

PH0020982

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: Connecticut	
COUNTY: Middlesex	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER 70.10.06.0011	DATE 10/6/70

1. NAME

COMMON:
→ Davison Art Center

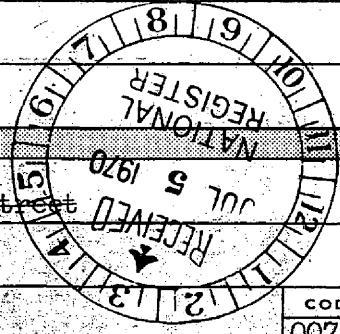
AND/OR HISTORIC:
— Alsoop House

2. LOCATION

STREET AND NUMBER:
30/ High Street opposite the intersection with Court Street

CITY OR TOWN:
Middletown

STATE: Connecticut CODE: 06457 COUNTY: Middlesex CODE: 007



3. CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building	<input type="checkbox"/> Public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted
<input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private	<input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted
<input type="checkbox"/> Object	<input type="checkbox"/> Both	<input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

Agricultural Government Park Transportation Comments

Commercial Industrial Private Residence Other (Specify) Remodelled building provides studio space for the

Educational Military Religious

Entertainment Museum Scientific

4. OWNER OF PROPERTY

OWNER'S NAME:
Wesleyan University

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Middletown STATE: Connecticut CODE: 06

5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:
City Hall

STREET AND NUMBER:

CITY OR TOWN: Middletown STATE: Connecticut CODE: 06

6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE OF SURVEY:
Historic American Buildings Survey (1)
Connecticut Historic Structures and Landmarks Survey (2)

DATE OF SURVEY: 1966 (2) Federal State County Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS: (1) Library of Congress
(2) Connecticut Historical Commission

STREET AND NUMBER:
(2) 75 Elm Street

CITY OR TOWN: (1) Washington, D.C. STATE: Connecticut CODE: 06
(2) Hartford

STATE: Connecticut

COUNTY: Middlesex

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CONTINUED

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input type="checkbox"/> Unaltered	<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

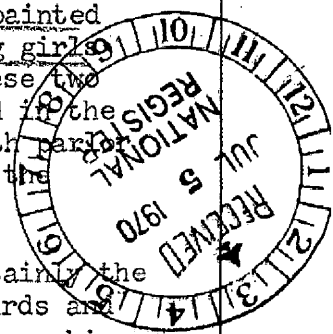
The plan consists of a central block which had a pair of parlors across the eastern front, with the dining room, pantry and staircases behind. There are two smaller recessed wings connected to either side of this block, the one to the South being a morning room, and the northern one containing a library and vestibule. The interesting and unique features of this arrangement are: first, that the entrance, unlike almost all contemporary designs, is on one of the recessed lateral wings, second, that the staircase (or hall) is completely an interior room with no windows and not located on the central axis of the plan, and that it contains a double-balustraded stair, elliptical in plan, and partly free standing, and third, that the plan is asymmetric. None of these features is original, but it was seldom that so many were incorporated into the plan of the house.

The treatment of the exterior is also a departure from the usual. A delicate wrought-iron porch surmounted by a balcony, runs around the front of the central block to the square-pillared colonades of the lateral wings. The most outstanding features of the facade are the painted frieze of the center block and the three sunk panels painted to represent niches and life-size statues "à trompe l'oeil". Oblong windows extending from floor nearly to ceiling provide three verticle accents in the central block of the facade. Here the central window opening of the first floor is filled with a grisaille consisting of the statue of Erato with her lyre standing in a niche. Similar vertical accents are formed by windows and niches painted "a trompe l'oeil" in the lateral wings. On the south wing the central panel on the ground floor level is a representation of a niche containing a grisaille statue of Juno. Directly above in a niche is the grisaille of an urn. On the north wing the central panel on the ground floor is a painting of Victory. Here the "trompe l'oeil" niche on the second floor level with a grisaille of an urn is located not directly above this painting but rather next to the main section of the house. The painted frieze beneath the cornice of the center block consists of a wide band showing a delicate curvilinear pattern of swags and ribbons. The ground of this frieze is rust. The stucco of the rest of the building is pink. The eaves and the ceiling of the porch are sky blue.

