

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

MAR 11 1982
APR 12 1982

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

~~United States~~ Post Office

AND/OR COMMON

Old Middletown Post Office

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

291 Main Street

N/A

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Middletown N/A VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd

STATE

CT

CODE

09

COUNTY

Middlesex

CODE

007

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

OWNERSHIP

STATUS

PRESENT USE

___ DISTRICT

___ PUBLIC

___ OCCUPIED

___ AGRICULTURE

___ MUSEUM

BUILDING(S)

PRIVATE

UNOCCUPIED

COMMERCIAL

___ PARK

___ STRUCTURE

___ BOTH

___ WORK IN PROGRESS

___ EDUCATIONAL

___ PRIVATE RESIDENCE

___ SITE

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

ACCESSIBLE

___ ENTERTAINMENT

___ RELIGIOUS

___ OBJECT

___ IN PROCESS

YES: RESTRICTED

___ GOVERNMENT

___ SCIENTIFIC

___ BEING CONSIDERED

___ YES: UNRESTRICTED

___ INDUSTRIAL

___ TRANSPORTATION

N/A

___ NO

___ MILITARY

___ OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Liberty Bank for Savings

STREET & NUMBER

315 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Middletown N/A VICINITY OF

STATE CT

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Middletown Town Clerk

STREET & NUMBER

Municipal Building, Dekoven Drive and Court Street

CITY, TOWN

Middletown

STATE CT

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

State Register of Historic Places

DATE

1981

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Connecticut Historical Commission

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE CT

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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

Constructed in 1916, this imposing Second Renaissance Revival structure served as Middletown's post office for sixty years. It is located on the southwest corner of Main and Court Streets, in the heart of the town's commercial center (Fig. 1). Vacant at present, the building was recently sold by the Federal government to a private individual who hopes to adapt its interior to a new use.

The Old Middletown Post Office consists of two large blocks and a rear addition. The main block measures 70' by 61' and is two stories high, although the downward slope of Court towards Main Street adds greater height to the main facade because more of the foundation courses are exposed. The second block is a one-story wing to the rear (west) of the main block and measures 70' by 65'. Both of these blocks are substantial, steel-framed structures and are faced with Bedford limestone. Attached to the southwest corner of the rear wing is a frame annex, built in the late 1950s to accommodate loading docks for trucks and a storage room.

The main facade of the principal block (Fig. 2) consists of five equally spaced bays. The basement or foundation story, which rises about five feet from the sidewalk, presents a smooth surface of limestone blocks and is broken at the center by steps leading up to the main entrance. There are two plain casement windows on either side of the entrance which are covered by vertical iron bars.

Five tall arched openings dominate the main floor. These openings are divided by rusticated piers on which are applied plain pilasters with vaguely stylized Corinthian capitals. The central doorway is recessed under an arched entrance with a prominent, foliated key block. The ceiling of this entrance is vaulted with Guastavino tiles; and, above the rusticated walls on either side of the doorway, there are semi-circular fanlights with a similar but longer fanlight above the double doors. The doors themselves are replacements. On either side of the main entrance are two long windows which are recessed in arched openings. The sash is plain 12-over-12, and the tympanums above are filled with low-relief ornamental carvings of an urn with foliated swags.

The pilasters of the main story support an elaborate entablature. The frieze is plain, and the words "United States Post Office" in bronze letters are applied at the center. The cornice above has a dentil course surmounted by a plain fascia and prominent cavetto molding.

This cornice forms the base of the second story which is also divided into five bays by plain pilasters. The windows are recessed into plain rectangular openings and are filled with 6-over-6 sash. Above is a simple molded cornice crowned by a plain, flat parapet.

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The north facade of the main block (Figs. 2 and 3) is similar to the front facade but has several subtle differences. Although it is also divided into five bays, the end bays project slightly and the three central bays are not divided by pilasters. The windows in these central bays are recessed in arched surrounds with key blocks and are filled with 8-over-8 sash with semi-circular fanlights; while the window treatment in the end bays duplicates the windows of the front facade. The main cornice is carried around to this facade of the building; and above, in the second story, the windows, upper cornice and parapet reproduce those of the front facade.

The north and west facades of the one-story rear block (Fig. 3) reflect the main block but are simpler. The five bays of each facade are divided by rusticated piers. The windows are recessed in plain surrounds (note the absence of key blocks), and are filled with 8-over-8 sash with semi-circular fanlights above. The rusticated piers extend upward to the bottom of the fanlights and are divided from the smooth wall above by a narrow stringcourse which is carried over the windows and forms a drip molding, giving the composition of these facades better definition. The cornice between the first and second stories of the main block is carried to the rear block and extends around the top of both facades.

On the south facade of this rear block, two arched windows have been blocked up to accommodate the frame loading dock and storage room addition. Behind this addition, along the south wall of the rear block, there is a tall chimney made of sand-colored brick. The south facade of the main block is a blank wall for it was attached to a now demolished neighbour. The roofs throughout the building are flat. Those of the main and rear blocks are hidden by the parapet.

The interior arrangement of the building is dictated by its former use. The first floor of the main block is dominated by the public lobby (Fig. 4); and it is here that the architect lavished most of his efforts. This square area is entered through the main entrance from Main Street. It is surrounded by postal boxes and windows for purchasing stamps, money orders, etc. The floor is white Tennessee marble, and there is an original bronze writing table in the center (there were formerly two) that was ordered from the Tiffany Studios in New York. There is a small lighting fixture suspended from the ceiling, Art-deco in style, and probably added in the 1930s. The most outstanding feature of the lobby, however, is its domed ceiling with a central skylight which, together with the

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arched windows in the surrounding walls (allowing light to penetrate from the large outside windows), transforms this lobby into a sunlit court. This dome is constructed of plaster laid on steel mesh attached to a frame which, in turn, is suspended from the interior side walls above (Fig. 5). It is a most skillful and interesting design.

