

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

For HCRS use only

received

DEC 22 1981

date entered

JAN 21 1982

1. Name

historic Fairfield County Courthouse

and/or common Court of Common Pleas

2. Location

street & number 172 Golden Hill Street _____ not for publication

city, town Bridgeport _____ vicinity of _____ congressional district 4th

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Bureau of Public Works, State of Connecticut

street & number Room 473, State Office Building

city, town Hartford _____ vicinity of _____ state Connecticut

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bridgeport Town Clerk, City Hall, Room 124

street & number 25 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport _____ state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1981 _____ federal state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission

city, town Hartford _____ state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Fairfield County Courthouse, built in 1888 in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, is an isolated structure which faces south on Golden Hill Street in downtown Bridgeport. Its location on the eastern slope of a hill overlooking the central business district renders the building highly conspicuous. To the west of the Courthouse, higher in elevation, is the Neo-classical Bridgeport City Hall. In form, the Courthouse is roughly square in plan with a deep indentation in the rear. It is approximately 160 feet on each side. The main section of the building is rectangular with a hipped roof. Two wings extending to the rear of this have, respectively, a hipped roof and a gable roof. On either side of the main block, flat-roofed wings with a central gable-roofed projection form the side elevations. The facade is unified by the hipped roof above it, and through the symmetrical placement of the central tower and turrets. Construction is of brick in a stretcher bond. Rock-faced granite ashlar is utilized for the basement and first floor of the facade and those portions of the side elevations readily visible from the road. The brick facade is relieved by brownstone courses and ornamental terracotta tiles. (Photograph 1).

The facade of the Courthouse, which faces Golden Hill Street, is divided into two sections by a round central tower. At one end of each of these sections is a turret with a crenellated parapet. The easternmost turret has an attached wing which continues the embattled parapet around the side. Each of the sections of the facade is divided by round arches into three distinct bays. The section to the left of the central tower has paired windows on the first floor corresponding to each of the arches. These windows are set within a brownstone quoin surround. Lintels and sills of rock-faced brownstone are united by horizontal courses of the same material, contrasting distinctly with the rock-faced granite of the first floor level. The second floor sills are formed by a similar rock-faced brownstone course. Windows are again paired and set within a slightly recessed opening which extends to the third floor arches. The lintels of the second floor windows and the sills of the third floor windows are united by smooth-faced horizontal brownstone belt courses. Spandrels between the two floors are decorated with terracotta tiles. Above the paired third floor windows are semicircular transoms of square glass panes. Above these are molded brownstone arches terminating in corbel stops. Spandrels and the area between the arches and cornice are filled with square terracotta tile creating a diapered pattern. (Photograph 1).

The section to the right of the central tower, and including the tower, is the original section of the building, built in 1888. The major distinction between the two sections is that the center arch in this section is larger in size. This reflects the main entry to the building, directly below on the first floor. The entry consists of a large arched opening flanked on either side by smaller arches. Massive granite columns with common capitals support the arches. The capitals feature a highly stylized acanthus leaf decoration. The center arch is approached by granite stairs, the other arches being closed off by a wrought iron railing. Inside this arcade is a porch with a round-arched

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entranceway now constructed of aluminium and glass, which have replaced the original panelled doors and woodwork. (Photograph 2). The second and third floors are treated in the same manner as the rest of the facade. The central arch, being larger, encompasses three windows on the second floor, and two wider windows on the third, with a tripartite division of the transom. All windows throughout the building have replacement 1-over-1 double-hung sash similar to the original.

The central tower, included in the original construction, is six floors in height with a conical roof. The decoration of the tower is similar to that of the rest of the facade, with use of ornamental tile spandrels between windows, and brownstone belt courses to unite windows and sills. The conical roof has gables on four sides with circular openings for clock faces, although only those clocks to the east and west survive. The polygonal turrets at either end of the facade are of four stories each, and again parallel the decoration of the facade. On each turret, a molded brownstone course supports a corbel table and cornice above which is an embattled parapet. On the east side, a projecting wing continues the decorative scheme of the facade and embattled parapet. (Photograph 3). The upper brickwork of the building was repointed recently with mortar which does not match the color of the original.