Inside the house the staircase is lined and painted to resemble marble. It has on the stair wall two female figures executed in the same manner as those on the exterior. The walls of the two parlors are painted to resemble paneling and there are four medallions of dancing girls on the street wall. The over-mantles and the ceilings of these two rooms are alive with angels, cherubs, birds, and insects, and in the center of each ceiling is a large mural. The one in the north parlor depicts Phoebus in a chariot drawn by horses, and the one in the south parlor depicts Jove in a chariot drawn by eagles.

The morning room contains probably the most charming and certainly the most informal of all the wall decorations. Here there are birds and vines placed in open arcades with wicker work in front of blue skies

SEE INSTRUCTIONS



SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian | 16th Century | 18th Century | 20th Century
 15th Century | 17th Century | 19th Century 1840

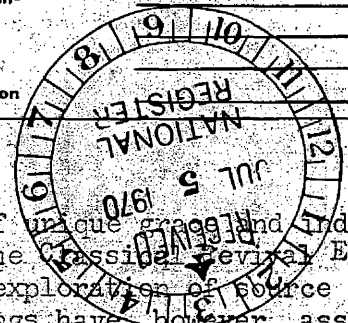
SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known)

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Education | <input type="checkbox"/> Political | <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Planning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Philosophy | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)
Social History |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry | <input type="checkbox"/> Science | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce | <input type="checkbox"/> Military | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications | <input type="checkbox"/> Music | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation | | | |

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

- 3 -



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

The Alsop house is significant as a building of unique grace and individuality, and as a summation of many aspects of the Classical Revival Era. The identity of its architect is uncertain, but exploration of source material and comparative study of other buildings have, however, assigned the design of the house tentatively to Ithiel Town, of New Haven, who is known to have been the architect of the Russell House. Ithiel Town was one of the most important architects of the Greek Revival Style. The distinction and prominence of his buildings, the most important of which were designed in conjunction with his long-time partner, Alexander Jackson Davis, and the fame of his architectural library won him wide recognition. The fact that the records show many changes made in the process of the erection of the house would indicate that Mr. Oliver, who was on the site most of the time, may actually have had something to do with the design, though probably under the guidance of Town. This would bear out the Alsop family tradition that some member of the family had designed the house.

It is interesting to note the close resemblance of the Alsop House not only to a composite of Town's other work, but to the work of Ludwig Persius and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, the most outstanding Classical Revival architect in Northern Germany. In fact, Persius' Landhaus in Potsdam is almost identical in its exterior design to the Alsop House, even to the trompe-l'oeil statues of the facade and decorative iron work.

Though the house is technically Greek Revival, it sums up in general many other aspects of the Classical Revival Era, called Empire in France and Regency in England, and illustrates the restrained proportions and elegant grace of the period which sometimes, as here, did not always follow the classical orders too slavishly. The house is one of those most prominently discussed and illustrated in the standard work by Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture In America, and is one of the buildings featured in Great Georgian Houses in America.

The exterior and interior decorations executed in oil on plaster are unique in the domestic architecture of America. Although they are attributed in Edward Allen's Early American Wall Paintings to Brumidi, who decorated the walls of the United States Capitol, stylistic comparison

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964.

Logan Luke, "Historical and Critical Evaluation of the Alsop House." Unpublished term paper for a course in architectural history at Wesleyan University in 1953.

The George W. and Harriet B. Davison Art Center. Pamphlet published by Wesleyan University, Middletown, Connecticut, 1952.

