

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

For NPS use only

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

received **MAY 3 1985**
date entered

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

1. Name

historic Locust Avenue School

and/or common same

2. Location

street & number Locust Avenue N/A— not for publication

city, town Danbury N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield code 001

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 type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" 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:

4. Owner of Property

name Danbury Board of Education

street & number Mill Ridge School

city, town Danbury N/A vicinity of state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

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

street & number 155 Deer Hill Avenue

city, town Danbury state Connecticut 06810

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 Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<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 <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Locust Avenue School is a public elementary school building located a block west of White Street in Danbury, Connecticut. Erected in 1896, the building continues to be utilized in the Danbury School System, presently as the home of the Alternative High School.

The Site of the school is an approximately 1.11 acre lot between Locust Avenue on the east, Ninth Avenue on the west and Roberts Avenue to the north. To the south, and along the other streets which border the lot, are free-standing one and two-family residences on small lots, constructed between the 1860s and the mid-twentieth century. A few blocks to the west on Roberts Avenue is the midtown campus of Western Connecticut State University, originally the Danbury State Normal School.

On the lot asphalt-paved parking areas are on the west and south sides, while the rest of the site is landscaped, including a number of trees planted to honor Spanish-American War veterans.

The building is eclectic in style. Influence of the Romanesque Revival is strong in the building's hip roof, square shape and the compound-arched Romanesque entries; Neo-Classical ornament such as the modillioned cornice and quoins is also apparent. Influence of the Colonial Revival appears in the octagonal-roofed cupola and its balustrade, and in the banks of chimneys whose terra cotta tile insets are closer in spirit to the Queen Anne. (Photographs 1, 2)

The building is rectangular, 60' x 86', constructed of deep orange-red pressed brick laid in common bond. Its two stories rise to a hip roof of slate, most of which is still intact and is being repaired. A modillioned cornice of galvanized sheet metal runs along the eaves. At the crest of the roof is an orange wooden cupola, with an octagonal, conical roof and round arches with keys, surrounded by a balustrade with chamfered newel posts and pointed finials. (Photograph 1) Inside the cupola is the bell from the former Congregational Meeting house that stood in the intersection of Main and West Streets between 1785 and 1878, when it was dismantled and moved. During the early nineteenth century, this bell summoned residents not only to meeting but to assemblies of the town and borough, which were held in the centrally-located building. Exact dating of the bell is not possible at present because of deteriorated conditions rendering interior access to the cupola unsafe. Flanking the cupola are two banks of chimneys with four stacks apiece, with insets of decorative terra cotta tiles.

Nearly identical facades face Locust Avenue and Ninth Avenue (Photographs 2, 3). Each facade consists of a two-story pavilion projecting from the bottom of the building, each surmounted by a pediment with cornice return rising above the central entry. Below the pediment are two paired windows with double-hung sash and wooden frames. Only a bay window with modillioned cornice on the north side of the Ninth Avenue facade, which contained the principal's office when this was a grade school, identifies the Ninth Avenue facade as the front.

On each side of the entry in the center of wall on each story are small window openings, rectangular on the first floor and round-arched on the

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Locust Avenue School

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 2

second, which provide light for what originally were office rooms.

The entries are the building's most striking features. A half-dozen granite steps ascend from ground level to doorways with double doors recessed behind four concentric round arches. The doors are panelled, with semi-circular transom above. (Photograph 4)

The side elevations are also identical to each other. The classrooms received light from banks of six windows with double-hung, two over two sash with wooden frames. Large windows at ground level, below the water table, also double-hung with two over two sash, provide light for the basement. In the center of each elevation on the first two story is a small, projecting, octagonal bay with conical slate roof. (Photographs 5, 6, 7)

The interior of the school is distinguished by the integrity of its many surviving original features. Inside the entry vestibules, "wardrobes," or hooks for hanging coats spread out inside the west facade. Four classrooms are on each floor, two on each side of a central hallway. (Photograph 8) The hallway is lined by three feet of tongue-in-groove wainscoting of dark, polished North Carolina pine. In each classroom wall near the ceiling are openings which originally served the ventilating system but which have been boarded over to comply with present fire codes.

