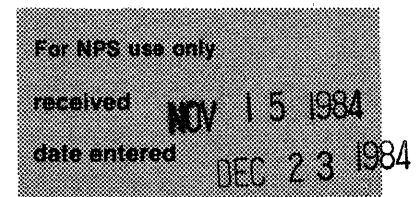


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Main Street Historic District #2

District F

Description and Boundary Justification

Main Street Historic District #2 encompasses the square block bounded by Main Street, on the west, Central Row on the north, Prospect Street on the east and Atheneum Square North on the south and the Hartford Steam Boiler Insurance Co. building on the east side of Prospect Street. There are eight buildings in the district, all but one of which contribute to its historic and architectural significance. The amount of land in the square block is approximately nine acres. The dominant force in the district is the Travelers Insurance Co., owner of six of the eight buildings.

Across Main Street from the district is a modern glass office building. ~~And~~ the First Church of Christ and Ancient Burying Ground, individually listed in the National Register. Across Central Row from the District is Thomas Hooker Square with the Old Statehouse, individually listed in the National Register. East of the district are modern office buildings and the Hartford Club, which is addressed elsewhere in this multiple resource area nomination. Across Atheneum Square North (formerly Wadsworth Alley) is the Wadsworth Atheneum, individually listed in the National Register. The buildings within the district are office and mercantile buildings that form a homogeneous resource in contrast to the diverse structures that surround the district.

The streets of the district date back to the early years of the community, founded in 1636. Initially residential in character, Main Street in the 18th century became the locale for taverns, shops and businesses. Central Row led from the Main Street eastward to the Connecticut River and so was an important thoroughfare in the 18th century and first half of the 19th century when the city was river oriented. Prospect Street retained its residential character to the end of the 19th century, as did Grove Street one block of which formerly bisected the district in the east-west direction. This block of Grove Street is now absorbed into the Travelers complex. Atheneum Square North in the 18th century was adjacent to the Wadsworth family home, later the site of the Wadsworth atheneum.

By the second half of the 19th century, Main Street in the district was the location of the Post Office, several insurance company offices, of which the Travelers remains, of The Hartford Times offices and plant before removal to their 1920 building on Prospect Street, which is dealt with elsewhere in this multiple resource area nomination, and of the Hartford City Gas Light Co., among other commercial establishments. Aetna Life Insurance Co.'s building stood on the plaza now called Tower Square, and Aetna Insurance Co. was next door to the north.

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As the Travelers grew it acquired property and built buildings. Its tower, for decades the tallest building between Boston and New York, occupies the southern part of the district with additional Travelers buildings coming north from it along Main and Prospect streets. Central Row retains some of its 19th-century brownstone architecture which is an appropriate and fortunate circumstance for a group of buildings facing Thomas Hooker Square and the Old Statehouse.

Individual descriptions of the buildings follow:

C Putnam Building
6 Central Row

Photograph 24

6 Central Row is a 4-story, 6-bay building faced with brownstone, in the Renaissance Revival style. Judging from its appearance, it was built c. 1860. It is one of the two buildings in the district not owned by the Travelers.

The first floor has been altered, probably early in the 20th century. It is now faced with granite and has three central arched windows as were favored for commercial buildings of the Neo-Classical Revival style. These windows are flanked by rectangular openings with medallions over them. A dentil course defines the top of the granite facing.

Windows of the second, third and fourth floors are graduated in height, diminishing in size from floor to floor. The present sash are 1-over-1. The second-floor windows have eared architraves that rise from rectangular bases and are gently segmental above the windows. The third- and fourth-floor windows have simpler molded architraves and sills supported by small impost brackets.

The roof line cornice is carried on paired brackets placed over the spaces between the windows. Between the two brackets of a pair is a recessed square panel while between the pairs of brackets are raised, interlaced hearts.

The building has been occupied by a series of stock-broker firms since 1914 of which Putnam and Co. was the dominant member.

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- C Travelers Office Building
9-17 Central Row

Photographs 21, 24, 25

The 16-story building at 9-17 Central Row was built in 1927-28, toward the end of the period when such large, tall buildings would be constructed in the Neo-Classical Revival style with parts analogous to the classical column. In this building, however, the old formula still is followed, with the first three stories or base clad in brownstone, the next ten stories treated in brick as the shaft and the top three stories handled in limestone as a capital.

