

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For HCERS use only

received MAR 31 1982

date entered MAY 18 1982

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

1. Name

historic Town Hall

and/or common Old Town Hall

2. Location

street & number 90 Post Road East

N/A not for publication

city, town Westport

N/A vicinity of

congressional district 4th

state Connecticut code 09

county Fairfield

code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" 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
	N/A	<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 The Old Town Hall Partners

street & number 235 Post Road West

city, town Westport

N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Westport Land Records, Town Hall

street & number 110 Myrtle Avenue

city, town Westport

state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Town of Westport Survey of
Historic Architecturehas this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1977

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Overview

The Old Town Hall in Westport, Connecticut, is a 2½-story, masonry building with exterior cobblestone walls, heavy, quarry-faced brownstone trim, and a high, hipped, slate roof. The rough stone building materials are used to articulate a symmetrical, Neo-Classical Revival style design that includes central gabled pavilion, central entrance flanked by fluted pilasters, fan window with keystone, quoins, and a belt course.

The building is 52 feet wide by 46 feet deep, and is sited about 70 feet back from the road on the south side of the main street, a block east of the Saugatuck River, in the heart of downtown Westport. There are driveways on both sides of the building, and a parking lot in the rear. Neighboring structures are a bank, theater, stores, and a firehouse.

Exterior

The Old Town Hall is separated from the street by a front yard or court that is flat but is elevated above the grade of the public sidewalk along the street. A stone retaining wall across the front and along the sides of the yard is pierced by central steps with five risers leading to a concrete walk that runs up to the building entrance. A second walk, at right angles, connects the driveways. Several trees in the front court obscure a view of the building facade from the street. (Photograph 1.)

The building's facade is dominated by the central, gabled entrance pavilion that projects eight feet. Three broad brownstone steps flanked by low cobblestone piers with brownstone slab caps approach the double, glazed front doors. A transom of five vertical lights over the doors has a segmental arch of cut brownstone voussoirs that continue down the sides of the doorway as rectangular blocks. Heavy fluted pilasters flank the doorway. They stand on bases of 15-inch quarry-faced plinths and torus moldings, have small circles in the necking of their molded capitals, and support a plain architrave and frieze. The lettering TOWN HALL is incised in the frieze. A flat cornice with cymatium crowns the entablature. Immediately above are paired 6-over-6 double-hung sash separated by a wood mullion. Their lintel extends as a belt course and supports a half-round window with radial glazing. The entire window ensemble has a Gibbs surround of brownstone blocks with a central keystone that echoes the raised keystone of the doorway below. The effect of the Gibbs surround is repeated by the brownstone quoins at the corners of the pavilion. In the gable, stepped brownstone blocks run in a saw-tooth pattern from the flat lower ends of the roof to a half-round, shaped finial at the peak. A flagpole is mounted behind the apex. (Photograph 2.)

In the sections of the facade to left and right of the pavilion, brownstone blocks continue the pilaster plinths as a water table. On the right (west),

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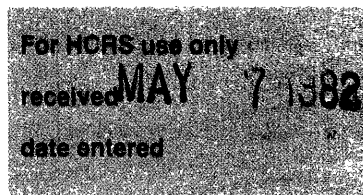
Item number 6

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State Register of Historic Places - 1981
Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, CT 06106

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OLD TOWN HALL

Continuation sheet Description Item number 7 Page 1

at basement level, there are paired 4-over-4 windows with brownstone sills and with the water table as their lintels. There is no corresponding pair of windows on the left. At the first floor, both left and right, there are 8-over-8 windows whose top sash are segmental to conform to the segmental arches of their apertures. At the second floor there are rectangular 8-over-8 windows with the Gibbs surround effect limited to the sides and with lintels that are sections of the frieze under the roof. (Photograph 5.) Quoins define the corners of the building.

Windows on the other elevations are the same descriptions as those on the facade. The east elevation has one basement window, toward the back, two windows, front and back, at the second floor, and three windows at the third floor, but the central one has been filled in with cobblestones. The sills of the third-floor windows are sections of the continuing belt course. (Photograph 3.) The west elevation basement, where the grade is lower than on the east, has three tall, paired 4-over-4 windows. The pair toward the back (south) is half filled in with cobblestones. In the central pair, one window has been replaced by a door, for which purpose the sill was lowered. Access steps with four risers descend north to south to this door, and a glazed entry protects the steps and doorway. The first and second floors each have three windows. (Photograph 4.)