Each classroom is lined with blackboard space above the wainscoting and lighted by a bank of six tall windows. Through the center of each classroom run supporting beams, reinforced at the joints by slender, cast iron columns with decorative floral bases. Partitions, however, are all of brick. (Photographs 9, 10) The panelled doors and their frames, with incised lines resembling fluting, are also of dark, varnished pine. (Photograph 11) The doorknobs, of wood, are similar in design and are also original. (Photograph 12) Blackboard frames in most of the classrooms have turned borders. (Photograph 13) Along most of the outer classroom walls, below the windows, run copper heating pipes mounted with the original, ornamental brass fittings. (Photograph 14) The narrow board floors are also the original pine.

The basement was designed to be bright and fully functional. It is well lighted by the ground level windows, and is almost entirely out of ground. Brick partitions are pierced with arched openings, and the ceilings are supported by large brick piers, square with corbelled tops. (photograph 15) The interior spaces thus formed in the basement are large, and the walls are brightly decorated with paintings by students of the Alternative High School, which has used the building since 1977. Also in the basement are original sink and cooking facilities as well as lavatory stalls, and the boiler room. Although a modern furnace today supplies the school with heat, the original furnace, a "Gurney" patent 1894, originally coal-fired but converted to oil in the 1920s, remains in place and is operational.

Alterations have been few, and have been occasioned only recently to correct

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Locust Avenue School

Continuation sheet

Item number 7

Page 3

fire code violations cited by the State Fire Marshal in 1982 and 1983, and were undertaken to keep the school in service. The building's original heating and ventilating system has been affected the most. The Wheeler system provided for the admission of 3,000 feet of fresh warmed air per hour, and renewed the air in the classrooms every three minutes by a system of air shafts which rise from the floor to the roof, between the two rooms on either side of the building. A register in the floor connected each room to an independent shaft between the walls while a register in the wall at the top of the room supplied heat. The openings along the upper part of the classroom walls facing the hallway have been boarded over, as have the openings in the classrooms at wall and floor levels which connected the rooms to the shafting. The original, ornate cast iron registers have been saved and are expected to be re-installed over the permanent blocking of the openings once that is accomplished.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1896 **Builder/Architect** Warren Briggs

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Locust Avenue School is significant to the history of education in Danbury as the last remaining nineteenth century school building within the old Center School District which comprised the City of Danbury, and to the history of education in the state of Connecticut as one of the few remaining buildings used as "laboratory schools" to train teachers from the original State Normal Schools. (Criterion A) It is significant architecturally as a particularly well-preserved example, interior as well as exterior, of an up-to-date school building of the late nineteenth century, in which architectural features were designed to create a positive environment for learning. It incorporates the progressive ideas of its architect, Warren Briggs, on school construction. (Criteria C)

The Locust Avenue School was constructed in 1896 by the Town of Danbury, (which in Danbury's dual city and town form of government was charged with education) in response to population growth on the city's eastern fringe. In 1892 a sister school on Morris Street, also designed by Briggs, had been constructed to accommodate the growing numbers of school children in newly developed areas in the west side of the city. The opening of much of the 300-acre White farm during the 1890s led to increased development in the east side of the city. New residential streets like Ninth Avenue (originally School Street) sprang up on former White acreage, while established streets like Locust Avenue and Osborne Streets rapidly filled up. The Report of the School Visitors of October, 1895, pointed out that "it is intended that this school house (on Locust Avenue) shall accommodate the younger pupils living in the eastern part of the (Center) district who at present are obliged to walk a long distance to attend the Balmforth Avenue School."

The school cost approximately \$23,000 to build. It was supposed to have been completed by its builders, the Danbury Building Company, by January of 1896, but opening was delayed until April, 1896, when pupils were admitted for the spring term. Its first 150 pupils were first and second graders from the Liberty Street and Balmforth Avenue Schools, who occupied the four classrooms that were finished at that time. Each classroom held classes of from forty to sixty pupils.

In 1905 administration of the school was transferred to the newly established State Normal School on White Street, which assumed control of its classrooms to train student teachers. Danbury's was the last of four Normal Schools established in Connecticut, beginning with New Britain in 1849. The establishment of the Normal School system in Connecticut was a part of the movement towards professionalizing teacher education during the late 19th century. During the college's first year of operation,

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.11 acres

Quadrangle name Danbury

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	30	7	50	4	5	8	4	7	0	0
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

Bounded north by Roberts Avenue, south by Elayne M. Bouteiller and Edward and Marion Wencek, east by Locust Avenue, west by Ninth Avenue.

