

# 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"/> 1500–1699	<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/		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation		
Criteria A,C		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)		

**Specific dates** 1890 - built **Builder/Architect** Leoni Robinson, architect

## Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Union School is significant for its role in the historical development of West Haven's educational system: it was West Haven's first large, modern, brick school building, serving generations of West Haven residents as a grammar school and for 35 years, as a high school as well (Criterion A). It also has architectural significance, both as a building which embodies the distinctive characteristics of Victorian architecture, and as a work by a leading Connecticut architect of the period, Leoni W. Robinson (Criterion C).

## Historical Importance

At the time the school was started, the fall of 1889, West Haven was part of the town of Orange, within which it was the most populous and prosperous locality. West Haven had grown because of its proximity to New Haven, its access to the New Haven Railroad, and its substantial industrial base. In 1889, 538 of the 849 students in the Orange school system were in West Haven's Union district. There had been a succession of wooden schools for the district, but considerations of space and amenities led the school board to start plans for a new building which would be completely modern in terms of "light, furnishing, and fireproof construction."<sup>1</sup> Their concerns were underlined when fire destroyed the district's only other school that same year.

Opened in 1890, Union School fulfilled well the educational philosophy of the period, which posited an important link between learning and a school's physical environment. Union School's tall windows admitted plenty of light, its ten large, spacious classrooms (each designed for 50 pupils) allowed adequate room for instruction in separate grades, and its central heating and ventilating system (which warmed outside air before distributing it to the classrooms) provided fresh air year-round, all in a fire-resistant, brick structure. The aesthetics of the structure were also important in making a statement about the town's prosperity, good taste, and concern for education. In one contemporary writer's judgment, "the magnificent Union School building,<sup>2</sup> . . . [is] one of the most pleasing edifices of its kind in the county."

## Architectural Significance

Union School is a representative, well-preserved example of the Victorian period's taste for complex massing, richly varied exterior surfaces, details drawn from historical sources, and an overall picturesque appearance. These attributes are evident in the school's tower, entry porch, and pavilion, which create asymmetry; in the use of various terra cotta and brick ornamental effects; and in the combination of round Romanesque arches and Classical cornices and pediment. It is an institutional analogue to the period's Queen Anne houses, which also utilized towers, asymmetry, and extensive and eclectic detailing; the fish-scale terra cotta is particularly reminiscent of contemporary domestic architecture. It is also similar to plans of English schools of the period.

(continued)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

History of West Haven, Connecticut, 1648-1940. West Haven, 1940.  
"The New School House", West Haven Budget, September 28, 1899, p.2.  
North, Harriet C., and Bennet W. Dorman. A Brief History of West Haven. West Haven, 1986.  
Orange, Town of. School Visitors Report, 1889-1890.  
Rockey, J.R. (ed.). History of New Haven County, Connecticut. New York, 1882.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1

Quadrangle name New Haven

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A	<u>18</u>	<u>671960</u>	<u>4571080</u>	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

### Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property includes the school and associated parking lot known as 174 Center Street, shown as Map F8, Lot 136 in the Assessor records, and recorded in the land records, Volume 640, page 207.

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

state	code	county	code

## 11. Form Prepared By

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

organization Historic Resource Consultants date March 24, 1987  
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  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

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

Patrick Andrews date 11/13/87 (11/13/87)  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: Beth R. Swase date 11/13/87  
Chief of Registration

**United States Department of the Interior  
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Union School

West Haven, CT

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

1

Significance (continued):