The lobby is surrounded by the work areas of the postal employees. Stamps and parcels were handled in an area between the lobby and the north wall, while registered mail and money orders were provided on the opposite side. In the northeast corner there is located the Postmaster's Office, a well lighted room with oak doors, an oak chair rail, and a closet-like room containing a large safe. Connected to the postmaster's office is a private washroom. From here, a steel ladder provides access into the security catwalk, an enclosed platform suspended from the ceilings of the work areas from which postal inspectors could view the employees below through small louvers.

Along the east wall of the lobby towards the southeast corner, a cast iron staircase with marble treads and risers leads up to the second story of the main block.(Fig. 6). Because of the dome's location, there is an interior hallway around three sides of this floor giving access to offices along the outside walls. These offices were used by various government agencies over the years, one of the last tenants being the U. S. Geological Survey.

The interior of the rear one-story block is devoted entirely to a large room for the sorting of mail (Fig. 7). A doorway at the southwest corner provides access to the loading docks. Thanks to many large windows, this room has excellent natural light.

Finally, the basement of the building, which extends below both blocks, contains several storage rooms, an employees locker room and washroom, a boiler room, and a room used to handle the Christmas overflow of mail.

In conclusion, the Old Middletown Post Office is a large, well-designed building combining aesthetic with functional elements. The main (east) and north facades of the exterior are skillfully but conservatively decorative, the central lobby is a dramatic expanse of light and space, and the work areas are well integrated into the overall design. Although empty, the building appears to be in excellent condition throughout, particularly the exterior limestone walls and trim which show no deterioration from pollution or general weathering.

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 1916 - built

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Unknown

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Middletown Post Office possesses a single area of significance. The building is an excellent example of the Second Renaissance Revival style interpreted on the scale of a modest public building (Criterion C).

As Marcus Whiffen notes in his work, American Architecture Since 1780, "the Second Renaissance Revival was in the first place the result of a felt need for simplicity and order in reaction to the very different qualities admired in the High Victorian period."¹ This artistic ideal can certainly be appreciated in the design of this post office. The cool, almost colorless limestone facades and the low relief of the carvings in the capitals of the pilasters and window tympanums contrast markedly with the polychromatic exteriors, vigorously molded window hoods, incised brownstone trim, and elaborate cast iron ornament of a number of nineteenth-century Italianate commercial structures located on other blocks of Middletown's Main Street.

The architectural importance of this structure is also related to its size and scale. Middletown's post office was probably designed by a young architect or group of architects employed by the postal department in Washington, D. C.² These anonymous architects were given certain limits to work within, the most important being those related to size and cost which were undoubtedly determined by the population of the town. These limits dictated that the architects prepare plans for a modest building, one of current style and taste to be sure, but nevertheless not the kind of grand Second Renaissance Revival building that was being constructed in larger cities.

The result was clearly a success. It is clear that all the elements present in larger, more costly buildings constructed in this style are present in the Middletown Post Office, but in a much more simplified form. For example, the five-bay main facade of this structure with its recessed doorway and windows recalls the true arcades of many large Second Renaissance Revival public buildings; while the pilasters and prominent cornices dividing floors are simplified versions of the correct kind of ornamentation for structures built in this style. Thus, Middletown was well served by the young architects of the postal service who gave the town a stylistically up-to-date structure within the confines of strict size and cost requirements.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Middletown Preservation Trust, DeKoven House, Middletown, CT. MS file, "Middletown Post Office" (contains photocopies of all material on the building held by the Library of Congress, local newspaper clippings, and other miscellaneous information).

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY .12

UTM REFERENCES Middletown, CT. 1:24000

A	18	69,5940	4,603,380	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The property is Lot 13, Block 17-55, as shown on Middletown Assessor's Map 22.

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE Hal Keiner, Consultant

ORGANIZATION Connecticut Historical Commission DATE June 16, 1979

STREET & NUMBER 59 South Prospect Street TELEPHONE (203) 566-3005

CITY OR TOWN Hartford STATE CT

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

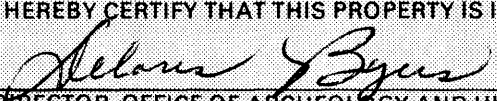
THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL x

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  DATE February 16, 1982

TITLE Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER	
	Entered in the National Register DATE <u>4/12/82</u>
DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION	DATE
ATTEST:	DATE
KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER	

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Finally, the Old Middletown Post Office is architecturally significant because of its value to the streetscape of this part of the town. The building stands on a corner in the midst of Middletown's commercial district. To its south along Main Street stands the Connecticut Bank and Trust Company, while across Court Street is the Liberty Bank for Savings (originally the Middletown Savings Bank) (Fig. 1). Both of these banks, which were built about the same time as the post office, were also constructed in the Second Renaissance Revival style; and, together, the three buildings are a group of considerable interest.

Footnotes:

¹Marcus Whiffen, American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles (Cambridge, MA: The M. I. T. Press, 1969), p. 154.

²The name James A. Wetmore appears on the building's cornerstone, but he was the "supervising architect" not the designer. Indeed, Wetmore, who oversaw the construction of hundreds of post offices across the country in his years of government service, was not an architect by profession. This information was uncovered while researching the Waterbury, Connecticut, post office. See, Mattatuck Museum, MS file on the Art-deco buildings of Waterbury.