

**United States Department of the Interior**  
**Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**  
**National Register of Historic Places**  
**Inventory—Nomination Form**

For HCRS use only  
 received JUN 3 1983  
 date entered

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

## 1. Name

historic Commodore Hull School

and/or common Commodore Hull School Apartments

## 2. Location

street & number 130 Oak Avenue n/a not for publication

city, town Shelton n/a vicinity of congressional district

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	<u>n/a</u>	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other: <u>n/a</u>

## 4. Owner of Property

name Arnold Goodman

street & number 503 Howe Avenue

city, town Shelton n/a vicinity of state Connecticut

## 5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk's Office, City Hall

street & number 54 Hill Street

city, town Shelton state Connecticut

## 6. Representation in Existing Surveys

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

date 1983  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

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

The Commodore Hull School is a former public elementary school. It is located in the city of Shelton on the west side of Oak Avenue, on an approximately three-fourths of an acre lot 145 feet south of the intersection of Oak Avenue and Wooster Avenue. The surrounding neighborhood consists mainly of one and two family frame homes constructed during the early decades of the twentieth century. A modern, three-story brick apartment building set back from the street borders the school property immediately to the south. Oak Avenue is cut into a steep hillside overlooking the Housatonic valley and the downtowns of the cities of Shelton, Ansonia and Derby. The school is set back from the sidewalk on the upper, or west side of the avenue (Photograph 1). The land to the rear is terraced, with a lower and upper playground behind the school. The school's front entrance is reached from the sidewalk by a flight of sixteen concrete steps. A 5' concrete retaining wall rises above the sidewalk and extends back to the side corners of the front of the building, creating a modest lawn area. Smaller flights of steps on either side of the retaining wall lead to the school's side entrances.

The structure is 62' x 90', of steel-reinforced concrete and hollow terra cotta blocks, with wood trim in doorways and windows. Its two stories rise to a modest cornice of white, enamel-glazed terra cotta block with a parapet above, with raised corners and a projecting crest in the center. These projections were originally pedimented, but the pediments were removed while the building was in use as a school. The building's design is an adaptation of the Neo-Classical style popular at the time that it was built. The structure rests on a high, exposed basement with a water table of molded white terra cotta block above a rowlock course of brick, surmounting alternating courses of terra cotta blocks and brick laid in Flemish bond. The whole structure is set upon a concrete foundation. The body of the building is of 6" x 12" hollow terra cotta blocks, and is inset with large panels of stuccoed concrete in which the fenestration is set, with sills, window surrounds, cornice, water table and other trim of shaped white, enamel-glazed terra cotta block.

The building's color scheme is its most striking feature. The terra cotta blocks are of varying hues, ranging from the deep russet color of the blocks in the basement courses through tones of violet red, pale orange and a deep beige in the body of the building. The use of warm, bright earth tones of the terra cotta block set off by the light beige color of the stucco panels and the white accents have an immediate visual impact on the observer. The colorful terra cotta blocks articulate the building's structural elements and vertical divisions, and give the impression of covering a greater area of the building's surface than they actually do. All of the wood trim used in the building is of ash originally painted a light green - now a dark kelly green, a color complementary to the oranges and reds of the terra cotta tile blocks.

## 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input 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,D)	<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** 1907-1908

**Builder/Architect** Arthur S. Meloy & Frederick S. Beckwith

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Commodore Hull School is significant architecturally as the only identified example of an elementary school building in the state of Connecticut to employ terra cotta block and reinforced concrete construction. (Criterion C). It is the only school building reported in the Annual Reports of the State Board of Education to have employed this noncombustible system of construction. In its scale and method of construction it reflects the movement toward more sanitary and safer, particularly fireproof, school buildings in the United States during the opening decade of the twentieth century. The school embodies a construction system and architectural design unusual for its time for school architecture. It is significant to the history of education in the City of Shelton, particularly to the development of an elementary school system in the Town of Huntington, within which Shelton was located until 1915. The building of the school marked the beginning of the expansion of the school system within the Borough of Shelton as it developed from a small manufacturing village into an industrialized, urban center. (Criterion A). The building is significant to the history of concrete construction and to educational and local history. (Criterion D)

