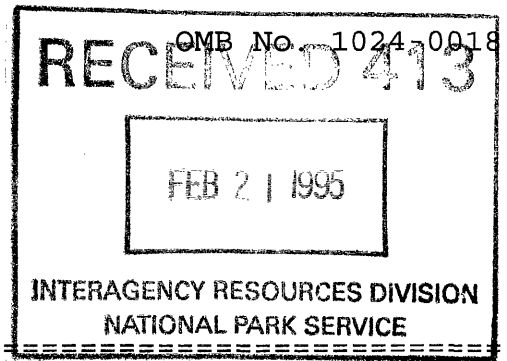


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NPS Form 10-900
(Rev. 8-86)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM**

1. Name of Property

historic name: NORWALK CITY HALL

other name/site number: N/A

2. Location

street & number: 41 North Main Street (South Norwalk)

city/town: Norwalk

not for publication: N/A
vicinity: N/A

state: CT county: Fairfield code: 001 zip code: 06854

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: public-local

Category of Property: building

Number of Resources within Property:

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: 0

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X 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 X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See cont. sheet.

Signature of certifying official: John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission. Date: 2/15/95. State or Federal agency and bureau.

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official. Date. State or Federal agency and bureau.

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this 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):

Edson F. Beall 3/23/95

Entered in the National Register

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic: GOVERNMENT Sub: city hall
Current: VACANT/NOT IN USE Sub:

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification:

Colonial Revival

Other Description: N/A_____

Materials: foundation STONE roof STONE: slate
walls BRICK other STONE: marble
WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

=====
8. Statement of Significance
=====

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: state.

Applicable National Register Criteria: A,C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) : _____

Areas of Significance: ARCHITECTURE
POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

Period(s) of Significance: 1912-1944 _____

Significant Dates: 1912 _____

Significant Person(s): N/A _____

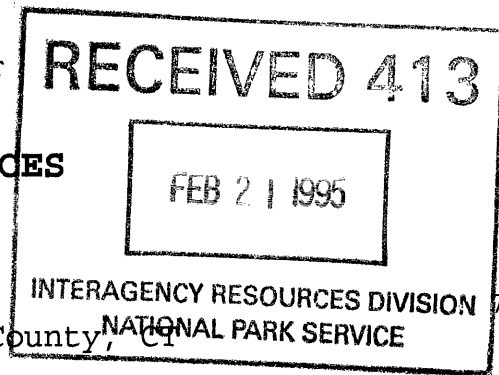
Cultural Affiliation: N/A_____

Architect/Builder: Frank H. Bissell and Joel D. Barber, architects
Michael Staub, contractor

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.
X See continuation sheet.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**



Description Norwalk City Hall
 Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

The Norwalk City Hall is a large 2 1/2-story brick building constructed in 1912 in the Colonial Revival style. Last used for municipal offices in 1988 and now vacant, the city hall stands at the corner of North Main and Marshall Streets in the heart of the South Norwalk commercial district. The walls are of red sand-struck brick laid in Flemish bond, with window sills and other trim of white and light gray marble. The steeply pitched hip roof is covered with slates and is surmounted by a small octagonal domed cupola. The front part of the building, paralleling North Main Street, measures 78 feet by 40 feet in plan, with an original flat-roofed two-story rear ell, 38 feet by 40 feet, extending back from the center (Photograph 2). A two-story flat-roofed addition, lower than the original ell, lengthens the building another 20 feet; it was added c.1930 to create vault space (Photograph 3).

The facade (Photograph 1) is dominated by a two-story portico that extends across the middle three bays of the five-bay facade. The portico consists of four fluted Doric columns, constructed of wood, above which is a triangular pediment. The columns' gray marble plinths rest on the topmost of a flight of 13 gray marble steps. The pediment has a course of large dentils below its cornice moldings and a frieze lettered with the words "CITY HALL." A small circular window, with keyblocks at the four quadrants, is centered within the pediment's stuccoed tympanum. Behind the columns are corresponding brick pilasters with wooden molded bases and capitals. The building's main entrance is in the center bay and consists of a large round-arched opening with marble impost blocks, within which are double glass doors, a transom, and a circular brick ornament in the stuccoed head of the arch. The transom and upper door lights have muntins forming a star pattern. A side entrance on the north (Marshall Street) elevation has glass doors like those in the main entrance, but with a radially glazed semi-elliptical transom (Photograph 8, view from interior).

