UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED DEC 06 1979

DATE ENTERED

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON	Histor. C South National Regist	er District		
LOCATION	Main Street, west	side, 43-203		
STREET & NUMBER	Main Street, east	side, 48-70		
	College Street, so	uth side, 105-111	NOT FOR PUBLICATION	
CITY, TOWN			CONGRESSIONAL DISTRI	ICT
Middletown	<u> </u>	VICINITY OF Second	Christopher J. Dodo COUNTY	i CODE
STATE Connecticu	17	CODE	Middlesex	CODE
CLASSIFIC				
CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESI	ENTUSE
XDISTRICT	PUBLIC	XOCCUPIED	AGRICULTURE	X_MUSEUM
BUILDING(S)		XUNOCCUPIED	X_COMMERCIAL	PARK
STRUCTURE	Х_вотн	WORK IN PROGRESS	EDUCATIONAL	
SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	ENTERTAINMENT	
OBJECT		YES: RESTRICTED	LGOVERNMENT	SCIENTIFIC
	BEING CONSIDERED	YES: UNRESTRICTED NO	INDUSTRIAL X_MILITARY	TRANSPORTATION OTHER:
STREET & NUMBER				
CITY, TOWN		VICINITY OF	STATE	
LOCATION	OF LEGAL DESCR	IPTION		
COURTHOUSE. REGISTRY OF DEEDS,I	ETC. Middletown Land	Records, Municipal	Building	
STREET & NUMBER	De Koven Drive			
CITY, TOWN	Middletown		STATE Connecticut (06457
REPRESEN	TATION IN EXIST	ING SURVEYS		
TÎTLE State Re	egister of Historic Pl	aces		
date 1978		FEDERAL X	_STATECOUNTYLOCAL	
DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS	Connecticut Historica	1 Commission		
CITY, TOWN			STATE	
	Hartford		Connecticut 06	5106

7 DESCRIPTION

COND	ITION	CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
XEXCELLENT XGOOD XFAIR	XDETERIORATED RUINS UNEXPOSED	UNALTERED XALTERED	XORIGINAL SITE XMOVED DATE 1977

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Middletown, Connecticut, settled in 1650 on the Connecticut River 15 miles south of Hartford, is the largest city in Middlesex County. The town prospered as an inland port until the War of 1812 and thereafter developed as a small industrial city and as the home of Wesleyan University, which opened in 1831. The city's Main Street was built up with a diversity of buildings during the 19th century in a manner not uncommon in New England. The southern two blocks of Main Street, with three associated buildings on College Street, comprise the Metro South District. The name Metro South has come into common usage in recent years to designate this part of town because of a redevelopment project so named. As this is the only name locally associated with the area, its use has been carried over for the district.

The district runs north along the west side of Main Street from Church Street and the South Green for two blocks to College Street. Three buildings around the corner to the west on the south side of College Street are included. On the east side of Main Street the district includes 48 Main Street and the Armory, but not the area north from the Armory to College Street because it has been cleared for redevelopment; one new structure has been erected there and a shopping plaza is under construction.

South of the district on the west side of Main Street is the South Green National Register District (listed in the National Register of Historic Places on August 12, 1975). On the east side of Main Street the district is bordered on the south by land that has been, or will be, cleared for redevelopment to Union Street. North of College Street the character of the buildings changes. The dominant structures of the streescape there are early 20th-century banks and institutions designed in the classic revival styles. West of the district is a neighborhood of free-standing structures that were primarily residential, but are now primarily commercial. East of the district to the Connecticut River is an area that was once the scene of activities connected with the town's function as an inland port, now largely cleared and under redevelopment. Thus, the two blocks of Main Street that comprise the district remain as an example of a 19th century urban downtown, now surrounded by other influences.

The condition of the buildings in the district ranges from good to deteriorated. The City of Middletown has purchased a portion of the properties (see list of property owners) for redevelopment. These buildings are not receiving normal maintenance and are deteriorating, especially those that are vacant. A building-by-building description of the district follows, starting at the northwest corner on College Street and proceeding counter-clockwise south along Main Street to South Green, and then up the east side of Main Street to the Armory.

