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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAR 16 1993

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wheeler Block

other names/site number Old Town Hall; Ransom School

2. Location

street & number 40 Norwich Avenue N/A not for publication

city or town Colchester N/A vicinity

state Connecticut code CT county New London code 011 zip code 06415

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

John W. Starnes 3/9/93
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
State of Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register.
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Delores Byer Entered in the National Register

Date of Action

4/16/93

Wheeler Block
Name of Property

New London, CT
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Commerce: specialty store

Social: meeting hall

Education: school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

Vacant/Not in Use

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Second Empire

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Granite

walls Weatherboard

roof Asphalt

other Brick (Vault addition)

Concrete (Vault addition)

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Social History

Architecture

Period of Significance

1872-1942

Significant Dates

1872

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Williams, William A.

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Wheeler Block
Name of Property

New London Co., CT
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 8	7 2 2 4 9 0	4 6 0 5 6 5 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Paul R. Lusignan Reviewed by John Herzan, National Register Coordinat

organization _____ date August 1, 1992

street & number 48A Kirkham Street telephone (203) 483-9524

(703) 691-7548

city or town Branford state CT zip code 06405

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Town of Colchester ATTN: Jenny Contois

street & number 127 Norwich Avenue telephone _____

city or town Colchester state CT zip code 06415

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 1WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

DESCRIPTION

The Wheeler Block is a two-and-one-half-story wood-frame commercial building located on a small lot at the south end of the Colchester Green. Built in 1872, the Second Empire-style building is bounded on the west and south by modest turn-of-the-century commercial buildings and on the east by the historic Nathaniel Foote House (1702). Set on a combination coursed and rubble granite foundation, the Wheeler Block has a rectangular plan (37' x 32') that rises to a tall mansard roof. Narrow wood clapboards cover the exterior walls of the main block, and a small one-story brick addition (1960s) is attached to the east. The commanding structure was erected by William A. Williams, a local builder, for businessman Joshua B. Wheeler.

The main Norwich Avenue elevation (north) is five bays across, with a central double-door entry located on the ground floor (Photograph No. 1). The entrance features a simple rectangular transom and is flanked by large six-pane plate glass storefront windows. The corner sash along the top row of the seven-foot-tall windows are hinged. The transom above the door is infilled with a stone tablet that reads:

Ransom School Building

Presented by

Emeline T. Ransom

A handsomely detailed Victorian porch (28' x 5'3") with a shallow bellcast roof shades the ground floor (Photograph No. 5). The open porch features four squared posts set on boxed pedestals with heavy wood brackets to support the roof. Each bracket is carved with a simple incised geometric design. The underside of the porch roof reveals nicely detailed tongue-and-groove boarding and exposed wood supports with chamfered edges. Engaged pilasters and a simple baluster railing complete the porch details.

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

DESCRIPTION (continued)

The second floor features five regularly spaced window openings. Each opening contains an original two-over-two double-hung wood sash. The window surrounds are plain milled boards with no molding. A wide wood frieze marks the cornice line above the second-floor windows. The frieze board is broken by a horizontal molding and a series of ornate paired brackets. Each bracket is carved with an incised scroll design that is similar to the pattern found on the entry porch below. Larger paired brackets decorate each corner of the building. The elegant wood brackets support a deep projecting eave that is detailed with a molded cornice. Finally, wide corner boards create the appearance of engaged pilasters that frame the entire two-story elevation (Photograph No. 4).

Set atop the deep second-floor cornice is the asphalt-shingled mansard roof. The roof was originally clad in painted wood shingles [still visible beneath the modern shingles] and features a slightly concave profile. A series of three large gabled dormers break the roof slope and dramatically accentuate the roofline. Each dormer contains a pair of rounded-arch windows with one-over-one double-hung wood sash. Located just above each window opening is a decorative incised cross motif. Scroll-shaped brackets and wood modillion blocks support the dormer gables. The highest point of the roofline is surrounded by a modillion cornice.

The west side elevation is three bays deep, with the front bay set slightly apart from the rear two bays (Photograph No. 1). A narrow entry door occupies the middle bay on the first floor. The doorway threshold currently hangs in midair several feet above ground level. The windows are two-over-two double-hung units similar to those located on the second floor of the front facade. The wide cornerboards, decorative brackets, and distinctive cornice detailing of the front facade are carried through to the side elevation. Two large dormers pierce the mansard roof on the top floor.