The front elevation has a wide, central section of seven bays flanked by slightly projecting 1-bay sections. The principal entrance, under a marquise, is in the center, with additional entrances in the flanking sections. Windows of the first two floors are separated vertically by fluted pilasters and horizontally by panels with raised, floral Art Deco designs. The second-floor cornice has a broad band of triglyphs, extending a similar motif in the building to the east.

At the top of the building a colonnade of six, colossal, 3-story Ionic limestone columns creates a temple-like appearance under an elaborate pediment set back behind urns supported by the colonnade's entablature. There is a progressive double set-back from the front elevation and from the side elevations. A wall extending up to the level of the returns of the pediment's cornices carries a range of antifixa. The principal horizontal lines of this rooftop temple are at the same height as the principal horizontal lines of a somewhat similar design on the earlier building to the west.

The architects for 9-17 Central Row were Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker of New York.

- C Marble Pillar Building
19-25 Central Row

Photograph 26

The 2-story, brownstone-faced building at 19-25 Central Row was constructed in 1939 using a traditional, 19th-century building material for classically inspired details in the Art Moderne mode. It has not been altered, relates well to its neighbor and makes an important contribution to the Central Row streetscape.

The street elevation is divided into three sections. The central section has a central entrance to the upper floor with molded stone surround, flanked by two store fronts with central pocket entries. There is polished red granite facing below the shop windows. At the second floor are five

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double casement windows, each sash two panes wide and four panes high under a 4-pane transom. Below each window there is a panel with central disk flanked by single triglyphs. The sections of the wall between the windows are brick.

The end sections of the building project slightly and are framed by channeled pilasters. There is a store front at the first floor and a wider double casement window at the second. Above the second floor there is a wide frieze with triglyphs over the end sections and alternating discs and triglyphs over the central section. This frieze continues a similar frieze from the brownstone base of the high rise building next east. There is a plain parapet above the frieze.

The Marble Pillar restaurant, noted for its German-American cuisine, has been a tenant of the building from the first. The Marble Pillar has been on Central Row since it was founded in 1860. During the years from 1878 to 1915 when the Old Statehouse across the street functioned as the City Hall, the Marble Pillar was a favorite meeting place for politicians and deal makers and continues to attract an influential clientele.

Architects for the building were the Hartford firm of Smith and Bassette. H. Hillard Smith (1871-1948) had been a partner in the office of William C. Brocklesby toward the end of Brocklesby's career, making the 20th-century firm of Smith & Bassette a rare continuation of a 19th-century Hartford architectural office. Other examples of the firm's 20th-century work in 19th-century brownstone are the Pump House (1945) at the eastern end of Bushnell Park and the Putnam House (1919) at 1010 Prospect Avenue. The Putnam family for decades operated the brokerage house located at 6 Central Row. A plaque in Thomas Hooker Square across the street from Central Row memorializes William H. Putnam for his civic good works. It was unveiled February 1, 1958, on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

Although it is not yet 50 years old, 19-25 Central Row is compatible with the historical and architectural significance of the district and is designated contributing. Its sympathetic design, materials, integrity and associations add materially to the Central Row streetscape.

NC Travelers Office Building
740 Main Street

Photograph 23

The 11-story office building at 740 Main Street was constructed in 1956 to the design of Voorhees Walker Smith & Smith of New York. Windows of the first-floor granite-faced street elevation have raised granite sills and side enframements of rectangular cross section, carried on small curved impost blocks. There are no lintels or window caps. Windows of

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upper limestone-faced floors are without such partial surrounds. Windows are 2-over-2 metal sash, with normally-placed central meeting rails at the first floor and high meeting rails in the upper floors. The south elevation facing a walkway, formerly Grove Street, is the same. 740 Main Street is a foil between the Neo-Classical Revival 750 Main Street, its neighbor to the north, and the base of the Travelers Tower to the south. It is a unique example in Historic Downtown Hartford of minimalist design of the period, but is considered not to contribute to the district because it is less than 50 years old.

Hartford-Connecticut Trust Building
750 Main Street
a/k/a 760 Main Street, 2 Central Row

Photographs
21, 23, 25, 27

The 17-story, brick-and-limestone building at 750 Main Street was constructed by the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Co. in 1921. This prominent corner location had long been the site of an office building; the bank continued the established function with a new and taller building in the Neo-Classical Revival style.