109-111 College Street is a 1926 two-story building that served as an entrance to the older Middlesex theater behind it. A ticket kiosk, now stored inside, was located in the center of the entranceway at the sidewalk, and on either side of the entranceway at first floor was a small retail shop.

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Metro South National Register District Middletown, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Property Owners ITEM NUMBER 4 PAGE 1

All buildings are considered to contribute to the historic character of the district except one, 155 Main Street, which has been designated with the letters "NC" before its address.

<u>College Street</u> south side 105-111 College Street	City of Middletown, Municipal Building, De Koven Drive, Middletown, CT 06457
<u>Main Street</u> east side 48	City of Middletown, Municipal Building, De Koven Drive, Middletown, CT 06457
56-70 Main Street	State of Connecticut, State Office Building, Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
west side 43-71 Main Street	John F. Reynolds 43-47 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
SW corner Main Street & William Street	First Baptist Church Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
Spear Plaza and 163-20 3 7 Main Street	City of Middletown, Municipal Building, DeKoven Drive, Middletown, CT 06457
151 Main Street	Middlesex County Historical Society 151 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
NC 155 Main Street	Robert S. Bishel et al 155 Main Street, Middletown, CT 06457
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Metro South National Register District Middletown, CT

CONTINUATION SHEET Existing Surveys ITEM NUMBER 6

William Southmayd and John Cookson Houses State Register of Historic Places 1975 x State Connecticut Historical Commission Hartford, CT 06106

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An iron and glass marquise, supported by chains, extends out over the sidewalk in front of the entranceway. The lobby inside has 1920s decoration that approaches Art Deco, but the pointed arches of the recessed panels for posters of coming attractions pre-date that style.

The Middlesex Theater itself, or the Opera House, as it was known when it was built in 1892, suffered a bad fire in 1924. In the reconstruction that followed, the original two tiers of balconies were replaced by one, but the dimensions of the theater remained the same, 80 feet wide, 200 feet long, and 80 feet high, with a stage 44 feet deep, 68 feet wide, and 62 feet high. The interior was redocorated after the fire, and how much if any of the present decorative treatment dates from 1892 and how much from 1924 is undetermined. There is a mixture of classical, Art Nouveau, and Art Deco motifs. A large Art Deco chandelier hung from the center of the ceiling flanked by smaller Art Nouveau-type chandeliers, all three of which are now stored on the lobby floor. The ceiling is decorated by a circle of classical symbols, including mythological figures, animals and the scales of justice. Along the side walls of molded and stipled plaster are rectangular and pointed-arched panels. Some of the panels contain intricate foliate patters approaching strapwork. The overall color scheme is pink, blue, and cream highlighted with imitation gilt.

Next to the theater entrance at 107 College Street is a building with early Gothic Revival detail constructed c. 1856 as a firehouse and so used until 1929. This two-story, three-bay brick structure now has a plate glass storefront under a sheet metal cornice. The central window in the second story is double one-overone under a wide brownstone pointed-arch lintel, while the single windows on either side are protected by brick drip stones. Diagonal sawtooth patterns of bricks run parallel to the bargeboards of the gable. The top of the hose drying tower is visible to the right of the ridge line.

Its neighbor at 105 College Street, the G. A. Chaffee Building, c. 1870, is a charming composition in brick, two stories high, under a slate-tiled mansard roof. The peaks of its two dormers rise from flat moldings supported by brackets. The second floor molded cornice is also supported by brackets. The bases of these brackets are connected by a horizontal molding, an unusual arrangement. Traditionally a tavern, this building, like the others so far described, is now vacant.

The Universalist Church, 1839, on the corner of College Street at 203 Main Street, was considerably altered when it was acquired by the Odd Fellows in 1916. Old prints indicate that prior to that time it strongly resembled the Greek Revival Baptist Church down the street with high entrance steps under a small, pedimented entrance portico flanked by tall, narrow windows. The steps presumably led up to a high-ceilinged sanctuary. Now there are two principal floors, the fenestration

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is new, the authenticity of the pilasters is in question, and the entire building, which is 50 by 72 feet in size, has been covered by stucco. The records indicate that the front of the ground floor has always been used for stores, but the present storefronts date from the 20th century.

