

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number \_\_\_\_\_ Page \_\_\_\_\_

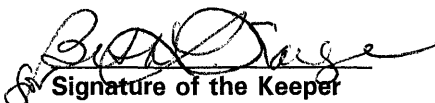
## SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD

NRIS Reference Number: 00000833 Date Listed: 8/11/00

<u>Hartford Electric Light Company</u>		
<u>Maple Avenue Sub-Station</u>	<u>Hartford</u>	<u>CT</u>
Property Name	County	State

N/A  
Multiple Name

This property is listed in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

  
Signature of the Keeper

8/11/00  
Date of Action

=====

**Amended Items in Nomination:**

**8. Criteria**

Criterion A is not justified and has been deleted.

This information was confirmed with John Herzan, National Register Coordinator, CTSHPPO, by telephone.

**DISTRIBUTION:**

- National Register property file
- Nominating Authority (without attachment)

8/22

**Hartford Electric Light Company Maple Avenue Sub-Station**

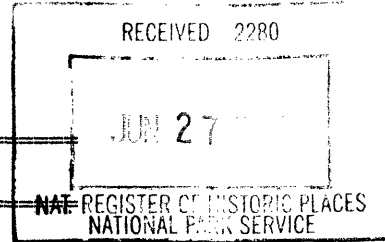
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**1. Name of Property**

historic name Hartford Electric Light Company Maple Avenue Sub-Station

other names/site number NA

**2. Location**

street & number 686 Maple Avenue not for publication NA  
 city or town Hartford vicinity South Hartford  
 state Connecticut code CT county Hartford code 003 zip code 06114

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, 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 FR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_\_\_ nationally \_\_\_ statewide X locally. ( \_\_\_ See continuation sheet for additional comments)

*John W. Shannahan* 06/21/00  
 Signature of certifying official Date  
 John W. Shannahan, Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

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

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

**Hartford Electric Light Company Maple Avenue Sub-Station**

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**4. 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):

*for Beth D'Avanzo*  
Signature of Keeper

*8/11/00*

Date of Action

**5. Classification**

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

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

Category of Property (Check only one box)

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

Number of Resources within Property

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>    </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register   NA  

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

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**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: INDUSTRY Sub: power plant

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: VACANT Sub: \_\_\_\_\_

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

20th-Century Revival (Classical Revival)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

roof tar and gravel

walls BRICK

other \_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**

The Hartford Electric Light Company (HELCO) Maple Avenue Sub-Station in Hartford, Connecticut, is a one-story buff brick building designed in the Neo-Classical Revival style by the city's architectural firm of Whiton & McMahon. (Photograph 5) A polygon approximately 40' x 60' in size, the building has an oblique front elevation (Figure 2) which parallels the direction of Maple Avenue, running diagonally through the street grid. (See map, Figure 1.)

Maple Avenue is one of the main traffic arteries extending from downtown through South Hartford, a section of the city that was largely developed at the turn of the 20th century as a street car suburb. The broad avenues are mixed commercial and residential, becoming more commercial with time, while the narrower cross streets are residential. Pursuant to this pattern, neighbors of the HELCO building are a restaurant and a food shop. (Photographs 1, 2)

The foundation of the sub-station is concrete, poured as *faux* gray granite with black flecks. Walls above are buff brick laid up in common bond. (Photograph 3) The five bays of the front elevation are divided by bold brick pilasters which stand on concrete molded bases and have papyrus-leaf capitals. (Photograph 9) The copper double door in the southernmost bay features a window in each leaf with classical-cross glazing, under an iron-and-glass marquise that retains the gold leaf number 8 from its original 686 street number. (Photograph 6) Each of the other four bays is filled with steel sash glazed with frosted wire glass in an asymmetric 3-over-3 pattern. The short three-pane upper sash pivot as awnings. (Photographs 5, 16) The pilasters support an entablature consisting of a concrete bed molding, brick frieze, brick dentil course, and concrete cornice, the whole surmounted by a stepped parapet with curvilinear top. The parapet carries incised lettering in a concrete panel which reads "H.E. LT. CO. / MAPLE AVE. SUB-STATION." (Photograph 4)

The south side elevation returns the features of the facade in nine bays (Photograph 7), including, near the rear, the door without the marquise (Photographs 10, 17). The parapet is plain. The roof behind the parapet is pitched down to front and back from a low central peak. Architectural details of capitals, frieze, and moldings from the front elevation are fully repeated along the south side elevation. (Photographs 8, 9) North side and rear elevations are plain. (Photographs 2, 10)