The first three floors of the two street elevations are faced with limestone above a water table of polished granite. On each elevation the first two floors have three 2-story round arches separated by pilasters that support a cornice with Greek key and dentil course. In the central arch on each street there is an entrance to the interior 2-story banking room, although the Central Row doorway has been blocked up. At 760 Main Street the entrance is graced with a pediment supported by Ionic columns and the doorway architrave is a cyma molding enriched with an elaborate anthemion motif and spiral border. There are panels with medallions and festoons over the first-floor windows in the archways. Paired windows at the third floor carry the limestone facing up to the height of the Putnam Building, adjoining to the east, with a cornice that extends the cornice line of the older structure. The next ten stories are brick with windows arranged as at the third floor, paired on the Main Street elevation and paired with single windows at the ends on the Central Row elevation.

On the Central Row elevation, above a 10th-story cornice, the three pairs of windows are replaced by three 3-story arches, reminiscent of those at the base. A broad molded cornice with modillions projects on both elevations above the 16th floor. The building is capped with a superstructure designed to resemble a pedimented Roman temple. As it is narrower in the east-west direction than the principal mass of the building, there is room for a terrace with balustrade on each side. The

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Central Row elevation of the temple has a central rectangular window with segmental pediment and a balcony, while a high relief marble crest with swags fills the tympanum of the pediment.

On the interior the height of the 2-story banking floor, still used as a banking floor, has been reduced by introduction of a low dropped ceiling. Any sense of the original space has been lost.

Architects for the Hartford-Connecticut Trust Building were Morris & O'Connor of New York. Benjamin Wistar Morris (1870-1944) was the son-in-law of the Rev. Francis Goodwin, the leading real estate developer in Hartford at the turn of the century. Morris' extensive work in Hartford included the Morgan Memorial of the Wadsworth Atheneum (1910) and the Connecticut State Armory (1909). In New York his firm is well known for the elegant interior space with groined and domed vaults of the Cunard Steamship Building (1921) on lower Broadway.

C Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection
& Insurance Co. Building
56 Prospect Street

Photograph 30

The block on the east side of Prospect Street between State and Grove streets long was occupied by a well-known Hartford theater, Parsons's. In the 20th century, Parson's Theater, as did the provincial legitimate stage generally, suffered a decline in patronage and eventually closed. Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection & Insurance Co. acquired the premises through foreclosure, and commissioned Hartford architect Carl J. Malmfeldt to design on the site their new headquarters building, which opened in 1932.

A simple rectangle in shape, the 3-story building is constructed of light grey granite for the foundations and light beige limestone above the foundations. On the Prospect Street elevation there is a central grouping of nine windows flanked by single windows. A belt course bearing a flat wave molding design divides the first floor from the second and third floors. The upper two floors have windows joined vertically by bronze spandrels in a 1930s version of the tall arched window openings of Neo-Classical Revival commercial buildings. Pilasters with shallow fluting divide the nine central windows. In the wide flat band above the windows stylized triglyphs alternate with discs. The roof line cornice molding is modest in profile, over a dentil course. The Grove Street elevation is similar with eight windows in the central grouping. The building's entrance is in the middle of the Prospect Street elevation

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surrounded by a simple molded architrave. Flanking piers in front of the entrance repeat the wave molding motif. Windows are 3-over-3, steel sash, of vertical panes.

While the building uses classically derived motifs, they are treated in the chaste planar fashion of the Art Moderne. All surfaces are flat, all decoration is restrained. The building, therefore, is similar to 19-25 Central Row, across the street, and the two make fine companion pieces.

Steam Boiler's architect, Carl J. Malmfeldt (1891-1949), was educated at Harvard, M.I.T. and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. He was associated with Adams & Prentice in the design of the Hartford Post Office and Federal Building in Historic Downtown Hartford.

A 2-stage addition was built on the north in 1964. While sensitive to the original building in materials and massing, its windows are connected through three stories instead of two, and a large part of the Prospect Street elevation of the addition is a blank wall.