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 7 Page 3WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

DESCRIPTION (continued)

In general, the east elevation is detailed in a similar overall manner. Later additions, however, partially obscure the first floor and portions of the second floor of the elevation (Photograph No. 3). Attached to the rear of the elevation is a two-story wood-frame wing containing bathroom facilities. This clapboard-sided addition (mid-20th century) features a flat roof and window openings that face south (rear). The second-floor level is reached by an exterior metal stair.

Located along the front of the east elevation is a one-story brick addition (19' x 23') that originally contained the "records vault" of the former city clerk's office. Devoid of window or door openings and set on a concrete foundation, this modern (1960) pressed-brick addition has a simple wood cornice and a flat roof. A modern concrete ramp runs around the exterior of the brick addition. The construction of the two modern additions in the mid-twentieth century necessitated the removal of a small one-story projecting bay located at the rear of the east elevation and visible in old photographs (Photograph No. 6). The two rooftop dormers and the decorative bracketing represent intact original design elements.

The ground floor of the rear elevation is dominated by a one-story concrete wing with a flat roof and no visible openings (Photograph No. 9). The interior of the 20'4" x 12' wing contains a second vault room constructed soon after the building was converted into a town hall in 1936. Two narrow doorways, located on the second floor of the main building, provide access from the roof of the concrete wing to the interior of the original building. Standard two-over-two double-hung windows flank the door openings and a tall brick chimney rises along the southwest corner of the rear wall. The mansard roof features two original dormers. The right-hand dormer has been cut to provide a secondary access door that leads to a metal fire escape. The fire escape rises from ground level to the roof of the rear wing (to provide access to the second-floor doors) and continues up from the roof to access the third-floor doorway.

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**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 4WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT**DESCRIPTION (continued)****Interior**

Since 1936 the first floor interior of the Wheeler Block has been cut up into various-sized offices to provide work space for town officials (Figure 1). The spaces on this floor retain little original detailing. The main entry leads to a small enclosed vestibule with glass and wood-panel doors to the right and left. The main offices feature diagonally laid wood floors and modern wood paneling. The central wall dividing the east and west halves of the building is covered with vertical tongue-and-groove wood sheathing. The concrete vault at the rear of the building has a two-leaf metal door, a ribbed-vault ceiling, and unfinished concrete floors and walls. There is no access from this floor to the upper levels of the building. The interior stair was removed in 1913 to provide additional space.

The second floor consists of two large rooms and a small kitchen area set in the southwest corner (not original). The open rooms run the full depth of the building and contain hardwood floors and wood paneling (Photograph No. 8). Boxed beams run transversely across the rooms, with a single support column breaking up the open space of the east room. The window and door openings feature simple molded wood frames. The kitchen alcove features tongue-and-groove sheathing and cabinets. Access to this floor is provided by the bathroom addition attached to the east or through the doors in the south wall that lead to the flat roof of the rear vault. A narrow wood staircase located in the southwest corner behind the kitchen leads up to the third floor (Figure 2).

The third floor or mansard area contains the original Masonic meeting rooms in their original configuration (Figure 3). The large main lodge room occupies the eastern portion of the plan, with two smaller ante-rooms along the west wall. The smaller ante-rooms retain original plaster walls and ceilings, with

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 5

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

DESCRIPTION (continued)

built-in closets and storage rooms located in the northwest room. The symmetrical lodge room (25'6" x 31') is accented by beadboard wainscoting, a wide mopboard and chairrail, and canted walls that conform to the exterior slope of the mansard roof (Photograph No. 7). Modern wallboard covers the upper wall finishes in the main lodge room. No sign of the original pressed-metal ceiling is visible, but it may exist under the modern ceiling panels.

Raised ceremonial platforms are set against three walls and each door contains a ceremonial knocker and peephole. The dormers feature operable interior shutters with original hardware. The dormer windows are 4' wide by 4' 10" tall and are set in deep 1' 6" reveals. The window and door trim is similar to that found on the second floor. The interior stairway is set in the southwest corner, just above the second-floor kitchen. Secondary access is through the south wall of the lodge room and out onto the rear fire escape.