Most window openings have been boarded-up with plywood sheets. The window openings have marble sills and jack-arch lintels with marble keystones. On the first floor, the windows consist of double-hung wooden sashes of three vertical panes. The second-floor openings are fitted with pairs of narrow two-over-two windows and corresponding transom lights.

Other notable exterior decorative detail includes a marble cornerstone bearing the building's date, raised-brick quoins at the corners and flanking the center three bays of the facade, gray marble facing on the

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description

Norwalk City Hall
Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

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foundation, and recessed brick panels below the second-story windows on the facade and the side elevations of the front part of the building. Elaborate cast-iron lamp standards bearing three glass globes rest on the marble-coped low brick walls that flank the entrance stairs (Photograph 4). The building's cornice echoes that of the portico, with the crown moldings jutting outward so as to accommodate an internal edge gutter which drains the roof into copper downspouts, the collection boxes of which also bear the building's date (Photograph 5). The cupola (Photograph 6) has a low railing of turned balusters along its base, each corner of which bears a slender urn. The cupola itself is entirely open and consists of eight Roman Doric columns. The columns support a metal-roofed dome surmounted by a ball finial; the cornice is embellished with small modillions.

The interior plan features a short corridor or vestibule immediately within the main entrance, leading to an octagonal lobby in the center of the building. The lobby (Photograph 7) has marble door-frames, a marble dado, and an elaborately molded cornice. Carved festoons appear above the dado, which continues into the anterooms of the offices to either side and along a corridor leading back to the main stairway (Photograph 8). The open stairs, located at the point that the ell joins the front part of the building, have simple paneled newels, square balusters, and a molded handrail. Other interior materials include plaster walls, linoleum floors (except for terrazzo in the vestibule and lobby), and dark-stained quartered-oak chair rails and molded window and door surrounds. Most doors are of similar oak, with a glass upper portion over a single lower panel. Two of the offices feature tall built-in cupboards (Photograph 9). Some rooms have embossed metal ceilings, while other ceilings are plastered.

Most of the interior is divided into small offices. However, there are two large special spaces on the second floor. In the rear portion is a large open room with a coved plaster ceiling that originally served as the city council chamber. The second floor of the front part, for two-thirds of its width, accommodates a small auditorium that has a high vaulted ceiling extending upward into the space created by the hip roof (Photograph 10). The vaulting is continued over a small low stage centered along the south wall. There are dressing rooms to either side of the stage, which is flanked by plain pilasters. Above the proscenium is a cartouche bearing the initial N for the City of Norwalk (but originally lettered "S N" for South Norwalk). The auditorium is also known as the city council chamber, since that was its last use.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Description

Norwalk City Hall
Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

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The Norwalk City Hall has suffered in recent years from roof leaks and water-pipe breaks, resulting in damaged plaster and floors. Also, vandals have removed some plumbing and heating components, causing further damage to walls and exposing asbestos-bearing material. In general, however, the building retains a great deal of integrity, with few changes to significant exterior or interior architectural details. The alterations have consisted almost entirely of the installation of modern lighting fixtures, the relocation of a few office partitions, and the addition of plywood paneling below the chair rail in some offices (Photograph 9).

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance

Norwalk City Hall
Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

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Summary

The Norwalk City Hall is significant because of its role in Norwalk's political history (Criterion A). Built in 1912, the building served for half a year as the municipal offices of the City of South Norwalk and then, for the next 75 years, as the seat of government for the consolidated City of Norwalk. The building provided offices for the mayor, clerk, assessor, tax collector, and other departments; jail cells in the basement; and meeting places for the City Council and large public assemblies. In addition to political meetings, the building's auditorium accommodated balls, lectures, and other public entertainments.

The city hall is also architecturally significant as an example of the Colonial Revival style of architecture (Criterion C). Its red-brick exterior, cupola, and other elaborate detailing inspired by early American precedents are typical of the style, especially as used for public buildings in that period. The building was designed by Joel D. Barber and Frank H. Bissell, who at the time had an architectural practice together in New York City.