The movement in the United States toward totally fireproof systems of construction took hold in the wake of the Chicago fire of 1871. In that disaster, the prevailing theory that incombustible building materials alone were sufficient to make a building fireproof was dramatically disproved. The first office building to be fireproof throughout was the Montauk in Chicago, which employed hollow clay and terra cotta tile blocks as one element in a total system of fire protection. Erected in 1881, it employed many devices which had appeared in previous years, integrating them into a total system. It had a concrete and iron grill foundation, its cast iron columns were covered with thick, porous terra cotta blocks and cement, and subsidiary partitions and flat floor and roof arches were of hollow tile, made of high grade fireclay. Many office buildings erected subsequently made use of these and similar features, and variants and improvements upon them. After 1894 semi-porous terra cotta gained greater popularity over hard hollow tile as the result of its performance in a Pittsburgh fire. 1/ The development during the late nineteenth century of reinforced concrete as a safe and reliable structural material was a major factor in the movement toward modern fireproofing systems, as it eliminated the need for structural members of wood or iron. Reinforcing techniques developed by Ransome, Hennebique and others during the late nineteenth century used steel reinforcing bars set densely in zones of tension, with bent and diagonal bars or J-shaped "stirrups" used in areas of shearing stress. By the early twentieth century, architects, builders and engineers had increasingly begun to use reinforced concrete as a structural system for skyscrapers, bridges and other ambitious projects.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 27,580 square feet

Quadrangle name Ansonia

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UMT References

A 

1	18	6	5	8	9	6	0	4	5	7	15	6	0	10
Zone	Easting			Northing										

B 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

C 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

D 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

E 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

F 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

G 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

H 

n/a														
Zone	Easting			Northing										

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

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

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

state n/a code n/a county n/a code n/a

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title William E. Devlin, Historical Consultant, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization n/a date September, 1982

street & number 368 Curtis Road telephone 354-1370


city or town Bridgewater state Connecticut

# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

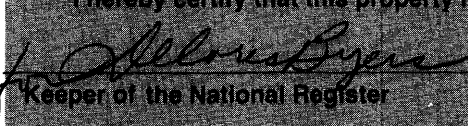
The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

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 May 17, 1983

For HCPS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
	Entered in the National Register date <u>6/30/83</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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The facade of the building facing Oak Avenue (east) is three bays wide, with a central front entry (Photograph 2). Double hung windows, originally 6 over 6 with a non-functional, ornamental transom above and with white terra cotta surrounds are set in large panels of stuccoed concrete to either side of the front entry. Above the doorway is a triple window with 9 over 9 sash and a common sill of white terra cotta. Above it is inset a rectangular block of white terra cotta carrying the name "COMMODORE HULL SCHOOL" in relief letters.

The front entry is the visual focus of the facade (Photograph 3). The double doors with transom above are recessed, the walls lined with white porcelain tiles. Above is a large ornamental window consisting of eight panes with crossing muntins. The entry surround is a shouldered architrave of molded white, enamel-glazed terra cotta with an astragal on the inner edge, and resting on a panelled, S-curved console base. Set above is a cornice carried by four Roman Doric capitals which rise from a frieze with the building's construction date spelled out in relief "A 1907 D". The capitals are paired, enframing the date. They are each embellished by a series of moldings that run between and through them.

The north and south side facades of the school are identical (Photographs 4 and 5). Central pavilions one bay wide project 2' from the face of the building, flanked on either side by stuccoed concrete panels into which are set banks of five windows on each story. The original 6 over 6 sash on the second story were replaced by the Shelton School Board with triple hung white vinyl windows. The pavilions are concrete, with courses of terra cotta block between the entries and windows above. The entries consist of panelled double doors, with a flat roofed, protective overhang above, trimmed with white, enamel-glazed, molded terra cotta tile, consisting of a cornice with a row of egg and dart below. Corner supports are embellished by triglyphs above guttae. Above the entries are two triple windows with crossed-muntin transoms, one above the other, separated by courses of terra cotta block and rising to the white terra cotta block cornice.

The rear of the school (Photograph 6) has bare stuccoed concrete walls with four windows with white terra cotta surrounds similar to those on the front. Two are on each floor in the center of the building, helping to light the hallways.

The interior of the school consists of four classrooms on each floor with plaster finish laid directly on the terra cotta block walls. (Photograph 7) The front and side entrances lead up to hallways which cross each other on the first floor. Stairs from the side entrances also lead down to the basement. The floors and stairs are concrete throughout, an important fireproofing feature. The floors were laid using the Kahn system of reinforced concrete construction. Steel bars with projecting points every few inches were placed between rows of hollow terra cotta flooring blocks

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and between the flooring blocks and the outer walls, where they were bent to anchor the flooring blocks to the bearing walls. Concrete was poured to a thickness of two inches above the flooring, and a plank floor of ash laid above it. The effect of the system was to create "concrete beams running the length and width of the building....instead of the usual long and heavy floor timbers." 1/ (Photograph 8)

The walls of the school's front vestibule are lined with white porcelain tile with a course of azure blue tile midway between floor and ceiling. (Photograph 9) A commemorative bronze plaque, presently in the possession of the Shelton Board of Education, and a print of the U.S.S. Constitution, commanded during the War of 1812 by town of Huntington native Commodore Isaac Hull, formerly hung on the walls of the vestibule. The plaque commemorated the dedication of the school and its naming for Commodore Hull, briefly mentioning his historic role as commander of the U.S.S. Constitution during the War of 1812. It also listed the names of the building committee, the architects, the Board of Selectmen and the Superintendent of Schools.