The east elevation of the Courthouse presents a flat-roofed wing with a central gable-roofed projection. The basement level, which is above ground due to the lower level of this portion of the lot, is faced with rock-faced granite. Above this are three full stories. In contrast to the facade, no belt courses connect the lintels and sills of the windows. Terracotta decorative tiles occupy the spandrels between second and third floor windows and between the third floor windows. A blind arch in the tympanum has terracotta tile infill, and a brownstone molding with corbel stops. Above this are a pair of windows with decorative brickwork and terracotta in the peak. A smooth, rounded brownstone finial crowns the gable. (Photograph 4).

The rear of the building, the north elevation, features two wings which project from the rear of the main building. The wing to the east houses office space, and is characterized by a hipped roof with a massive center chimney. Long, rectangular window openings are used. Flanking, flat-roofed extensions are located on either side. The second wing, to the west, contains courtroom space, and is separated from the first by a narrow alley. Large, round-arched windows with semicircular transoms offer contrast to the other wing. The gable roof has a rounded finial similar to those on the east and west elevations. A circular window in the gable end has been filled in with brick. (Photograph 5).

The west elevation is very similar to the east elevation. The main differentiation between the two is the absence of terracotta ornamentation, and the lower height of the elevation due to the higher level of the lot, this side facing the upwards slope. The length of this section has also been shortened proportionally. As in the east elevation, a projecting gable is the dominant feature of this side. The same characteristic rounded finial is also present. (Photograph 6)

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The interior of the Fairfield County Courthouse is entered through the main entry to the right of the central tower. A short entry hall has a coffered ceiling with terracotta tile relieving the brick walls. A short flight of steps leads to a second set of doors, also of aluminium and glass, which were originally wooden panelled doors. The internal arrangement of the first floor has been completely altered- only the flooring of inlaid tesserae and cast iron supporting columns remain. The most significant remaining interior feature is a large, three-story staircase of cast iron which leads to the upper floors. This is in an excellent state of preservation, with slate treads and an elaborate railing of cast and wrought iron, of exceptional design. (Photographs 7 and 8). Light was introduced by a skylight no longer extant, although the coffered ceiling within which it was placed is still present.

The second, or mezzanine, floor has also been rearranged radically. The library room, which has survived fairly intact in plan, has been altered through lowering the ceiling. This has truncated both cast iron columns and bookcases. Only a few of the original panelled doors have been retained. All lighting fixtures have been replaced, along with the original furnishings. Only on the third floor has any significant portion of the original room layout survived intact. Here the original courtrooms, constructed in 1888, remain, as well as two additional courtrooms added in 1900. Although the courtroom furnishings have been removed, wainscoting, railings, and panelled doors survive. Sufficient material is present to effectively represent the appearance of the rooms as designed. (Photographs 9 and 10).

The extensive rehabilitation of the Fairfield County Courthouse, under the direction of Fletcher-Thompson, Inc., from 1976 to the present date, 1980, has had markedly little effect upon the external appearance of the building. Major interior details, the central cast-iron staircase and the third floor courtrooms, have also been preserved intact.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1888; 1900

Builder/Architect Warren R. Briggs

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) (Criterion C)

The Fairfield County Courthouse, designed by Warren R. Briggs, is an excellent example of the Richardsonian Romanesque style of architecture. Briggs, a native of Boston, had received training in both Europe and with several architectural firms in Boston. The influence of Richardson's style is marked in the Fairfield County Courthouse. The monumental character of the Courthouse, the use of belt courses, round-arched window openings and entrances, and of a variety materials are all characteristic of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Briggs has skillfully used these elements to create an architectural composition of beauty and harmony. (Criterion A). The Fairfield County Courthouse also represents a major governmental function of the state of Connecticut. Entrusted with judicial functions, the counties in Connecticut were self-sufficient units during the colonial period and early 19th-century. By 1855, the State of Connecticut had assumed control of the judicial system, ending the relatively autonomous county court system. The Fairfield County Courthouse was constructed for the use of the state court system with local participation.

Warren R. Briggs, the architect of the Fairfield County Courthouse, was a native of Boston who had received training in the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. After additional architectural training with several Boston firms, including Peabody & Stearns, Briggs began his architectural practice in Bridgeport. As many young architects of his generation, Briggs was greatly influenced by the work of Henry Hobson Richardson. The design of the Fairfield County Courthouse shows this influence clearly. The monumental nature of the Courthouse building, together with the use of a variety of material in its construction, granite, brick, brownstone, terracotta, is characteristic of the Richardsonian Romanesque style. Brownstone belt courses which unify the lintels and sills are another typical feature of the style., serving also to define the various levels of the building. The large round arches beneath which the windows are organized, and the entrance arcade are also to be found in Richardsonian Romanesque buildings. A large, central tower was yet another feature of the style. It was associated with many courthouses of the period, the most notable of which was Richardson's Allegheny County Courthouse of 1884.