The basement has a modern concrete floor that creates low headroom. The rubblestone lower foundation is clearly visible, along with the heavier ashlar granite sills.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE

The Wheeler Block is nominated to the National Register for its local significance under criterion A and criterion C. The imposing two-and-one-half-story wood-frame structure represents a fine example of Second Empire-style design and reflects an important period of local growth. Historically, the building is significant for its long association with the regionally important Wooster Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons. The building's third-floor meeting rooms served not only as home to the Masons, but also as host to smaller social and fraternal organizations. From its construction in 1872 until well into the mid-twentieth century, the top-floor meeting hall was a vital element of the fabric of social life in Colchester.

The handsome nineteenth-century building was erected in 1872 for commercial use. The owner, Joshua B. Wheeler, was a respected Colchester merchant and a member of the local Masonic lodge. The building remained a commercial block--one of Colchester's largest--until 1910, when Wheeler's daughter, Emeline T. Ransom, presented the facility to the Town of Colchester for use as a school. The lower two floors housed an elementary school until 1936, when the building was converted into town offices. The building functioned as the official town hall until 1991.

Historical Background

Colchester, incorporated as a town in 1698, developed during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as an important crossroads community lying strategically between the growing urban areas of Hartford and New London, and Norwich and Middletown, Connecticut. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were a time of general prosperity for the town. The period was marked by the development of an increasing number of civic and cultural institutions. One of the most influential organizations to emerge was the Wooster Lodge of Free

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 2

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

and Accepted Masons, which was formally established in 1781. (1) The local Masonic group, which occupied the top floor of the Wheeler Block from 1872 until the 1970s, remained a significant feature of social life in Colchester through the early years of the twentieth century.

Life in Colchester changed dramatically during the middle years of the nineteenth century as the largely agrarian community developed a thriving industrial base. The erection of the Second Empire-style Wheeler Block was a direct result of Colchester's mid-century economic boom and reflected the level of prosperity brought to the rural crossroads community by the Hayward Rubber Company and its associated enterprises. The rubber (shoe) plant was established in Colchester by Nathaniel Hayward in 1847. For the next 45 years the economic health of the community revolved around the rubber plant and the associated small-scale industries that it drew to the community. During this period the central village became the hub of renewed commercial activity as businessmen and entrepreneurs sought to benefit from the local boom economy. A great deal of development focused on the area around the newly established town green, which was donated by Nathaniel Hayward.

The importance of the Hayward Rubber Company (a.k.a. Colchester Rubber Company) to the Colchester economy became evident with the closing of the plant in 1893. The collapse of the firm spelled the demise of the local economy. The once-thriving community lost its ability to secure new investment and returned to life as a rural crossroads community, with agriculture playing the largest role in the local economy. The result, however, was that the central green and the areas surrounding it remained largely unchanged from their mid-nineteenth-century appearance. Fine examples of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century architecture remain in place today, unaltered by the modest development seen in the period after the turn of the century when Colchester became a pleasant resort area or by the more recent developments that have transformed the town into a bedroom community.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 3WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

The imposing three-story Wheeler Block was built in 1872 by Joshua B. Wheeler (1798 - 1882), a longtime Colchester merchant and influential local businessman. Wheeler had operated a general merchandise store in Colchester for many years in partnership with Boston merchant Philo Gillett. Having prospered during the early years of Colchester's nineteenth-century boom, Wheeler had the block built as an investment property. The construction of the building undoubtedly also enhanced Wheeler's status in the community. The land on which the commercial block rests was originally owned by J. Turner (1854). Joshua Wheeler and Aurelia L. (Turner) Wheeler lived just a short distance from the newly erected commercial block in a large frame house on the south side of Norwich Avenue (not extant). (2)

The handsome Second Empire-style Wheeler Block was the work of local builder William A. Williams, who operated a small carpentry shop on Pleasant Street near the rubber company plant. For the total fee of \$4,500 Williams provided Wheeler with a 37' x 32' wood-frame structure with "... a 9' first floor, an 8'8" second floor, and a 10' tall top floor ... two chimneys, ... 6" x 8" sills, ... wood spruce roof shingles, ... four lite [2/2] windows, ... and trim of plain beaded or beveled casings." (3)

With the completion of the Wheeler Block, the local Masons were presented with the first lodge facility specifically designed for their needs and use. From the very start, the third-floor rooms were intended for use by the local lodge, of which Joshua Wheeler was a member. A lease agreement between Joshua and Aurelia Wheeler and the Wooster Lodge No. 10 of Free Masons dated October 31, 1872, spells out the terms of the use:

... the rooms on the Third floor of a building now just erected in the village of said Colchester. On said floor is [sic] four rooms, one hall and three small rooms, or ante chambers, constituting the whole of said floor, to be used by said Wooster Lodge for the meeting of the lodge.