Interior space, now empty, is divided into bays by three partial floor-to-ceiling brick partitions. (Figure 2) Floor and ceiling are concrete. The front area is not divided. (Photograph 11) Brickwork is nicely detailed with corbeling at the top of a partition. (Photographs 12, 13) Some partitions continue to be lined by low brick space dividers which formerly housed electrical equipment. (Photograph 14) Steel I-beam structural members are visible in the ceiling. (Photograph 15)

The function of the HELCO Maple Avenue Sub-Station was to act as a "feeder," that is, to receive electricity in high voltage (11,000 volts) from a generating station and feed it in low voltage (5 volts) to transformers scattered throughout South Hartford. To help perform this feeder task, the cubbyholes along the interior's demising partitions were filled with large circuit breakers with other switches on the walls above. The building also contained back-up batteries and a fire-suppression system. Today, electricity at 23,000 volts goes directly to the neighborhood transformers, rendering the "feeder" function of the sub-station obsolete.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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

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

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply)

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

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1926 -1950

Significant Date 1926

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) NA

Cultural Affiliation NA

Architect/Builder Whiton & McMahan

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**8. Significance****Summary**

The Hartford Electric Light Company (HELCO) Maple Avenue Sub-Station is a well-preserved Neo-Classical Revival building which played an important role in the growth of service provided by the area's major electrical utility to the South Side of the city. It is a good example of the workmanlike and thoroughly eclectic architectural practice carried on early in the 20th century by the partnership of Frank W. Whiton (1872-1966) and John J. McMahan (1875-1958).

**History**

Formation of the Hartford Electric Light Company in 1881<sup>1</sup> was spurred by the example set at the Willimantic Linen Company<sup>2</sup> in Windham, Connecticut, which illuminated its new mill completed in 1880 with arc lighting. Arc lighting is the technique of creating light when a current passes between two incandescent electrodes surrounded by gas. Arc lights were brought from Willimantic to illuminate the 1879 anniversary celebration at the Connecticut State Capitol of the Civil War battle at Antietam, Maryland.<sup>3</sup>

After being organized to exploit the new technology of electricity, Hartford Electric Light Company from the first pursued a program of growth. Power stations on rivers at the outlying locations of Rainbow<sup>4</sup> and Tariffville<sup>5</sup> were purchased in the 1890s. An aggressive and successful effort was made to convert industry to electric power, an early example being Billings & Spencer's drop forging plant. Development of the household domestic market soon followed, as cooking, refrigeration, and heating in the home changed over to electricity.

The post-World War I years were an era of growth and development for the Hartford Electric Light Company. The generating plant at Dutch Point in Hartford was followed by construction of the much larger South Meadows facility, which was brought on line to increase the supply of electricity needed for distribution through feeders such as the Maple Avenue Sub-Station. The company also increased its geographical presence by acquiring the Connecticut Power Company in March 1920 and by supplying power to others, such as the 5,000 kilowatts delivered by HELCO to Connecticut Light & Power Company (CL&P). (Figure 3) Power lines were extended and interchanges between the companies were created statewide and beyond, coordinated in 1925 by the Connecticut Valley Power Exchange.

Corporate consolidation followed. In 1957 HELCO merged with the Connecticut Power Company. The years 1965-1966 saw the affiliation of HELCO, serving 45 cities and towns, and CL&P, serving 119 Connecticut communities, with Western Massachusetts Electric Company to form Northeast Utilities, one of the 20 largest public utilities in the country. In 1967 the Holyoke [Massachusetts] Water Power Company joined the group. The first important action of Northeast Utilities was to construct the Millstone nuclear power plant at Waterford, Connecticut.

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<sup>1</sup>Not to be confused with the 1887 formation of the Hartford Light & Power Company, which was absorbed by the Hartford Electric Light Company in 1901.

<sup>2</sup>The president of Willimantic Linen Company was A.C. Dunham. At the time of the 1957 merger of HELCO and the Connecticut Power Company, the president of the latter was A.C. Dunham's grandson, A. Dunham Barney.

<sup>3</sup>The occasion was Battle Flag Day, the day on which the display of Connecticut's Civil War battle flags was inaugurated in the Capitol, where the collection continues to the present time.

<sup>4</sup>Near Windsor.

<sup>5</sup>Near Simsbury.