The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection & Insurance Co. was founded in 1867. By emphasizing rational treatment of boilers through its inspection and technical advice programs, the company increased safety and reduced property losses and loss of life in the operation of steam boilers. "Steam Boiler," as the company is familiarly known, was a pioneer in this constructive approach of linking insurance coverage and rates with measured performance with respect to the risk. After occupying their Art Moderne home office for 50 years, Steam Boiler in 1982-1983 built and moved into a larger new building of distinguished contemporary design around the corner and one block east on the northern side of State Street.

C Travelers Office Building
59 Prospect Street
a/k/a 26 Grove Street

Photograph 21

The 11-story, yellow brick building at 59 Prospect Street, built in 1921 by the Travelers, is a companion piece to the east section of the base of the Travelers Tower. Its principal cornice is placed one story below the roof line to be at the same level as the cornice of the base of the tower. Roughly rectangular in shape, the building has an open light well in the center of the south elevation above the third floor. Its west elevation abuts the east elevation of 740 Main Street. The architect was Donn Barber.

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C Travelers Tower
1 Tower Square

Photographs
21-23, 28, 29

The building known as the Travelers Tower is a rectangular granite structure running in the east-west direction from Main Street to Prospect Street, set back by the depth of Tower Square from the street known as Atheneum Square North. The 34-story tower itself rises 527 feet above the ground off center to the east, about two-thirds of the way from Main Street to Prospect Street, flanked by 8-story sections of unequal size to east and west. The building was completed in stages from 1906 to 1919.

The section fronting on Main Street was built first, of stone in the Renaissance Revival style. Its rusticated 2-story base has a central pedimented entry flanked on each side by three round-arched openings. The bases of the piers dividing the arches are carved in a unique design that resembles stalactites. Above a second-story cornice and balustrade, four smooth pilasters rise in an upward thrust for five floors, terminating in segmental arches. Windows are recessed between them. The flanking wall sections, at the corners of the building, continue the rustication of the first two floors and serve to frame the central five bays. Windows at the top floor are tripartite, under a heavy, projecting, bracketed cornice.

On the south elevation the heavy cornice is interrupted for the section of the building that rises to become the tower. The south elevation of the tower consists of three pairs of windows flanked by a single window and another pair. This configuration continues from the base through the 16th floor. The 17th and 18th floors have a 2-story arcade of round arches under a heavy cornice. Then, the east-west width of the structure diminishes with the beginning of the taper of the tower, although the north-south depth remains constant, established at two bays of paired windows. The 24th and 25th floors have an Ionic colonnade supporting another cornice on which there is a square superstructure. In each face of this superstructure there is a round arch springing from free-standing columns, and there is a free-standing column at each corner. Above, a truncated pyramid with raised diamond pattern on its sloping surfaces supports a small domed lantern and metal finial.

The Main Street entrance opens to a reception hall and marble stairway that leads up to a large room now used as a museum. The museum is a 2-story space. It has paired and single free-standing columns on high bases with egg-and-dart moldings as capitals. The elaborate coffered ceiling has a skylight and there is a similar window on the east wall. Placed in the middle of the north wall is a marble statue of the seated

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figure of James G. Batterson, the founder of the Travelers, sculpted in 1919 by Albin Polasek. Batterson was also engaged in the stone business. His firm, the New England Granite Co., supplied the stone for the tower from its granite quarry in Westerly, Rhode Island.

An historic event in Hartford's 17th-century history is memorialized by a granite plaque mounted at street level at the south end of the Main Street elevation of the building. According to the account recited by the plaque, the General Court of Connecticut was meeting in a tavern on this site in 1687 when Sir Edmund Andros on behalf of King James II of England demanded the return of the Royal Charter given by Charles II to the Connecticut Colony in 1662 granting a large measure of self government. In the course of the stormy debate that ensued, according to the account, the lights suddenly went out and the charter was spirited away to be stored temporarily in a hollow oak on what is now Charter Oak Avenue. (The oak is the Connecticut State tree.) Two years later, upon the accession of William and Mary, government under the charter resumed.

Architect for the Travelers Tower was Donn Barber of New York. For the first building, fronting on Main Street, Edward T. Hapgood of Hartford was associated with Barber. Hapgood was also associated with Barber in the design of the Connecticut State Library and Supreme Court Building.

At the time it was built, the Travelers Tower was the tallest building in New England. For almost three-quarters of a century it was the tallest building in Hartford. Built of fine materials to the design of a leading architect of the day, the tower's Neo-Classical height is visible from afar when traveling by highway or by air. It is a widely recognized symbol of Historic Downtown Hartford.