The rear elevation at basement level has windows to left and right with iron grilles, and a central entrance. Steps descend with seven risers from west to east in a stairwell with cobblestone walls. The first and second floors have windows left and right like the windows on other elevations. The central section of the first floor has an aperture resembling the front entrance, including a double-door effect. Only the west leaf of the double door, however, is operable. It is fitted with six lights over a solid lower section. The east leaf is false, and consists of a 4-over-4 window with a molded sill over a panel below. The five-pane segmental transom is repeated from the facade.

At the second-floor level there is a tripartite glazed element with brick surround, interrupting the belt course, that presumably was introduced when the metal fire escape structure, by which it is reached, was added. The left and right fixed sections of this element each has a 4-over-4 window above a solid panel, while the central door has nine-pane glazing over three recessed panels. A cobblestone chimney projects 17 inches from the wall between the central and eastern apertures. It rises through the roof overhang to a height approximately the same as the apex of the roof. (Photographs 3 and 4.)

The high, hipped, slate roof has a short ridge line in the east-west direction with a short, upright, copper finial at each end. The eaves of the roof flare out over the walls of the building in a substantial overhang, supported by shaped rafter ends. (Photograph 5.) The structure is fitted with copper gutters and leaders.

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The south edge of the fire escape reaches approximately to the rear lot line. The parking lot behind this line is a separate parcel.

Interior

The brick walls, for which the cobblestones are an exterior facing, are visible on the inside. The principal partitions, also, are brick bearing walls, with rounded brick at the right angles. Floors are reinforced concret

The front entrance opens to a landing mid-way between the basement and first floor. Formerly, steps ran down to the basement both left and right, but the space occupied by the left (east) stairway has been converted to a lavatory. The west stairs have a wrought-iron railing, molded wood handrail, and a cast-iron newel post. In the basement a central hall runs from front to back. The left front room (northeast corner) was the town lockup. It has a heavy metal door and no windows, thus accounting for the lack of symmetrical apertures noted from the exterior. The middle room, immediately to the rear of the lockup, was the first floor of a two-story vault for protective storage of records and documents. This original, two-story vault was later extended by addition of a third level, on the second floor of the building, thus explaining the fenestration of the central section of the east elevation. There is a third room behind the vault on the east side of the hall. The space on the west side of the hall is divided into several rooms. The doorways through the brick walls have segmental arches. The windows are simply set in the brick reveals, without decorative trim.

The first floor is reached by ascending stairs with four risers straight ahead from the entrance landing to a central hall like that in the basement. The middle room on the left (east) is the vault, and there is access to it from the front and back rooms. The space on the east side of the hall is similarly divided. The upper halves of the doors between the rooms and the hallway are glazed with a large pane of glass while the lower halves are two horizontal panels, with pivoted, glazed transom above. The windows have wood surrounds, molded, with flat sills.

At the front of the building, west of the entrance, a stairway rises south to north from the first floor to a landing. The stairway has an iron railing made up of vertical members akin to balusters and curved motifs of S and C curves, and panelled cast-iron newel posts. (Photograph 6.) A matching stairway formerly was in place east of the entrance, but now only the step ends are visible. This pair of stairways provided public access to the hall on the second floor where town meetings were held. The stairs turned 90 degrees at the landings against the north wall to second runs of four risers to the second-floor level where pedestrian traffic merged as it turned toward the back of the building. The balustrade continues on both sides for six feet at this level to the doorway to the former hall.

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The double doors in this doorway may be original, as well as several other doors, but in general the second floor space has been severely altered with new partitions and dropped ceilings. The added level of the vault is still in place, and in the right (west) front room the original, pressed metal ceiling is visible. It has a pattern of coffers set off by egg-and-dart moldings with enriched molded cornices at the top of the walls. (Photograph 7.)

There is no access to the attic space. Apparently, it never was put to use.

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 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 1908-09 **Builder/Architect** E.G Southey ?