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The 1920 *Sanborn Atlas* of South Hartford shows the vacant parcel at 686 Maple Avenue flanked by vacant parcels and then buildings, as at present. Across the street, the west side of Maple Avenue from Kenneth Street to Mountford Street is vacant, while on Kenneth Street the north side is built up with frame houses and the south side is subdivided but the parcels are vacant. These conditions reflected the new construction in the neighborhood that was under way. The Hartford Electric Light Company bought the parcel at 686 Maple Avenue in May 1925, for \$750, in timely recognition of the area's burgeoning growth. Development that was encouraged earlier in the century by new trolley lines continued in the prosperous twenties, and beyond. The Maple Avenue Sub-Station provided electric power essential to the neighborhood's continuing growth.

**Architecture**

The HELCO Maple Avenue Sub-Station is significant architecturally because it is a well-preserved example of the early-20th-century's Neo-Classical Revival style executed in an industrial building. The character-defining features of the front and south side elevations are typical of the carefully detailed eclectic work of the Hartford architectural firm of Whiton & McMahon.

While the size and shape of the building are unremarkable, the range of pilasters along the front and side elevations immediately establishes a sense of classical design, as though they were arcades. The materials used, brick and concrete, the latter as *faux* granite, are economical but display fine workmanship in the moldings of the pilaster bases and leaf pattern of the pilaster capitals. The brick walls demonstrate fine craftsmanship by the way they are laid up using deep joints struck with a pleasing texture. (Photograph 8) The soldier courses which connect the bases and form the window sills and lintels are without classical precedent, but are appropriately scaled. The capitals are rationalized in that they are the leaf pattern only, without other details. By the same token, the entablature supported by the pilasters is incomplete, without architrave, consisting only of a frieze, while the cornice is reduced to the bare minimum of dentil course and crown molding. Nevertheless, the overall effect is classical, unified, and well-proportioned.

In contrast to the spirit of economy which apparently guided the choice of principal building materials, the two sets of double doors are paneled copper, an expensive metal. The classical crosses in the upper sections of the doors are further demonstration of the decision to treat the entrances with extra care. Two other building components, the marquee and the windows, are signs of the times. The marquee is quite elegant in shape and glazing, with the enrichment of gilt street number. The feature is found over the front doors of many contemporary apartment houses and other buildings, making the sub-station visually suitable to the residential neighborhood in which it was built. The industrial steel sash have the frosted wire-glass glazing and awning configuration popular for industrial buildings at the time.

The stepped parapet of the front elevation is also a design component seen frequently in contemporary apartment houses. A building type in Hartford at the time was the Neo-Classical Revival three- or four-story brick apartment house with front elevation faced in yellow brick. The buildings are known locally as "Yellow Bricks," successors to the even more popular ubiquitous Hartford "Perfect Six."<sup>6</sup> Many Yellow Bricks are entered under marquees and parapets similar to those of the sub-station.

The fact that the south side elevation of the sub-station is fully articulated but the north side elevation is not is unexplained. Conjecture suggests that the architects knew the adjoining south lot would continue vacant, but since it was under separate ownership the conjecture is scarcely satisfactory. As it worked out, the lots on both sides have remained vacant and no explanation for the difference in treatment of the two side elevations is known.

Frank Warren Whiton (1872-1966) was born in East Hartford, Connecticut. During the first two decades of his career, he worked for a series of well-known Hartford architects, including Melvin H. Hapgood, John J. Dwyer, William C. Brocklesby,

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<sup>6</sup>The Perfect Six is a three-story brick late-Italianate-style building with two apartments on each floor, double bow front, and heavy overhanging bracketed sheet-metal cornice. There are multi-hundred examples in Hartford.



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Isaac A. Allen, Jr., and Albert W. Scoville. The next two decades were spent in partnership with McMahon, followed by five years in his own office, and 13 years with the city engineer. He then, at age 80, resumed individual listing as an architect in the city directory.