Historical Significance

In 1912, when work on the Norwalk City Hall began, there were three separate local governmental units within the Town of Norwalk: town government, which embraced the entire area and was responsible for the traditional legal record-keeping and social-welfare functions that had developed in the colonial era; the City of Norwalk, which covered a small area around the built-up part of town known by that name, and which provided special services such as sidewalks, police and fire protection, water, and street lights; and the City of South Norwalk, which provided similar services to that densely built part of town. Of the two city governments, South Norwalk was the older, having been established in 1871 to serve a rapidly growing commercial and residential area. South Norwalk's advantages included good access to the harbor area and local oystering grounds, passenger and freight depots on Connecticut's major shoreline rail corridor, and a thriving industrial sector, with large factories manufacturing hats, corsets, shirts, and locks.

The construction of a city hall for South Norwalk's local government

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance Norwalk City Hall 8-2
 Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

was part of an expansion of public services that reflected the city's prosperity in the early 20th century. South Norwalk accounted for more than a third of Norwalk's population at the time. It was also the fastest growing part of town; its population increase over the preceding decade, 36%, was two and one half times that of its rival to the north, the City of Norwalk. With revenues from taxes, water bills, and a municipal power company, South Norwalk undertook to build a city hall and two other large public buildings: a library, partly assisted with funding from Andrew Carnegie, and a new central firehouse for the city's two fire companies. The city hall was completed in April of 1913, and the City Council met there for the first time in May. Instead of formal dedicatory exercises, the city hall was opened with a band concert and a reception hosted by South Norwalk women's groups, including local Women's Suffrage advocates. The auditorium's first major event was on May 23, 1913, when the Old Well Hook and Ladder Company held its annual formal ball there.¹

The general contractor for the city hall was Michael Staub from Mamaroneck, New York, with roofing, painting, plumbing, and electrical work performed by local subcontractors. The marble was provided by the Vermont Marble Company. The building cost a little over \$40,000 and was paid for by a \$75,000 bond issue that also funded the construction of a central fire station and library in South Norwalk.

After years of controversy, Norwalk's town and city governments were consolidated under a single mayor and council, effective in October, 1913 (ironically, the first public assembly in the new building had been a large protest against consolidation by citizens of South Norwalk, who insisted on a referendum on the issue). The new arrangement provided for a single mayor and council and a unified police department. The consolidation was only partly complete, however, since, as a compromise, an elaborate system of taxing districts was established to fund and administer many municipal services; to this day, South Norwalk retains considerable individual

¹As soon as it was completed, local prizefighter John "The Raver" Benjamin announced that he and his fiancée would be the first couple to be married in the new city hall (though as it turned out, the ceremony took place in New York City); "Raver Wants to Wed in City Hall," Norwalk Hour, April 19, 1913, p. 1.

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**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
CONTINUATION SHEET**

Significance

Norwalk City Hall
Norwalk, Fairfield County, CT

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identity as the Second Taxing District. For the nominal rent of \$1 per year paid to the Second Taxing District, South Norwalk's city hall was taken over as offices of the consolidated government, and the "S.N." that had graced the cartouche over the auditorium's stage was changed to the single letter "N."

For the next 75 years, all the important political issues affecting Norwalk were discussed and voted on in this building. The level of funding for schools and other services, the introduction of zoning in the 1920s, the city's response to the Depression-Era public relief crisis, provision for public housing after World War II, and urban redevelopment in the 1960s and 1970s are but a few examples of important public decisions undertaken in these years by Norwalk's Mayor and City Council.

Architectural Significance

The Norwalk City Hall is notable as a large and richly detailed example of the Colonial Revival style of architecture. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, architects turned to the buildings of early America as a source of inspiration. The resulting designs were not intended as reproductions, but rather as modern buildings that would have connotations of tradition and patriotism and recall the supposedly elegant living that characterized the colonial era. The Colonial Revival style, particularly as applied to public buildings, incorporated the most elaborate elements of early American architecture, as evidenced by the Norwalk City Hall's quoins, massive portico, belfry (for which an additional \$600 was paid), and extensive use of marble. Red-brick exteriors and Colonial Revival detailing dominated the architecture of public buildings well into the 1930s.

The architects for the city hall were Joel D. Barber (1876-1952) and Frank H. Bissell (1881-1957), a New York partnership that also designed South Norwalk's central fire station, underway at the same time as the city hall. Barber, the older partner, graduated from Cornell University's School of Architecture and then studied in Paris and Rome. In the late 1920s and 1930s, he was a member of Raymond Hood's office in New York City, where he worked on several major projects, including the McGraw Hill and Daily News buildings and Rockefeller Center; he also is credited with the design for an office building for E. I. DuPont de Nemours & Co. in Wilmington, Delaware. Barber became an authority on