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

The initial lease ran for a period of five years at a cost to the Masons of \$100 per year. (4)

Wooster Lodge No. 10 of Free and Accepted Masons, named for Revolutionary War hero Major David Wooster, had been instituted with a charter from the Massachusetts Grand Lodge in 1781 and held its first meetings in John Taintor's tavern on the corner of Lebanon Avenue and Broadway (not extant). Eleven of the first 12 members of the new lodge had served together in the Revolutionary War, and like many soldiers they had become aware of Masonry through army lodges.

For 15 years after its establishment, the Colchester Masonic lodge was the only lodge in Connecticut located east of the Connecticut River. Men from throughout the eastern regions of the state who wished to become Masons had to travel to Colchester to do so. As a result, the town quickly became an important center of regional Masonic activity. Large gatherings and rallies were often held in Colchester. Local representatives were continually asked to speak to interested local groups, and traveling Masons regularly made a point of stopping at the Colchester lodge. "Early lodge meetings resembled a veteran's reunion and the lodge became the source from which a dozen lodges sprang within the next several decades." (Wooster Lodge was not the first lodge in eastern Connecticut. Earlier lodges had been established in New London and Norwich prior to the Revolutionary War. However, these lodges were either abandoned or closed as a result of the war.) (5)

By 1782 Wooster Lodge had moved its meeting rooms from the Taintor tavern to the house of Captain Dudley Wright at 35 Hayward Avenue (extant, listed NHRP). An upper-floor room was fitted out for use by the lodge. In 1789 the lodge moved again, this time to John Breed's tavern at 208 South Main Street (extant). The lodge remained here for a number of years during

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 5

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

the height of its early popularity. The actual lodge rooms, however, are no longer extant. It was during the period around 1800 that the local Masons also initiated a chapter of the Royal Arch Masons, a council of Royal and Select Masons, and the first "encampment" of Knights Templar in the United States. These efforts served to place Colchester squarely at the center of statewide Masonic activity for several years. The local Masonic groups continued to use private homes, converted tavern halls, and commercial spaces for their meetings until the construction of the Wheeler Block in 1872. Except for the Captain Wright House and the Breed Tavern, none of the other sites have been identified as extant. The formal lodge rooms remained in the Wheeler Block until the late twentieth century, when the group moved into a converted Main Street theater building that remains its home today.

While the third floor of the Wheeler Block remained the Masons' private sanctum, the rest of the building served a series of commercial uses during the early years. The second-floor rooms were initially leased to William H. Hayward and Andrew Pl[eu]ller for use as a barber shop and billiard room. While the sale of cigars was officially sanctioned, the lease clearly stipulated that no "stimulating drinks of any kind" were to be sold or served in the building. Gambling was not to be allowed on the premises either. The yearly rent was \$125.00 for the first year and \$100.00 per year for the remaining four years of the five-year lease. (6)

The earliest identified occupants of the ground-floor shops were Joseph Manly, a harness maker, and I. C. Gleason, a jeweler. Local historian Barbara Brown notes that Orrin W. Avery operated a store selling stoves, tinware, and agricultural tools out of the building during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Insurance maps also show that the building was used variously as a newsroom, a cobbler's shop, and a bakery. (7)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 6

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

The initial five-year lease given to the Masons was renewed in 1878 and again in 1883 by Aurelia Wheeler after Joshua's death at the age of 83 in 1882. (8) With Aurelia's death in 1889, the commercial block passed to her daughter Emeline T. Ransom of Haverly, Iowa. (9) By 1890 the rent on the third-floor rooms had dropped to \$72.00 per year. (10)

Finally, in 1910 Emeline Ransom provided the Masons with a long-term 99-year lease that included the entire third floor and the southwest room on the second floor at a fee of \$1.00 per year. (11) Later that same year, in response to inquiries from local officials, Mrs. Ransom deeded the entire property over to the First School District of Colchester for use as an educational facility. The deed reserved the Masons' right to use the upper-floor lodge rooms for their meetings. (12) A stone tablet over the main entry to the building records Mrs. Ransom's gift.