John J. McMahon (1875-1958) was born at the corner of Front and Talcott Streets in Hartford. In 1902 he joined the office of John J. Dwyer as a draftsman, being taken into the partnership of Dwyer & McMahon in 1906. Upon Dwyer's death in 1911, McMahon entered into partnership with Whiton, his fellow worker in the office. After that partnership was dissolved in 1932, McMahon resumed his own practice.<sup>7</sup>

The firm of Whiton & McMahon carried on an active practice that specialized in churches, schools, and public buildings. Their work included the following commissions:

Holy Trinity Church, Capitol Avenue, 1911  
 Y.M.C.A. Boys Building, Pearl Street, 1912  
 Pope Park Bath House, 1913  
 St. Peter's School, Main Street, 1913  
 Alfred E. Burr School, Wethersfield Avenue, 1914-20  
 Washington Street School addition, 1918  
 Wilson Street School addition, 1921  
 Clarence A. Barbour School, Tower Avenue, 1924  
 St. Augustine Rectory, Campfield Avenue, 1924  
 J. Kinsella School, Charter Oak Avenue, 1925  
 St. Justin's Church, Blue Hills Avenue, 1926-1933  
 St. Augustine School, Clifford Street, 1927  
 Dr. Joseph A. Naylor School, Franklin Avenue, 1927-29  
 Corning Building, Asylum Street, 1928-29  
 Cornelius A. Moylan School, Hillside Avenue, 1929  
 Canaan, St. Joseph's Church, ca. 1932  
 New Haven, St. Brendan's Church, 1920s

<sup>7</sup> McMahon's office (downstairs) and residence (upstairs) were at 187 Barker Street, just around the corner from the HELCO Sub-Station. After his death, McMahon's daughter continued to live upstairs, but did not disturb the first floor. McMahon's professional career, based upon his in-place office materials, became the subject of a term paper for a Trinity graduate student in 1994. See Bibliography.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

"Bringing You Electricity." Hartford: Hartford Electric Light Company public relations leaflet, 1970s.

Duffy, Joe. "Architect offered student a door to city's past," *The Hartford Courant*, March 1, 1995, B7:1.

Hellenga, Barbara. "John J. McMahon (1875-1958)," term paper for American Studies 811, Trinity College, 1994.

Kummer, Merle, ed. *Hartford Architecture, Volume Two: South Neighborhoods*. Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1980, p. 151.

Hartford Assessor's field card.

*The Hartford Electric Light Company, 1882-1929*. Hartford: Hartford Electric Light Company, 1929. Company publication with tip-in illustrations.

Hartford Land Records, volume 579, page 525-526, May 26, 1925. Estate of Chris Sonney to Hartford Electric Light Company.

*Historical Review - The Hartford Electric Light Company, 1881-1976*. 75th anniversary publication.

Ransom, David F. "Biographical Dictionary of Hartford Architects," *Connecticut Historical Society Bulletin* 54(1989)1-2: 73, 107, 159.

*Sanborn Atlas of Hartford and West Hartford, Connecticut*. New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1920, Plate 10.

Sirois, Wayne, 27-year maintenance worker at Hartford Electric Light Company (HELCO) Maple Avenue Sub-Station. Interview, February 1, 2000.

Weaver, Glenn. *The Hartford Electric Light Company*. Hartford: 1969.

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.

previously listed in the National Register

previously determined eligible by the National Register

designated a National Historic Landmark

recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repositories: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property 0.19**UTM References**

Zone Easting Northing

A 18 4623430 692700

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The boundary is shown on Metropolitan District Commission Map No. 63 (Figure 1), as described at Hartford Land Records, volume 579 page 525.

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary is the boundary of the parcel since it was purchased by Hartford Electric Light Company in 1925.

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title David F. Ransom, reviewed by John F.A. Herzan, National Register Coordinatororganization Architectural Historian date March 2000street & number 83 Avery Heights telephone 860 953-8626city or town Hartford state CT zip code 06106

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq). Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 0013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**List of Photographs**

Photographs were taken on February 1 and February 4, 2000, by David F. Ransom. Negatives are on file at the Connecticut Historical Commission. Photographs are keyed on Figure 2.