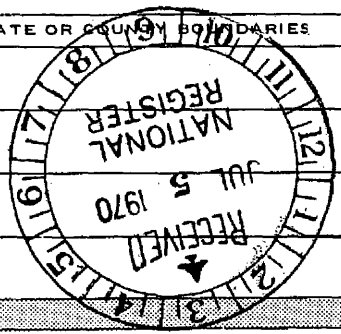
10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY				O R	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES							
CORNER	LATITUDE				LONGITUDE			LATITUDE			LONGITUDE	
	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds	Degrees	Minutes	Seconds
NW	°	'	"	°	'	"	41°	33'	30"	72°	39'	22"
NE	°	'	"	°	'	"	41	33	30	72	39	22
SE	°	'	"	°	'	"						
SW	°	'	"	°	'	"						

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: **3**

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

11. FORM PREPARED BY

NAME AND TITLE: Constance Luyster, Administrative Trainee

ORGANIZATION: Connecticut Historical Commission DATE: April 15, 1970

STREET AND NUMBER: 75 Elm Street

CITY OR TOWN: Hartford STATE: Connecticut CODE: 06

12. STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION

As the designated State Liaison 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. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National State Local

Name: *[Signature]*
 Title: State Liaison Officer and Chairman Connecticut Historical Commission
 Date: April 15, 1970

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

[Signature]
 Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
 OCT 6 1970

Date: _____

ATTEST:

[Signature]
 Keeper of the National Register
 AUG 26 1970

Date: _____

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(Number all entries)

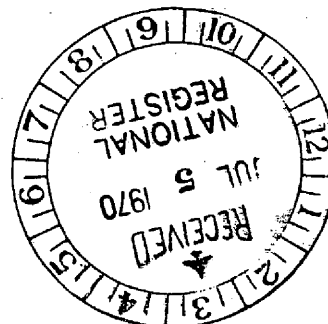
- 2 -

Present and original Appearance

and the illusory perspective of these panels is reminiscent of the great scenic murals of the Italian Renaissance. In one of the panels a green, red, and yellow South Carolina parakeet is sitting on a hopp. The feeling of the room is both light, gay, and decorative.

In the transformation of the old Alsop house into the present Davison Art Center changes were made in the stables, which were remodeled into studios, and the lower floor of a service wing, which was transformed into a lecture room, and a bedroom which was divided into two offices. The former porch along the wing was incorporated into a long gallery carried around two sides of a court to the main gallery which in its exterior design reflects the simple lines and masses of the original house. Besides the addition of the gallery, the use of the building as an art center required a newly built area joining the house to the old stables. This addition provides office space, an entrance to the new gallery and a passageway to the old barn which although considerably altered outside retains its fine exterior.

The two formal drawing rooms, the morning room, the stair hall, foyer and dining rooms are preserved with their original wall and ceiling decorations. These were cleaned and restored under the direction of Richard Buck, Head of the Conservation Department at the Fogg Museum of Harvard University. Since little of the original painting was badly damaged, the present effect is substantially what it was when the painting was new. The rooms have been furnished and decorated to reflect the best taste of the period, and not to reproduce the appearance of the house when in the possession of its former owners.



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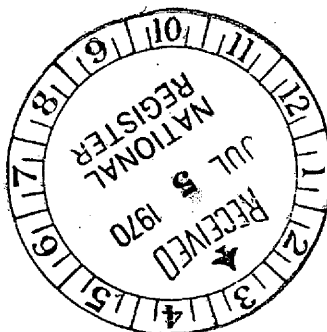
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- 4 -

Significance:

shows this ascription to be unlikely. The Italian, moreover, did not come to this country until 1852, and evidence points to the paintings having been executed soon after the completion of the house. Talbot Hamlin says in the 1964 edition of his Greek Revival Architecture in America that the Alsop family tradition has it that the builder of the house took his bride for their wedding journey on an extended trip through France and Italy and, returning, brought back with him a group of skilled Italian craftsmen. The general plan of the house he devised himself and had the help of a local architect in seeing it into the final form, the actual construction and the entire decoration being the work of the Italian craftsmen he had brought with him for that purpose.