As Colchester entered the twentieth century, the importance of a well-balanced educational system for the community became an important local concern. The town's first educational classes had taken place in the Congregational Church. By 1850, as a result of growth in the area, the town was divided into 15 separate school districts. The thriving central village contained two schools.

A series of small one-room schoolhouses served the central village until 1910, when Emeline Ransom donated the Wheeler Block to the local school district. The building's four large rooms and central location greatly improved the conditions for teaching in the central village. The Wheeler Block served as the home of the First District elementary school from 1910 to 1936, when elementary education in the community was consolidated into the newly built Central School. (13)

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places
Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 7WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

After the Wheeler Block was vacated by the local school system, it was converted into use as town offices. (The integrity of the interior school rooms was compromised by alterations made to facilitate the inclusion of the town offices.) The centrally located building helped to consolidate a number of governmental functions under a single roof for the first time. The building functioned as the official town hall until 1991. With the completion of the new town hall farther east along Norwich Avenue, the wood-frame building on the green became vacant. There is strong interest, however, in seeing the building turned into a local history museum.

Architectural Significance

The 1872 Wheeler Block is architecturally significant in the context of commercial construction in Colchester. The building's distinctive Second Empire style is unique within the commercial community and is found on only one other property in the town, a much smaller residential building located on Prospect Street. The Wheeler Block retains a substantial number of original features that reflect the period style, including a concave-silhouette mansard roof, decorative top-floor dormers, modillion cornices, and over-scaled wood brackets.

Very few large-scale commercial buildings were ever built in Colchester and even fewer remain intact. The Wheeler Block actually represents one of the larger and more articulated nineteenth-century designs built in the community. The Wheeler Block's overall level of integrity and original detail make it a fine representation of Colchester's boom-era prosperity.

(continued)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 8

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

SIGNIFICANCE (continued)

Historical Significance

The Wheeler Block is also significant for its association with Colchester's rich social history, specifically its connection with the Wooster Lodge of Masons and other local fraternal groups. In a small community such as Colchester that contained no private clubs or businessmen's associations, the fraternal lodge was an important center of social and political debate. Designed to suit the specific needs of the fraternal lodge, the Wheeler Block's third-floor rooms were an important local meeting place and remained an important social activity center for an extended period of time. The Masons' continuous use of the Wheeler Block from 1872 to the 1970s represents the longest single period of occupancy for any extant structure associated with the local lodge in Colchester.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 9

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

FOOTNOTES

- (1) Marshall, p. 181
- (2) Walling, "Map of New London County, Connecticut.", 1854.
- (3) Contract and specs agreement dated 11 March 1872
- (4) Colchester Land Records Vol. 30, p. 386, 1872.
- (5) Case, p. 28-29;
Pendleton 1940, p. 15, 42.
- (6) Colchester Land Records Vol. 30, p. 404, 1873.
- (7) Sanborn-Perris Insurance Map 1884, 1892, 1908;
Brown, L. C. "A Day in Colchester 1874."
- (8) Colchester Land Records Vol. 30, p. 545, 1878;
Colchester Land Records Vol. 34, p. 102, 1883.
- (9) Colchester Land Records Vol. 34, p. 276, 290-91, 1889.
Note: The Wheeler house was willed to another daughter,
Fanny Curtis of Colchester.
- (10) Colchester Land Records Vol. 34, p. 335, 1890.
- (11) Colchester Land Records Vol. 41, p. 597, 1910.
- (12) Colchester Land Records Vol. 40, p. 387, 1910.
- (13) Lusignan, p. 26.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 9 Page 1

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

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Maps

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 10 Page 1

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Starting at a point 246' east of the intersection of the southerly highway line of Norwich Avenue and the easterly highway line of Main Street, that point being the northwest corner of the nominated property; thence running southerly a distance of 65' to the southeast corner of the property; thence easterly 75', southerly 25', easterly 25', southerly 10', and easterly 15' along the southern property line of said property to the southeast corner of the lot; thence running northerly 100' to the northeast corner of the property; thence westerly 115' along the southerly highway line of Norwich Avenue to the point of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the store and meeting hall.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Section number Photo Page 1

WHEELER BLOCK
NEW LONDON COUNTY, CT

PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Wheeler Block

New London County, CT

Photographer: Paul R. Lusignan

Date: June 1992

Negative: Connecticut Historical Commission, Hartford, CT

Photograph No. 1

North facade and west side elevation, view looking southeast.