The major divisions of the building also reflect the interior arrangements. The facade, divided into two sections by the central tower, has two courtrooms on the third floor which face this side. The large round-arched windows provide light to the courtrooms and galleries. In the rear, the two wings correspond to office space and another courtroom respectively. Again, round-arched windows light the courtroom space. That the exterior was designed to reflect the interior arrangement is made clear by Briggs' statement to the building committee in 1886:

9. Major Bibliographical References

"The Court House," Bridgeport Daily Standard, July 30, 1886.
 Faeth, Henry J. The Connecticut County. Storrs, Ct.: Institute of Public Service, 1949.
 Hubbard, Leverett, M. Register and Manual of the State of Connecticut. Hartford: The Case, Lockwood, and Brainard Co., 1888.

10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 2
 Quadrangle name Bridgeport Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A	1 1 8	6 5 1	7 1 2 0	4 5	6 1 0 1	7 1 0	B						
	Zone	Easting		Northing				Zone	Easting		Northing		
C							D						
E							F						
G							H						

Verbal boundary description and justification

A complete boundary description may be obtained by reference to Tax Map Section 9, Map 4, Block 908, Lot 9 in the Office of the Tax Assessor, City Hall, 25 Lyon Terrace, Bridgeport, Ct.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title D.S.Plummer, National Register Nominations Consultant
 organization Connecticut Historical Commission date 9/8/80
 street & number 59 South Prospect Street telephone 566-3005
 city or town Hartford state Connecticut

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

D.S. Plummer

title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date December 7, 1981

For HCRS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	Entered in the National Register date <u>1/21/82</u>
<i>Debra Byrne</i> Keeper of the National Register	
Attest:	date
Chief of Registration	

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The exterior of the structure is intended to express as far as it is possible to do so, the internal character of the building. Sound construction, simplicity of line and detail, with a proper massing of the several portions of the building, have been relied on rather than elaborate and costly detail or picturesqueness introduced at the cost of the internal arrangements. Strength, durability and practicability, combined with harmony of line and detail are the features expressed in this design. 1.

Ornamentation is subordinated to the form of the building, a concept promoted by Richardson himself. As in the Seaside Institute, completed a year earlier, Briggs simplifies his ornamentation. The extremely stylized acanthus leaves of the capitals supporting the entrance arcade is an example. Foliate forms are reduced to the simplest terms. The Fairfield County Courthouse succeeds in fulfilling the aims of the architect, and stands as a building of considerable architectural merit.

The Fairfield County Courthouse is also an important governmental structure. Fairfield County was one of the four original counties created by the General Assembly of the Colony of Connecticut in 1666. By 1785, the number of counties had been expanded to eight. The functions of counties were to hold courts, maintain a jail, and to raise taxes to cover necessary expenditures. During the colonial period and the early 19th-century, county government was autonomous from that of the state. The status of the county court system was gradually eroded by the establishment of state controlled courts which began to handle many of the cases formerly handled by the County Courts. In 1855, the County Courts were abolished by the state legislature, and their judicial functions transferred to the state courts, which continued to use the counties as judicial districts. The county was reduced to the status of a service unit, providing court space. Financial support shifted to the state legislature. County officials continued to hold office, although reduced to dependence on the state. In 1960, the last vestiges of the county system were abolished as redundant. The counties remain only as geographical designations.

Fairfield County, the third most populous county in 1880, needed new courthouse facilities by the 1880s due to a rapidly expanding population and a consequent increase in court cases. Bridgeport, the largest city in Fairfield County, was the site of the earlier courthouse and the logical choice for the new facility. The city also lobbied persistently and eagerly for the new facility. State legislators from the various towns in Fairfield County were responsible for the decision-making and funding of the new courthouse. A committee of local citizens, including the famous showman, P.T. Barnum, was appointed, and Warren R. Briggs, an architect practising locally, selected. The new courthouse included cells in the ground floor, offices, courtrooms, a library, jury rooms, and judge's chambers, thus housing the complete judicial function. The success of the building is confirmed by the fact that it continues to function as a courthouse.

Footnotes

1. "The Court House," Bridgeport Daily Standard, July 30, 1886.