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Criterion

The Old Town Hall in Westport is an eclectic combination of the use of cobblestones with a Neo-Classical Revival style architectural design. Normally, this style is executed in a material with smooth surface such as brick, cut stone, or wood. Normally, cobblestones are used for rustic or domestic structures. In the Old Town Hall, however, the Neo-Classical Revival style and the cobblestone texture are used together in a combination that is out of the ordinary but quite successful. (Criterion C.) In addition to being visually pleasing, the Old Town Hall proved its sturdiness by functioning for seven decades as the nerve center of local government and now, in good structural condition, is ready to take on a new life and serve a new function.

History

From the time the town was incorporated in 1835, there was talk in Westport about the need for a Town Hall. For the first several years Town Meetings were held in a schoolhouse near the Congregational Church. In 1844 the town purchased a lot on which to build, but didn't, and the lot was sold. Various sections of the town vied to become the location for the Town Hall. This competition was resolved when the railroad came through in 1848 and established its depot near the Saugatuck River, thereby making this part of the town the center of activity.

From 1854 Town Meetings were held for forty years in a hall over the store of John N. Betts. When an 1878 committee proposed a building for \$5,000/7,000, the owner of the hall countered, successfully, with a program of renovations coupled with yearly rental of \$125. Presumably the hall was used most of the time for purposes other than the occasional Town Meetings. The town offices during these years were located at the convenience of the incumbent office holders.

After moving to another rented hall in 1892, a Town Meeting on March 2, 1908, appointed a committee to consider suitable protection for the town records. The committee responded to this charge by recommending construction of a Town Hall and the lot on Post Road East was purchased for \$4,500. A special Town Meeting held June 29, 1908, by a vote of 110 to 103² adopted the committee's recommendation, which read as follows:

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property Less than one

Quadrangle name Westport

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A	<u>1</u> <u>8</u>	<u>6</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>5</u> <u>6</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>5</u> <u>0</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

E			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

F			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

G			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

H			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

Verbal boundary description and justification

The nominated property is described in the Westport Land Records, volume 25, page 467.

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

state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
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state	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>	county	<u>N/A</u>	code	<u>N/A</u>
-------	------------	------	------------	--------	------------	------	------------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title David F. Ransom

organization Architectural Historian

date November 28, 1980

street & number 33 Sunrise Hill Drive

telephone 203 521-2518

city or town West Hartford

state Connecticut

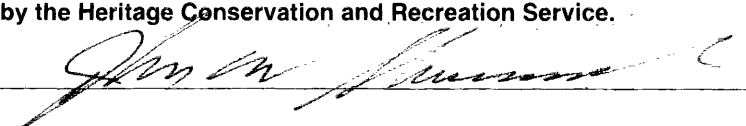
12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

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

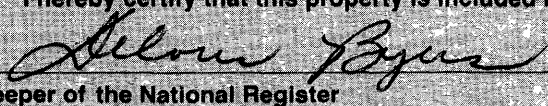


title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date March 9, 1982

For HCRS use only

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



Entered in the National Register

date 5/18/82

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Your committee has held some eight or ten meetings, at which all the members have been present; we have secured plans from a number of architects and have agreed that the plans here presented are the best adapted for the purposes of the town.

These plans provide,

- 1st. For the preservation and safety of our land, probate and other records, a vault 8 x 18 feet.
- 2nd. Adequate quarters for the town clerk, probate clerk, boards of selectmen, assessors, relief and school committee.
- 3rd. A town hall 41 x 48 feet.
- 4th. A basement in which the heating apparatus is located, a place for lockup and cell room, adequate space for voting booths....
- 5th. An emergency room for use in case of accident.

The building proposed to be built of fieldstone, with granite trimmings, the roof of slate or tile, the floors to be of reinforced concrete construction, the top floor of concrete; inside wood trim to be of ash, plastering to be of hard finish, heating by direct steam, plumbing to be first class with sanitary fixtures.

The building proposed to be 44 x 52 feet; ceilings to be 9 feet high in basement, 12 feet high on first floor, and an average height of about 15 feet on the second³ of (sic) hall floor. Stairways and partitions to be fireproof.