Photograph No. 2

North facade, view looking southwest.

Photograph No. 3

North facade and east side elevation, view looking southwest.

Photograph No. 4

Cornice detail, southwest corner of building looking northeast.

Photograph No. 5

Porch detail, north facade.

Photograph No. 6

Historic photograph, view looking southwest c. 1890-1900.

(Courtesy of Colchester Historical Society)

Photograph No. 7.

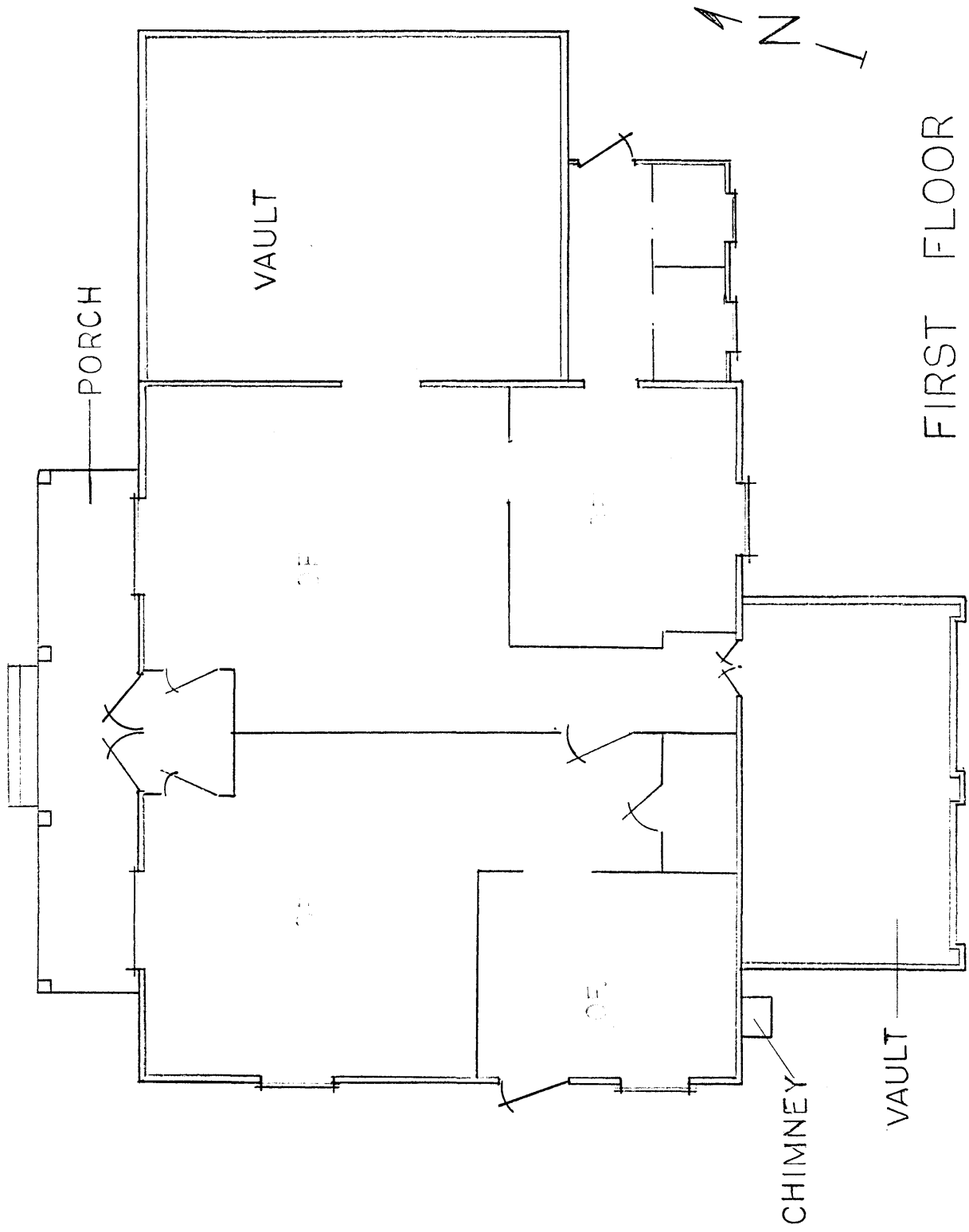
Interior photograph, Masonic lodge room, view looking east.