The basement contains two rooms originally designed as classrooms but now used for storage, and a boiler room. A brick chimney with quoins rises from the rear of the school, just inside the rear (west) wall.

Footnotes:

1/ Ansonia Sentinel, "Laying the Floor Tiles," November 19, 1907

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Contemporaneous with the development and growing popularity of fireproof building systems, a movement was emerging within the nation's educational establishment toward better and safer school buildings. Along with such factors as adequate heating, ventilation and sanitary facilities, fireproof building materials were a major concern of progressive educators. Their concern in this regard was underscored by the Collinwood School fire of March 4, 1907 in St. Louis, Missouri, in which 173 pupils and two teachers perished. The importance of the school building to the success of the educational process was the subject of several papers read at the annual conferences of the National Education Association during the first decade of the twentieth century. Distinguished educators such as Seymour Davis of Philadelphia and William B. Ittner, Commissioner of School Buildings in St. Louis, pointed out the attributes of the ideal school building, which included fireproof construction, adequate ventilation, heat and sanitary facilities, a modest scale of two stories and a raised basement providing space for playrooms and manual training facilities.

The design of the Commodore Hull School, drawn by the Bridgeport architectural firm of Meloy and Beckwith, incorporates several of the features advocated by these educators. Its high basement, well out of ground, created space for extra rooms. Its concrete floors and stairs not only made the building fireproof, but cut down on noises carried from place to place through the building, were easily kept clean and were unappealing to insects. The terra cotta tile blocks used in construction were hollow, and were commonly burned during manufacture at high temperatures in the 2000-2500° range, making them resistant to cracking at temperatures below that point. Their use as bearing walls eliminated the use of combustible structural members. Moreover, the tiles were plastered on directly, eliminating further the need for combustible wooden lath. (Photograph 7) The whole building could, if necessary, be flushed out by a hose.

While public, commercial and industrial buildings were increasingly being built incorporating the new advances in fireproof construction, school buildings in Connecticut continued to be built of wood frame in the rural towns and of brick mill construction in the urban areas. The Commodore Hull School is the only building of non-frame or brick construction to be listed in the Annual Reports of the State Board of Education, which began listing new buildings by their construction in 1905. No earlier Report mentions a building of concrete and terra cotta. The use of the Kahn system of reinforced concrete construction in the school was an especially bold innovation. Developed during the early twentieth century by engineer Julius Kahn of Detroit, the Kahn system utilized a patented "trussed bar" which combined the horizontal tension bar and diagonal shear bars of earlier systems in a single unit, by means of points projecting every few inches from a horizontal steel bar. The Kahn system had been recently used in 1905-1906 in the fifteen-story Marlborough Hotel in



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Atlantic City, New Jersey, at the time the largest concrete building in the world. While the Commodore Hull School was in the process of construction, the Ansonia Sentinel reported that:

"This is the first building of this kind in this part of the country, and its construction is being closely watched." 2/

Confusion and some opposition arose to the planned structure when it was first put before a town meeting in July, 1907. Opponents contended that the school was an unnecessary experiment. The architects were able to persuade townspeople of the advantages of their design, but their most persuasive point was that the new school would be comparable in cost to one of traditional mill construction.

The building's architectural style as well as its method of construction was unusual in Connecticut for its time. At a time when most new schools in the state were of red or buff brick and their ornament restrained, the design of the Commodore Hull School is bold, colorful and striking, and represents a somewhat avant-garde adaptation of Classical design elements. The terra cotta block walls are multi-hued and of bright earth tones, and are broken by the large stuccoed concrete panels into which are set the windows. The glazed and molded white terra cotta trim elements are set off strongly against this background.

The construction of the Commodore Hull School was undertaken in response to a growing school population in the Borough of Shelton. A part of the Town of Huntington until a city charter was granted in 1915, Shelton was a manufacturing village that grew up on the banks of the Housatonic River after 1870. In that year, the Housatonic Power Co. headed by Edward Nelson Shelton completed a dam across the river for water power and stimulated an industrial boom that persisted through the early twentieth century. Industries which manufactured a variety of products located near the dam, including a paper mill, cotton mill and factories which produced pins, tacks, bolts and silver plate. The manufacturing area near the river, known since 1872 as Shelton, became a borough in 1882, although school functions continued to be administered by the town of Huntington. In 1887 the 17-room Ferry School, the first in the borough area, opened as an elementary and high school. In 1894 the First School Society of Huntington, which had been founded in 1799, became the Town School Committee. Walter D. Hood became the first superintendent in 1903, ending the school visitor system of supervision.