The building was erected at a construction cost of \$17,000 for a total cost of land and buildings of \$21,500. The first Town Meeting in the new Town Hall was held May 4, 1909.

The building was constructed of cobblestones rather than fieldstone, and the trim is brownstone rather than granite, for reasons not known, but as the changes were to less expensive materials, cost considerations may have been a factor.

The minutes of the June 29, 1908, meeting fail to mention the name of the architect who was selected, but the Annual Report of the Town of Westport for the year ending September 14, 1908 includes, without date, an item of "Expenses in connection with town building to date,

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Bill of Architects

Meloy & Beckwith	\$25.00
E. G. Southey	50.00
John R. Taylor	25.00"

As the committee stated that it "secured plans from a number of architects," it is possible to speculate that these three names were among the number. As Southey was paid twice the fee of the others, speculation suggests that his plans were used. Ernest G. Southey is listed in the Bridgeport City Directory of that year as an architect, and continues to be listed through 1948, a span of time suggesting that the Westport Town Hall was one of his early commissions.

Architecture

The classical revival idiom had been firmly established as the widely-accepted style for American architecture by the World's Columbian Exhibition of 1893 in Chicago. The style was well suited for use in public buildings because it carried a sense of order, strength, stability and impressiveness. The Westport Town Hall was one of a legion of public buildings constructed across the country in the Neo-Classical Revival style in the several decades following the Chicago exposition.

The Town Hall's high, hipped roof of slate is consistent with the style. The roof's flared eaves with projecting overhang supported by shaped brackets or rafter ends, however, is not an integral part of classicism, although the usage in Westport was not unique. The pressed metal ceiling, incorporating several classical motifs, fits in well with the overall design of the building.

What sets the Westport Town Hall apart is the execution of the Neo-Classical Revival style using cobblestones, a building material seldom associated with this style. The Westport committee envisaged a rough, inexpensive stone, fieldstone, in their June 29, 1908 report, that, in the event, turned out to be cobblestone. Their motivation is not recorded, but what they did was unusual.

Cobblestones were used during the early part of the 20th century in rustic buildings, usually domestic in nature, often built as bungalows in the style popularized in California, notably by the work of architects Greene and Greene, that swept the country. Cobblestones also were used in houses designed by Gustaf Stickley in New York State, who was the leader of the Craftsman movement. Both of these influences had to do with houses, and an air of domesticity does, indeed, carry over into the Westport Town Hall, but fitted with a formal entrance appropriate to its governmental function.

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At the end of the first decade of the 20th century, the Neo-Classical Revival style, flared roofs supported by brackets, cobblestones, and pressed metal ceilings all were in vogue. At the Westport Town Hall they all were incorporated in the same building to create a structure whose components are found elsewhere although the combination is unusual.

Present Status

In the late 1970s the Town of Westport decided to rehabilitate a former grade school for use as the Town Hall. This program was completed in 1979, and the new or present Town Hall, with much greater floor space, was put into use in 1979. The Old Town Hall is the subject of negotiations whereby the town will sell the structure to a new owner who plans to rehabilitate it for use as commercial offices.

1. This account of the 19th-century history of Westport's interest in a Town Hall is taken from Birge, pp. 52-57.
2. Bridgeport Telegram, June 30, 1908, 1:4.
3. Minutes of Westport Special Town Meeting, June 29, 1908.
4. Another Neo-Classical Revival style building, in Connecticut having a similar hipped roof with bracketed eaves as well as a textured siding, weathered shingles, is Comstock-Cheney Hall (1910) in Ivoryton. Memorial Hall (1913), Bethlehem, Connecticut, is an example of another community building constructed, in part, with cobblestones. Memorial Hall also has pressed metal walls and ceilings comparable to the Westport Town Hall ceiling. Memorial Hall burned down in 1980.

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Edward Coley Birge, Westport, Connecticut, The Making of a Yankee
Township, New York: The Writers' Publishing Co., Inc., 1926.

Bridgeport Telegram, June 30, 1908

Minutes of Westport Special Town Meeting, June 29, 1908.

Old Town Hall
90 Post Road East
Westport
Fairfield Cy., CT

Sketch Map
Site Plan
Photo Key

Post Road East