Photograph No. 8

Interior photograph, second floor east room, view looking south.

Photograph No. 9

Rear elevation and east side elevation, view looking northwest.

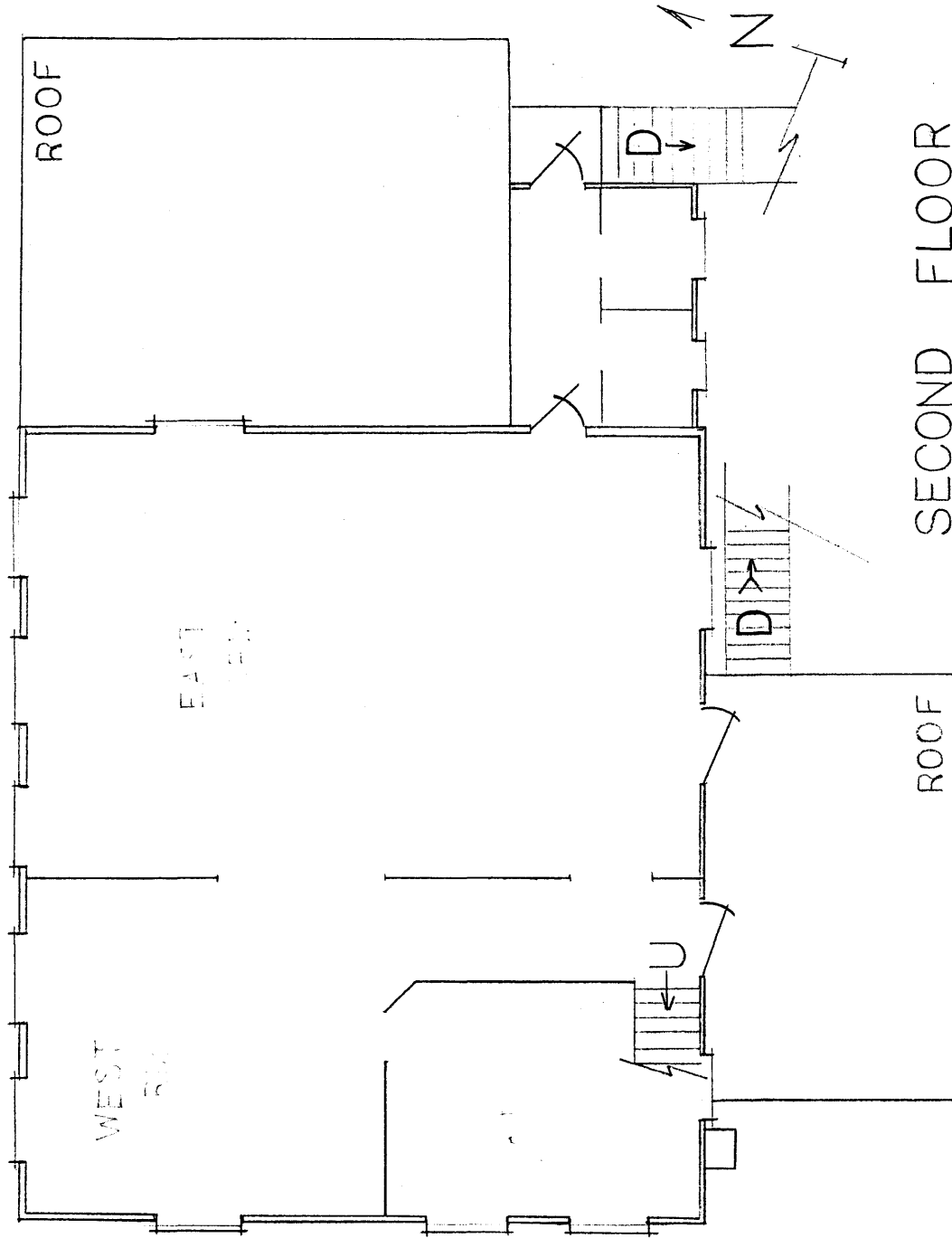


NOT TO SCALE