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

state N A code county code

state N A code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title William E. Devlin, Paulette Pepin; edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Danbury Preservation Trust date May 31, 1984

street & number Box 2201 telephone

city or town Danbury, state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

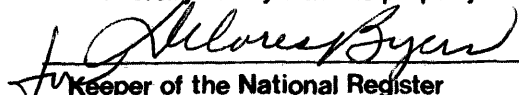
As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature 

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission date 4/19/85

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

 Entered in the National Register date 5-30-85
Keeper of the National Register

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

Continuation sheet

Locust Avenue School 8
Item number

Page 2

1904-1905, every student was required to observe, teach and manage for two weeks in the Locust Avenue School or the rural, one-room King Street School in Danbury's northwestern corner. Later, classrooms in other Danbury schools were also used but Locust Avenue was the only one to serve continuously as a model school, staffed by the State Department of Education and maintained by the Town of Danbury until 1965, when it was turned over to the Danbury Board of Education at the time that City and Town governments were consolidated.

The school is the last of the four brick schools erected during Danbury's years of rapid growth during the second half of the nineteenth century. The New Street School, built in 1865, was demolished in 1969; the Balmforth Avenue School, built in 1881, was demolished in 1958; and the Morris Street School's old section in 1981. It has also survived frame buildings used as schools on Liberty Street, South Street and White Street. The school is among the last of the model schools which served original Normal Schools in the state, along with schools in New Britain and New Haven.

The building's last year as an elementary school was 1976. Since the following year it has housed the Alternative High School, an innovative and successful program for high school students unable to adjust to the structured curriculum of Danbury High School. The school's proximity to after-school jobs in the commercial areas of nearby White Street and to the Roberts Avenue School two blocks to the east, where a number of students serve as reading tutors, has proved to be a factor in keeping the program at Locust Avenue.

The school's architect, Warren Briggs of Bridgeport, was a frequent choice of building committees in Danbury for major buildings during the final two decades of the nineteenth century, when the city was concerned with improving its public image. In addition to the Locust Avenue and Morris Street schools, Briggs provided designs for the Fairfield County Court-house in Danbury, the Danbury National Bank Building, and Broadview, the poor farm operated by the Town of Danbury.

Briggs incorporated many of the progressive ideas of educators at the time regarding school architecture. In the bright classrooms, lighted by banks of six tall windows, the desks were arranged facing the opposite wall so that light fell over the left shoulder of the pupil. The classrooms were not only brightly lit but airy, as the ventilating system changed the air in the rooms every three minutes. The same system provided heat in cold weather, while hot water pipes along the outside walls supplemented during extremely cold weather. The school's eight classrooms are spacious enough to comfortably accommodate the 50-60 pupil classes then common. The basement was designed to be used as play space in poor weather. Its large interior spaces are clean, spacious, nearly out of

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

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

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Locust Avenue School

Item number

8

Page 3

ground and are brightly lit by double-hung sash at ground level. The same attention to detail which marks the classrooms and the main floors is evident in the basement, where masonry arches admit one to its various rooms, equipped with sink, cooking and lavatory facilities. The construction of the school is slow-buring post-and-beam or mill construction, lessening the danger of fire.

In 1899, Briggs published his treatise, Modern American School Buildings. The Locust Avenue School is one of his designs featured in the work.

The school has undergone very few alterations, and most of these have occurred within the past two years to avoid being shut down because of state fire codes. In exterior and interior appearance, the building's integrity and character have been remarkably well maintained.

There are, in addition, other aspects of the school with associations of Danbury history, notably the bell which once summoned residents to town meeting and church when it was in the First Congregational Meeting house; and maple trees in the school yard, which were planted in honor of the town's service in the Spanish-American War by members of the school's first graduating class.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Locust Avenue School
Item number

9

Page 2

Briggs, Warren Richard. Modern American School Buildings. FAIA, New York, J. Wiley & Sons, 1899.

Danbury Evening News, various issues, particularly April 1, 1896

Danbury Town Records, particularly Reports of School Visitors, 1895-6

Ittner, William B., "School Architecture," Journal of the Proceedings 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. 1895-1959

Interviews:

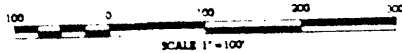
Gertrude Braun, former Dean of Arts & Sciences, Western Connecticut State University.

Peter Durham, Vice-President Academic Affairs, Central Connecticut State University.

Joseph Pepin, Director, Alternative Center of Education.

DANBURY TAX ASSESSOR'S MAP

LOCUST AVENUE SCHOOL



J-14

J-12

E 40,000

E 40,500

E 41,000