The three-story brick building next door at 191-195 Main Street dates from 1835. There is a brick fire wall down the center of the building, suggesting the possibility that originally it was one-half its present size. In any event, by 1856 both halves were in place, but as a two and one-half story building with gable roof. The gable roof line is visible in the south wall. The full third story was added c. 1891, along with a new front facade. The construction of brick with brownstone lintels and trim was typical of the times.

The district's 19th-century building with the greatest architectural pretension is the 1867 Middlesex Assurance Co. at 179 Main Street. Its ground floor has been defaced with modern storefronts, but the upper two stories show a classic Italian Renaissance five-bay facade of round-arched windows with keystones, a rusticated central pavilion under low pediment, quoins at the corners of the building, and molded cornice over a row of dentil blocks. The brownstone, now spalling, presumably came from the quarries across the river in Portland. The roof structure is built of a combination of timbers and iron bar trusses.

Behind the front section is a later, second section and behind it is the Middlesex Theater, which was built by the insurance company. Main access to the theater until 1926 was from Main Street, through the central door of the office building, and through a long hall to the theater.

The land records suggest that the Hall House at 171 Main Street was built in 1796. Originally, it was a conventional two-and-one-half-story, five-bay structure. A third floor added in the 1870's, storefronts installed in the 20th century, and a severe fire on the interior have badly impaired its integrity. Principal interest in the house now lies in people and events associated with its history.

Additional stores built to the south of the Hall House in the 20th century do not contribute to the historic character of the district.

General Mansfield's house, now the Middlesex County Historical Sociey, was built by his father-in-law at 151 Main Street in 1810. A fine brick five-bay Federal house, it has a columned entrance portico with the cove ceiling typical of the porticos of Federal houses in Middletown. The portico leads to a panelled

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door under a half-round fanlight. Details such as brownstone lintels and sills, a delicately proportioned cornice with dentil course, and six-over-six windows enhance the composition. The house and grounds are well maintained behind a handsome wood fence.

A modern vest pocket park, Spear Plaza of 1974, separates the Mansfield House from William Street and the Baptist Church. The church is an 1842 Greek Revival building in brick on a high brownstone basement. The tall windows and pilasters suggest what the original appearance of the Universalist Church, now covered with stucco, may have been. The Federal portico of the Baptist Church does not seem appropriate for its temple front; its tall, narrow proportions conflict with the broader proportions of the building itself. A short, square tower with paired columns at the corners divided by louvers under a small dome, painted white, has been removed from the roof of the church in recent weeks.

An interesting exercise in historic preservation has been carried out in the last block of the west side of Main Street in the district. Three frame houses have been moved from sites a block or two away to this location, and are in the process of rehabilitation. The first is the Southmayd House, 1747, a five-bay, gable roof, clapboard structure with a Federal portico similar to that of the Mansfield House. The north side has its original clapboarding and an unusual crown molding over both side door and adjoining window that was reproduced from the original. The rear wall is covered with rough weather boarding, thought to be an economy measure as compared with clapboards. Inside, the original oak stairway rises from the left in three runs, with half spindles at the posts. A smoke chamber that opens onto the stairs and the presence of gun stock posts in the house add to its authenticity.

The two-story house in the center is of transitional Federal/Greek Revival style, built in 1837 for Rev. John Cookson, the Baptist minister. With its gable end forming a temple front facade, this house has Greek Revival massing and entrance design, with most of its detailing Federal in proportion and style. The trim includes pilasters at the corners and in the pediment flush boarding and a semielliptical fanlight.

The district terminates with the Caleb Fuller House, 1771, at the corner of Church Street. This corner site is also included in the South Green National Register District. It is the third site for the Fuller House, which had been moved twice before in its history. A five-bay, Georgian-type house, it has a gambrel roof with dormers, adding a third type to this group of three houses. The clapboards are four feet long, bevelled at the ends for overlap, and have

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wider exposure to the weather toward the top of the walls. These three houses are being rehabilitated for use as professional offices, and thus will fit the commercial nature of the district in function.