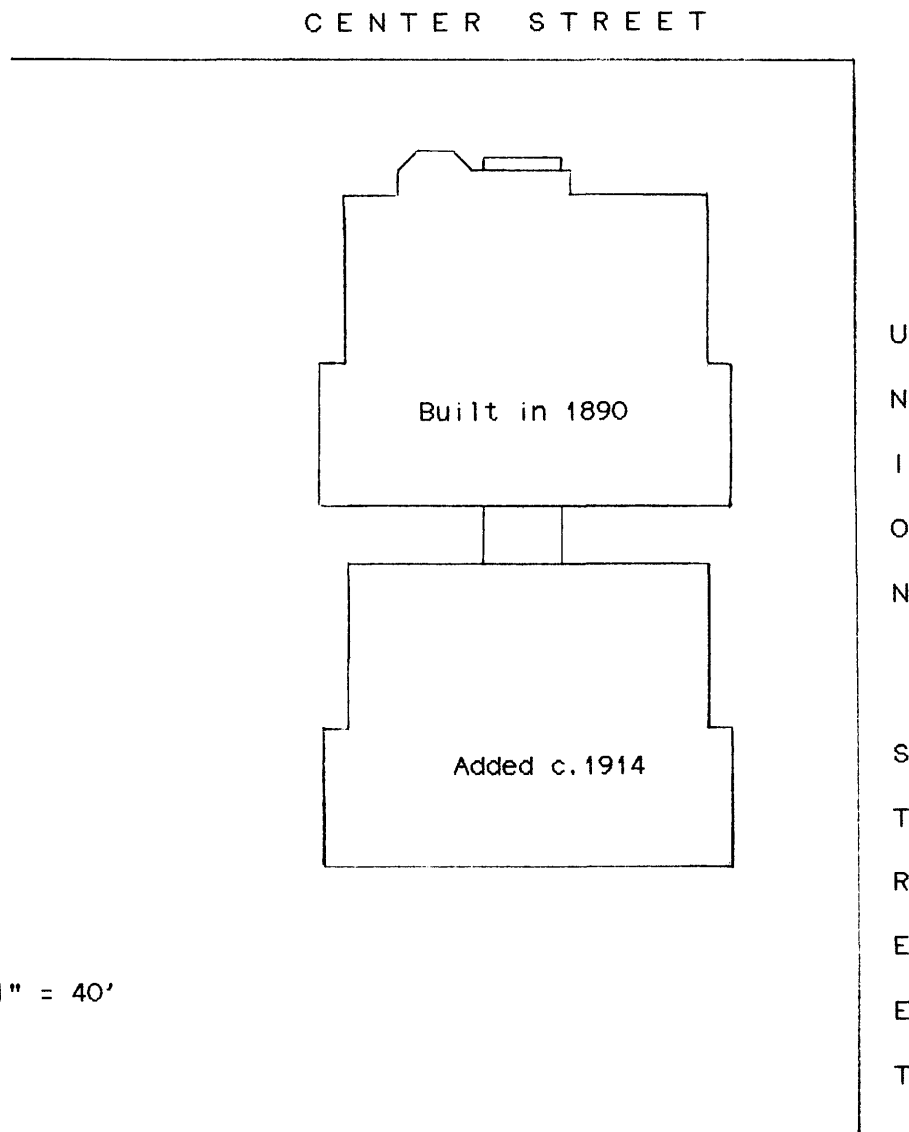
Leoni W.<sup>3</sup>Robinson was the leading New Haven-area architect of the late 19th century. He designed many large commercial and institutional structures in downtown New Haven, as well as stylish industrial buildings for the Winchester Repeating Arms and Quinnipiac Brewery companies. Many were in a Queen Anne-Romanesque style similar to that of Union School. In addition to his long and prolific practice, he is significant in the institutionalization of his profession: he was a charter member of the Connecticut affiliate of the American Institute of Architects, and a founder of the Architectural Club of New Haven, a group with state-wide influence.

NOTES

1. Town of Orange Board of School Visitors, Annual Report, 1889.
2. J.R. Rockey, History of New Haven County (New York, 1892), I, 332.
3. Elizabeth Mills Brown, New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Design (New Haven, 1976), 8.

UNION SCHOOL  
West Haven, Connecticut

Site Plan



Scale: 1" = 40'