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- 2 a -

Plan of the Alsop House taken from Talbot Hamlin's Greek Revival Architecture in America

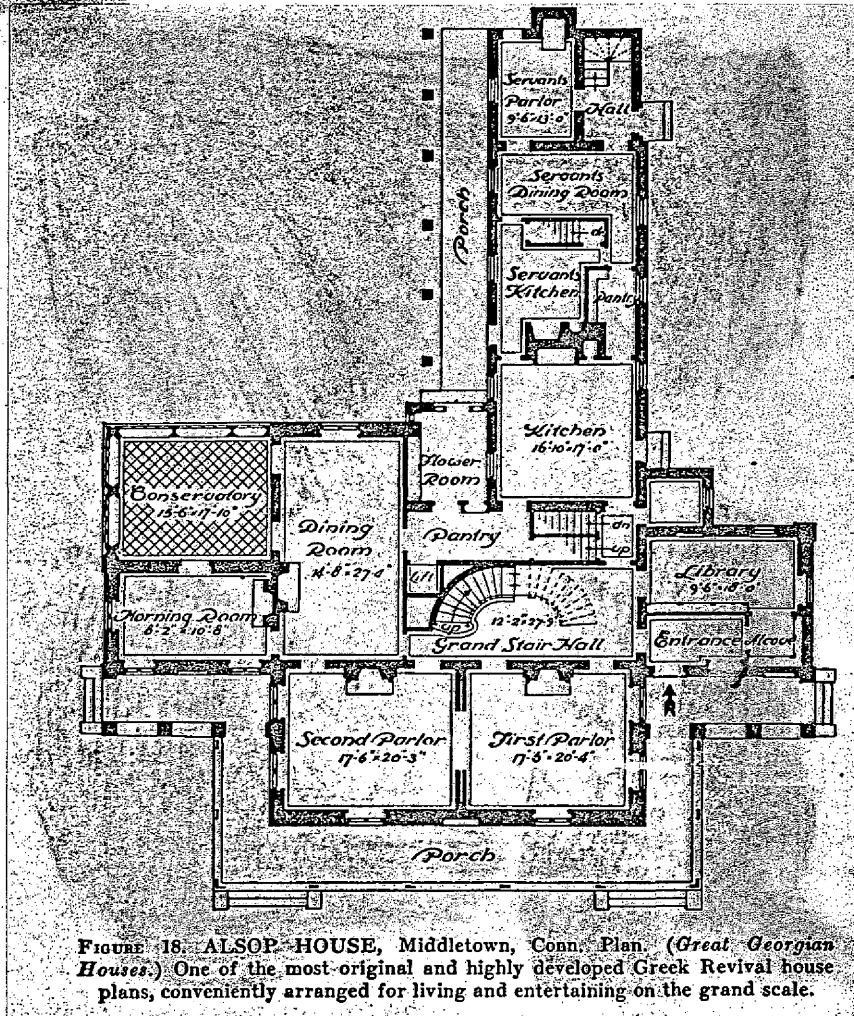
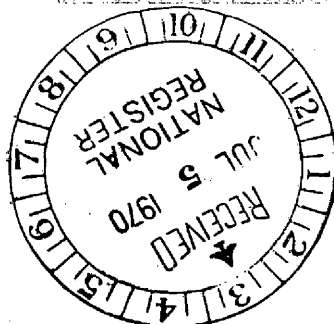
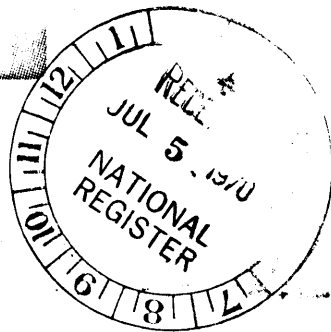
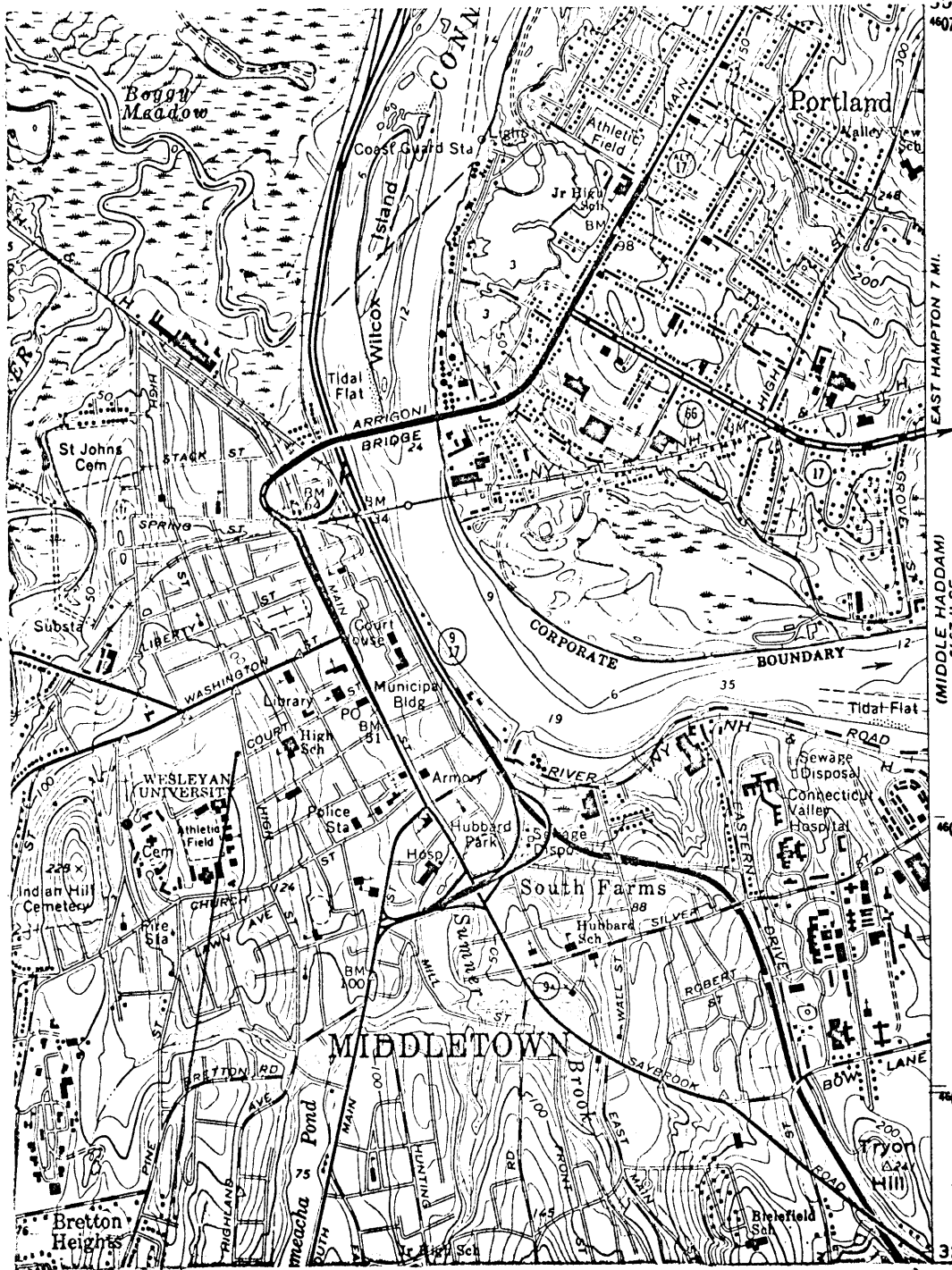


FIGURE 18. ALSOP HOUSE, Middletown, Conn. Plan. (*Great Georgian Houses*.) One of the most original and highly developed Greek Revival house plans, conveniently arranged for living and entertaining on the grand scale.





41° 35'



EAST HAMPTON 7 MI.
(MIDDLE HADDAM)
6467 II SE



72° 40'

72° 39' 30"

DAVISON ART CENTER
Latitude 41° 33' 30"
Longitude 72° 39' 22"