Across the street is the Charles Boardman House, at 48 Main Street, built in the 1750's. This pitched-roof, frame structure has a central chimney on stone foundations with overhang at the second and third floors. While the house has been covered with shingles and has a modern storefront, much of the original fabric remains, including the stairway and chimney. On the property to the rear is a barn considered to be its contemporary, now covered on three sides with stucco. The house and barn are scheduled for rehabilitation.

Next north on the east side of the street is the State Armory, 70 Main Street, which is a U-shaped combination of three buildings. The oldest of these, the John R. Watkinson House, c. 1810, forms the north, or left, arm of the U. It is The entrance a Federal, red brick, five-bay house with splayed bronstone lintels. has a panelled front door, recessed under a panelled soffit, and another of the district's columned porticos with coved roof and dentilled cornice. A duplicate of this house has been built to the south, the pair defining an entrance court to the main building. The armory itself, constructed in 1921, is essentially a 75 by 143-foot drill hall with a two-story front section. Two-story paired columns under an entablature of the Doris order are attached to the center of the front facade of this section. The district is mostly comprised of 19th-century buildings punctuated by changes associated with a redevelopment program of the past decade. The buildings that remain in place are a demonstration of the diversity of quality and design typical of the Main Street of a small, industrial 19th-century city in New England.

Several buildings in the district are vacant and suffer varying degrees of deterioration on the interior. These buildings are the following:

109–111 College Street	Entrance to theater
Middlesex Theater	
107 College Street	Firehouse
105 College Street	Chaffee Building
171 Main Street	Hall House

The theater entrance appears to have little deterioration and is structurally sound. The Firehouse and Chaffee Building interiors were not visited but according to reports and to exterior appearance are in reasonably good shape considering their age. The Hall House has been gutted by fire and now is little more than a shell.

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The theater has been examined by engineers whose report is listed in the bibliography. This report indicates that the theater has the structural soundness to support a rehabilitation program (though at great expense). To a visitor, the theater seems overcome with damp and mildew, shows loss of decoration trim that has dropped from place, is marred by falling plaster, and is disfigured by removal of the chandeliers.

6 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW						
PREHISTORIC	ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	COMMUNITY PLANNING	LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	RELIGION			
_1400-1499	ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	CONSERVATION	LAW	SCIENCE			
1500-1 599	AGRICULTURE	ECONOMICS	LITERATURE	SCULPTURE			
_1600-1699		EDUCATION	MILITARY	SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN			
<u>x</u> 1700-1 799	ART	ENGINEERING	MUSIC	X THEATER			
<u>×</u> 1800-1899	COMMERCE	EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	PHILOSOPHY	TRANSPORTATION			
^X _1900-	COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY	POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	OTHER (SPECIFY)			
		INVENTION					
SPECIFIC DAT	ES	BUILDER/ARCH					

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

While none of the individual buildings in the Metro South District is of great architectural or historic importance, each contributes to the significance of the group. As a whole they typify 19th-century building styles and construction methods, they have close association with important local people and institutions such as General Mansfield and the Middlesex Assurance Co., and the churches and theater were important in the religious and cultural development of Middletown.

Buildings in the district have considerable diversity in size and sophistication, nowhere better illustrated than by comparison of the fire house and tavern on College Street, with the adjoining Middlesex Opera House. The fire house and tavern are small buildings, providing delightful examples of vernacular design and local craftsmanship. The theater is a large building, designed by a nationally known architect, Francis H. Kimball (1845-1919). Kimball had come to Hartford as supervising architect for construction of two buildings designed by Bryant and Rogers of Boston, and stayed on as supervising architect at Trinity College for William Burges. He was also the architect in his own right for several buildings in Hartford before moving on to New York City, where he specialized in theater design. A testimonial to his ability was recorded in 1968 by architect T. J. Palmer in the course of an analysis of the Middlesex Theater for possible rehabilitation. He found the theater had superior acoustics and good sight lines. While the reinforced concrete beam and slab floor was built after the fire, it was supported on the original granite piers, and the overall proportions and design scheme remained Kimball's.