In 1963 the Travelers demolished the Second Empire Charter Oak Life Insurance Co. building that stood between the tower and Atheneum Square North. The site was made into a stone terrace, introducing significant new open space in the district. In the center of the terrace there is a domed, glass and concrete gazebo that is connected by a glass-enclosed passageway to a new opening in the south elevation of the tower. This entrance is now the main entrance of the building. Architects for the 1963 work were Voorhees Walker Smith Smith & Haines of New York with Sasaki Walker & Associates of San Francisco.

Stephen F. Voorhees (1879-1965), whose firm was responsible for 9-17 Central Row and 740 Main Street as well as Tower Square, practiced architecture for 63 years. He served in the Spanish-American War and drew plans for army hospitals during World War I. A graduate of Princeton, he designed buildings for Harvard, M.I.T. and Princeton, and was supervising architect for Princeton during the years 1930-1949. He was chief

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architect for the New York World's Fair in 1939 and served as president of the American Institute of Architects. Numbered among the firm's many prominent commissions are the Prudential Insurance Co. headquarters in Newark and Bell Telephone Labs building in Murray Hill, New Jersey.

Significance

Criteria C, Architecture and A, History

Criterion C - Architecture

Main Street Historic District #2 constitutes a group of well-designed office and commercial buildings, most of them high rise, in the heart of Historic Downtown Hartford. The New York architects responsible for most of the structures were skilled in the design of early skyscrapers in the Neo-Classical Revival style. The Central Row streetscape is an especially felicitous blending of 19th- and 20th-century styles and materials.

Donn Barber, the New York architect who left his mark not only in the district but also elsewhere in Hartford, contributed the design for the most important building in the district, the Travelers Tower. His skill is apparent both in the individual sections of the overall building and in the unity of the completed structure which has the integrity of a single building planned all at one time. By abandoning his initial scheme for twin towers, he arrived at the great, single, 527-foot tower that was unique in the Hartford skyline for three-quarters of a century.

The New York firms headed by Stephen Voorhees and Benjamin Wistar Morris contributed designs for buildings in the district that complemented Barber's work, added to the urban density and maintained the architectural character of the square block. The buildings work together not only as efficient offices for the Travelers and other occupants but also architecturally as a cohesive grouping reflecting the similar training and design values of the principal architects.

The special problem of how to make the northern edge of this complex, Central Row, sensitive to the presence of the 18th-century Bulfinch Old Statehouse has been handled with skill. An observer has made a perceptive summation of the interrelationships on Central Row, saying, "The group of four buildings on Central Row is an example of how existing buildings on a street can help to determine the design of new buildings. The cornice of

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the earliest building, (the Putnam Building), established the height of the base of the (Hartford-) Connecticut Trust Building, which in turn inspired the remodeling of the ground floor of its Italianate neighbor. The massing and the setbacks of the upper floors of the (Hartford-) Connecticut Trust Building influenced the design of the later Travelers Building, whose brownstone base influenced the design of the adjoining building. The quality of the individual buildings and of the street as a whole is enhanced by the close interrelationships of the designs."¹ Central Row provides a successful transition from the oldest building in Historic Downtown Hartford, the Old Statehouse, to the urban density of the district as a whole and to the great height of the Travelers Tower.

Criterion C - Insurance History

Hartford is known throughout the world as the Insurance City because of the growth in the city of a number of large insurance companies during the 19th and 20th centuries. Most of these firms started out in downtown Hartford in or near Main Street Historic District #2. The Travelers Insurance Co. remains at this location and dominates the district.

The practice of banding together to share maritime risks began informally along Hartford's riverfront in the late 18th century, as it did in other cities engaged in trade by sea. Fire was another risk addressed early in the history of the insurance industry; in Hartford Jeremiah Wadsworth, whose home adjoined the district on the south, formed a fire insurance company in 1794. Of the large Hartford insurance companies still in business, the oldest is Hartford Fire, founded in 1810. Its office once was on State Street, on the other side of the Old Statehouse from the district. Aetna Insurance opened its doors in 1819, and once occupied a building on the Main Street site of the Travelers Tower. Aetna Life followed in 1835, its headquarters at the turn of the century being a building on the site of Tower Square that later was occupied by the now defunct Charter Oak Life Insurance Co. Connecticut Mutual, organized in 1846, built their home office in 1870 across Main Street from the Old Statehouse on the present site of the Hartford National Bank building. Phoenix Mutual, which dates from 1851, is now headquartered in an elliptical glass building just north-east of the district. Hartford Steam Boiler (1866) long had its home office in the district, and is now located nearby. The approximately 40 insurance companies now with home offices in the Hartford area have assets of about \$50 billion.²