WHEELER BLOCK, COLCHESTER, CT

FIGURE 1

FIRST FLOOR

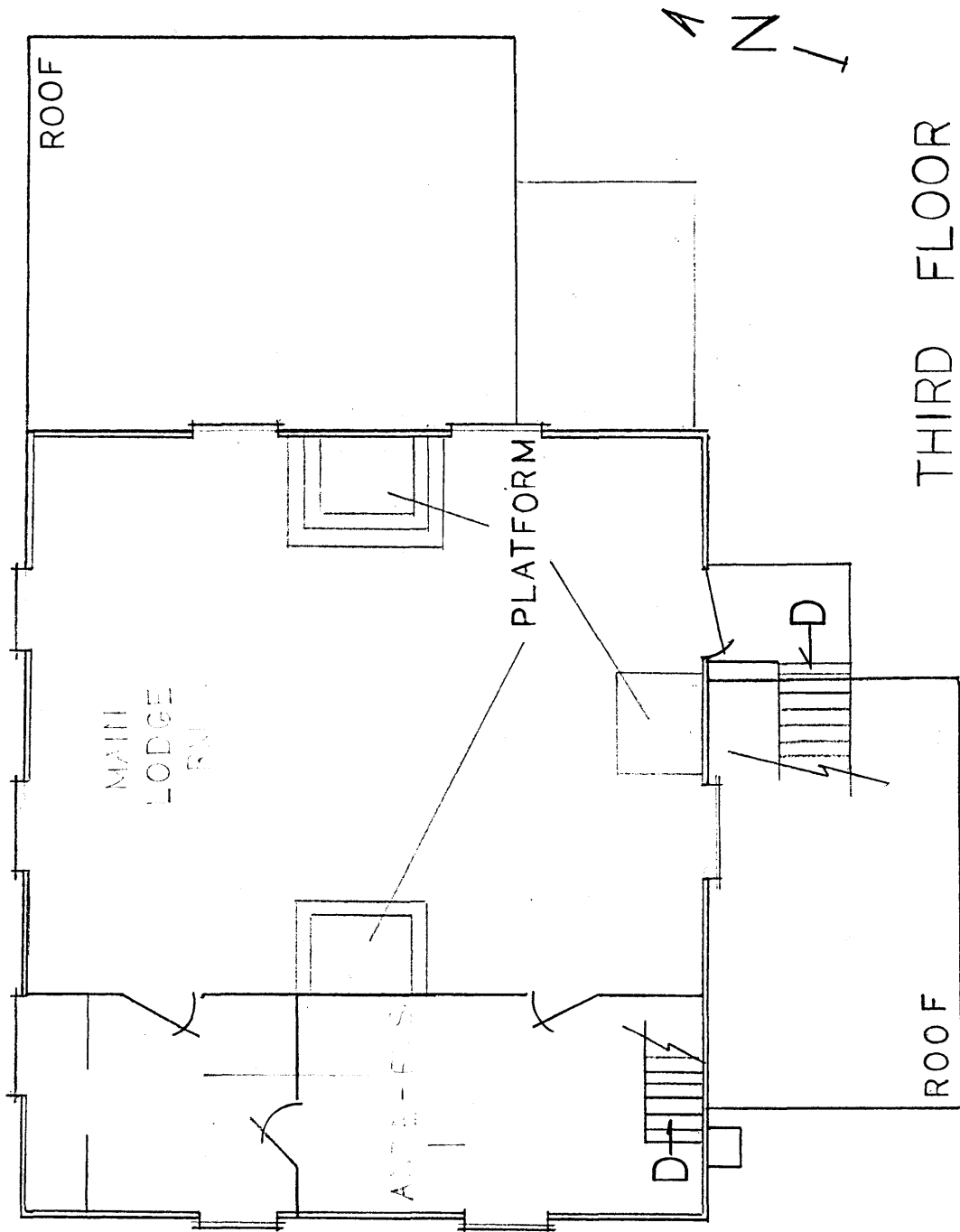


SECOND FLOOR

NOT TO SCALE

WHEELER BLOCK, COLCHESTER, CT

FIGURE 2



NOT TO SCALE

WHEELER BLOCK, COLCHESTER, CT

FIGURE 3