The unexpected arrangement of access to the theater through the insurance building, and, indeed, the role of the insurance company in constructing the theater, have been explained in local history as the plan of O. Vincent Coffin, president of the company and later the first resident of Middletown to become governor of Connecticut. It was at his behest that the Middlesex Assurance Company voted to use some "spare cash" to erect an opera house as a contribution to the artistic development of Middletown and Middlesex County. Many notable artists performed on its stage, including Lionel Barrymore, Douglas Fairbanks, Sr., John Phillip Sousa, Walter Damrosch, May Fisk, Otis Skinner, and Buddy Ebsen. Later the Opera House became Middletown's first movie theater, with silent films, then talkies.

The Middlesex Assurance Company, through its basic business of insurance, was a force for financial stability and growth in the area. In addition, the company

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

T. J. Palmer, Architect, Report on Middlesex Insurance Co. Building and Theater, Middletown Redevelopment Agency, 1968.

	ogical Excavations in	n Middletown 1974-	¹⁹⁷⁶ . UTM NOT MCOURT
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made a contribution to the community by engaging nationally known architect, Kimball, for the theater it constructed, and another competent architect, whose identify is unknown, for its Italian Renaissance office building. The office building's handsome facade is a demonstration of local use of native Portland brownstone, so much of which was shipped by water to New York City for its famous brownstone fronts.

The 18th-century house at 171 Main Street has many associations with the early development of medicine in Connecticut. It was the home of Dr. William Brenton Hall (1764-1809), who also used the premises for an apothocary shop and for a medical school early in the 1800's, before the medical school at Yale was opened in 1813. Dr. Hall introduced smallpox vaccine into Connecticut. The house later was the residence of Dr. Thomas Minor (1777-1841), who published five books on various medical subjects and was active in the establishment of several medical institutions throughout the state. The back yard of this property was the site of a Wesleyan University archaeological investigation in the spring of 1976.

Major General Joseph K. F. Mansfield (1803-1862) was mortally wounded at Antietam. Having himself played an important role in Middletown's Civil War history, it is appropriate that his house for many years has quartered the Middlesex County Historical Society. The house is of above average architectural interest because it is free of alterations and retains strong integrity of site with its authentic wooden fence. Its portico with coved ceiling is a typical example of a Middletown interpretation of the Federal style.

The two churches give the district a good representation of Greek Revival religious architecture. The similarities in plans of high basement, entrance portico, tall windows, pilasters, and crowning pediment suggest that the same architect/builder was involved in their construction, three years apart. While the Baptist Church (1842) continues in its original condition as a prime example of its type, the Universalist Church (1839) has undergone alterations and adaptive re-use which have damaged its architectural integrity.

An interesting example of historic preservation is provided by the three frame houses at the lower end of Main Street. These three houses, originally located on sites within a block or two of the district, were scheduled to be demolished because the City of Middletown fire code prohibited frame houses in the downtown area. An arrangement was worked out whereby the City Council declared the present location of the houses to be not part of the fire district. As part of the agreement, the houses have been equipped with both interior and exterior sprinklers. The forces of redevelopment, fire prevention, and historic preservation were able to come to an understanding that satisfied the objectives of all three interests.

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The Boardman House across the street is scheduled for similar restoration, on its present site. This property is of special interest because the old barn is still standing on the premises, the only such case in downtown Middletown. Because of this circumstance, the site is scheduled for archaeological investigation at a future date.

This district as a whole is a realistic collection of structures reflecting the diverse forces at work in the development of a 19th-century urban Main Street. The range of influences runs from the vernacular design of the fire house, through Italian Renaissance elegance, Greek Revival temple forms, and the restraint and discipline of Federal forms, to the average man's tenement. The buildings still in place reflect the continued pressures of changing times. These pressures have resulted in a compromise between redevelopment and historic preservation in the case of the three frame houses at the foot of Main Street, while elsewhere in and around the district the physical and financial problems of maintenance and possible re-use of some buildings in their historic function and of possible adaptive re-use of others play a part along with new construction in the continued 20th century development.

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UTM References:

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