As the insurance industry developed and the companies grew, many of the home offices moved away from their early locations in or near the district. The Travelers Insurance Co. elected to remain and develop in the district and now owns most of the properties that constitute the district. The Travelers was founded by James G. Batterson, the aggressive proprietor of a local stone

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yard and monument works who also imported marble. In the course of his European travels on business he became exposed to the practice of selling trip insurance. He brought the idea back to Hartford and started the Travelers Insurance Co. as an enterprise additional to his principal business. Today the Travelers writes insurance and engages in financial activities of wide scope, with many thousands of employees. The Travelers is the major factor in the district and a major force in the city.

1. Anne Krofoot Kuckroo, Hartford Architecture, Volume One: Downtown, Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1978, p. 114.

2. This account of insurance history in Hartford is taken from Marion Hepburn Grant, In and About Hartford, Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1978, pp. 27-33.

Geographical Data

Acreage: Approximately 9
Quadrangle: Hartford North 1:24000
UTM References: A 18/693540/4626160
 B 18/693410/4626060
 C 18/693480/4626080
 D 18/693460/4625960
 E 18/693340/4625980
 F 18/593380/3626180

Verbal Boundary Description: The district's boundary is shown by the dotted line on the map drawn at scale of 1" = 100'.

GOLD ST.

MAIN STREET

STREET

PEARL ST.

ATHENEUM SQUARE NORTH

ONE TOWER SQUARE

NC 740

760

760

PROSPECT

STREET

AMERICAN ROW

CENTRAL ROW

THOMAS HOOKER SQUARE

OLD STATE HOUSE

STREET

STATE

MARKET S

ELKS

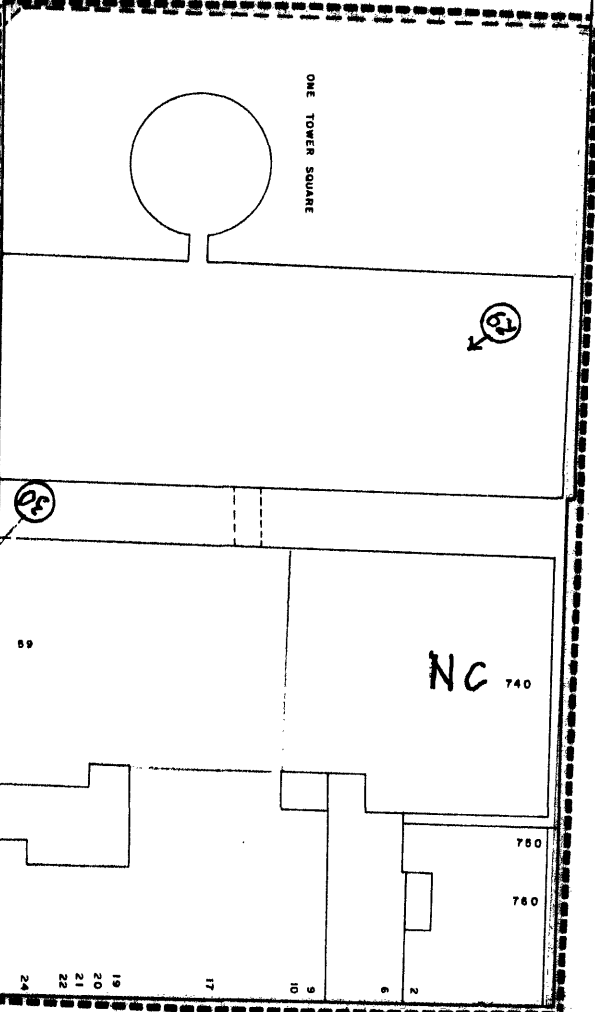
HARTFORD CLUB

Historic Downtown Hartford
Multiple Resource Area

Main Street Historic District #2

Scale: 1" = 110'

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GROVE STREET

MARKET S

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