The Shelton Looms plant of Sidney Blumental & Co., manufacturers of velvet plush and other fabrics, including some of the first rayon, drew many new workers to the less-developed north end of Shelton after its establishment in 1896. The subsequent population increase resulted in the overcrowding of existing school facilities, which in turn led to classes being held in rented quarters in local commercial buildings.



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During the school year 1906, classes were held in what were derisively referred to as "bake-shop", "meat-market", and "cigar-store" schools. 3/ On July 25, 1907, a town meeting agreed to appropriate \$42,500 for the construction of the new school.

The building was completed in September, 1908. It was named for Commodore Isaac Hull, a native of Huntington and commander of the U.S.S. Constitution during the War of 1812.

The school served the north end of Shelton, which was only beginning to be developed when the school was built. It was an area where recently arrived immigrants tended to settle. Chiefly Italian through the 1920s and later of Polish and other central and eastern European origin, these families found employment in local factories, particularly Sidney Blumenthal & Co's Shelton Looms plant. The school's enrollment over most of its existence was composed largely of the children of recently arrived immigrants. 4/ While the building was not used for citizenship or "Americanization" classes, the Commodore Hull School was the place where most of Shelton's foreign-born children or the children of foreign-born parents learned the English language and basic American values.

During the 1930s the hill in the rear of the school was levelled and two playgrounds constructed under the auspices of the W.P.A., replacing a previously existing smaller playground and orchard on the hillside to the rear of the school. One of the basement classrooms received use as a lunchroom and assembly room. The basement was also used for manual training for boys and sewing instruction for girls during the period between 1930 and 1960.

Following the completion of the Commodore Hull School, the school district was forced to add two more new schools in 1911, the Lafayette School and the Huntington School. All of these early schools are no longer in active use. The Ferry School and the Lafayette School have been converted into apartments.

The Commodore Hull School remained in active use until April, 1978. In 1981 it was sold to the present owner, Arnold Goodman.

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Footnotes:

- 1/ Architectural Record. "Fireproof Construction, Past and Present." May, 1909, p. 377
- 2/ Ansonia Sentinel. "Laying the Floor Tiles," November 10, 1907.
- 3/ Ibid., "Want it Reconsidered." August 5, 1907.
- 4/ Interview with Hazel Teetsel, former teacher and principal, April, 1982.

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Major Bibliographical References

1. Ansonia Sentinel July 16, 1907; July 25, 1907; July 26, 1907; August 5, 1907; August 7, 1907; August 10, 1907; September 14, 1907; October 30, 1907; November 10, 1907; April 10, 1908.
2. Architectural Record, "Fireproof Construction, Past and Present". May, 1909, pp. 375-80.
3. Condit, Carl. W., American Building, Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1968.
4. Connecticut State Board of Education. Annual Report to the Governor together with the Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board. Hartford. Published by the State. Vols. 1889-1920.
5. Davis, Seymour, "Recent Progress in School Architecture". Journal of the Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1905, pp. 838-43
6. Huntington, Town of. Annual Report. 1905-1910
7. Huntington land records, Book 47, pp. 126-7, Book 436, p. 308, Town Clerk's Office, Shelton, Connecticut.
8. Ittner, William B., "School Architecture", Journal of the Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1908, pp. 1065-71.
9. Mills, Wilbur T., "Innovations in School Architecture", Journal of Proceedings of the National Education Association, 1908, pp. 1071-7
10. Molloy, Leo T., comp., Tercentenary Pictorial and History of the Lower Naugatuck Valley. Emerson Press, Ansonia, 1935.
11. Postcard of Commodore Hull School, c. 1910. Plumb Memorial Library, Shelton.
12. Scientific American, "Cohesive Fireproof Tile Construction". May 23, 1907, pp. 246-7

Interview

1. Hazel Teetsel, retired educator. Teacher at Commodore Hull School, 1921-1965; Principal, Commodore Hull School, 1950-1971. April, 1982.

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The property is described in Shelton Land Records, Volume 436, p. 308:

Bounded northeasterly by Oak Avenue, 99', more or less; southeasterly by land now or formerly of James A. Bradley and Nathan M. and Julia Dibble, 291' more or less; southwesterly by land now or formerly of James A. Bradley and estate of F.G. Perry, 100' more or less; northwesterly by land now or formerly of Nathan M. and Julia Dibble, estate of James H. Beard, C.W. Parley and Mrs. N.H. Downs, 219' more or less.

The property is also depicted as Lot #114, shown below, on an excerpt of the Tax Assessor's Map, City of Shelton.