## Photograph 1

Streetscape  
View northeast

## Photograph 2

Streetscape  
View southeast

## Photograph 3

View southeast

## Photograph 4

Front parapet  
View east

## Photograph 5

View northeast

## Photograph 6

Front entrance  
View southeast

## Photograph 7

South elevation  
View northeast

## Photograph 8

Detail of Photograph 7

## Photograph 9

Detail of Photograph 8

## Photograph 10

Southeast corner  
View northwest

## Photograph 11

Front of building  
View southwest

## Photograph 12

South aisle  
View east, toward rear

## Photograph 13

Detail of Photograph 12

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Photograph 14

Switching locations

View northwest

Photograph 15

South aisle

View west, toward front

Photograph 16

Window in south wall,  
typical

View southwest

Photograph 17

Interior of rear door

View south

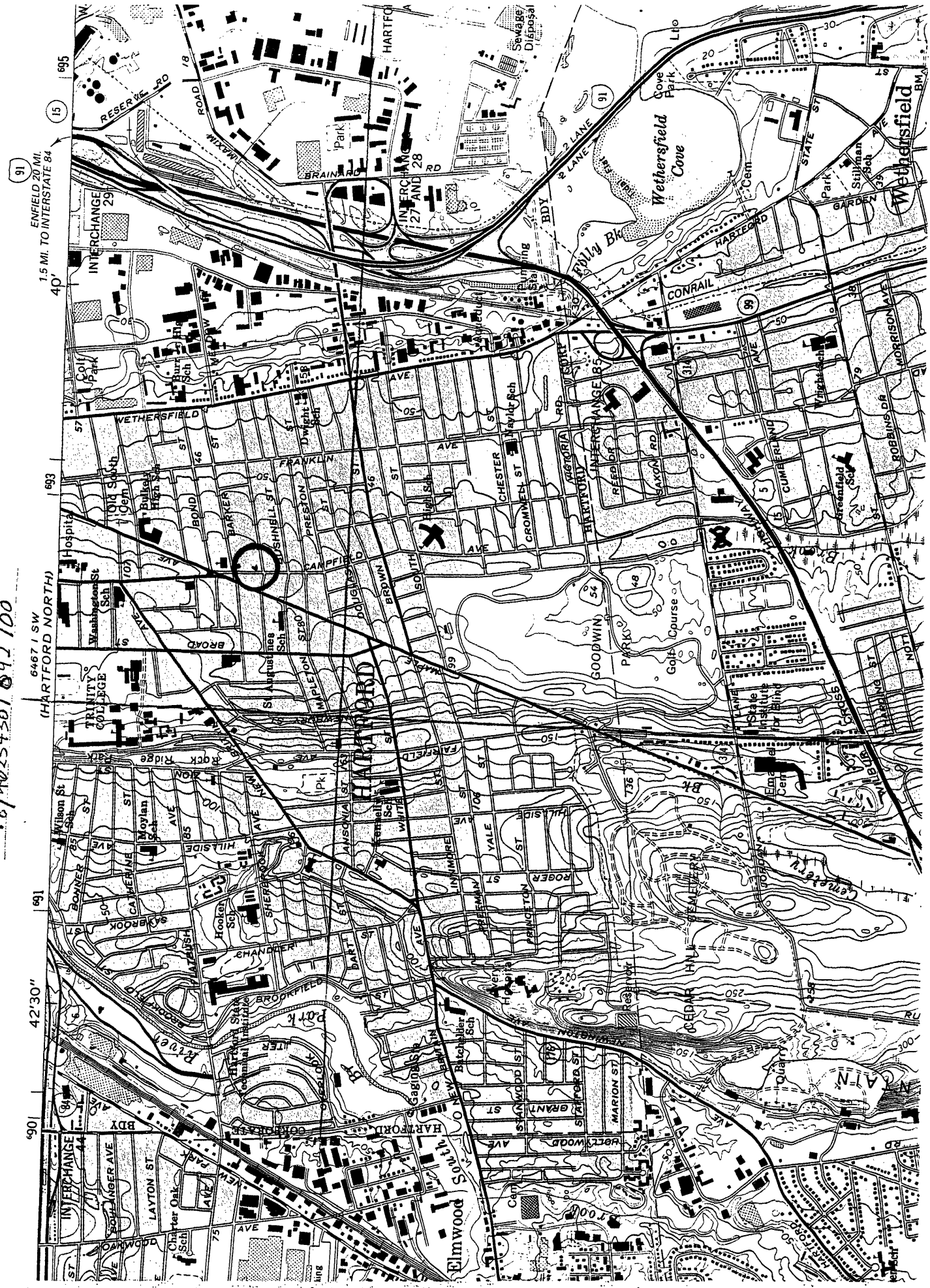
**List of Figures**

Figure 1. Hartford Map No. 63, Metropolitan District Commission, drawn at scale of 1" = 200'

Figure 2. Ground plan and photograph key

Figure 3. Map of areas served by the Hartford Electric Light Company.

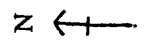
HELCO Sub-Station  
HARTFORD, CT  
UTM REF.  
18/4623430/092700





HELCO Maple Ave. Sub-Station  
Hartford, CT

Figure 1  
Neighborhood Map

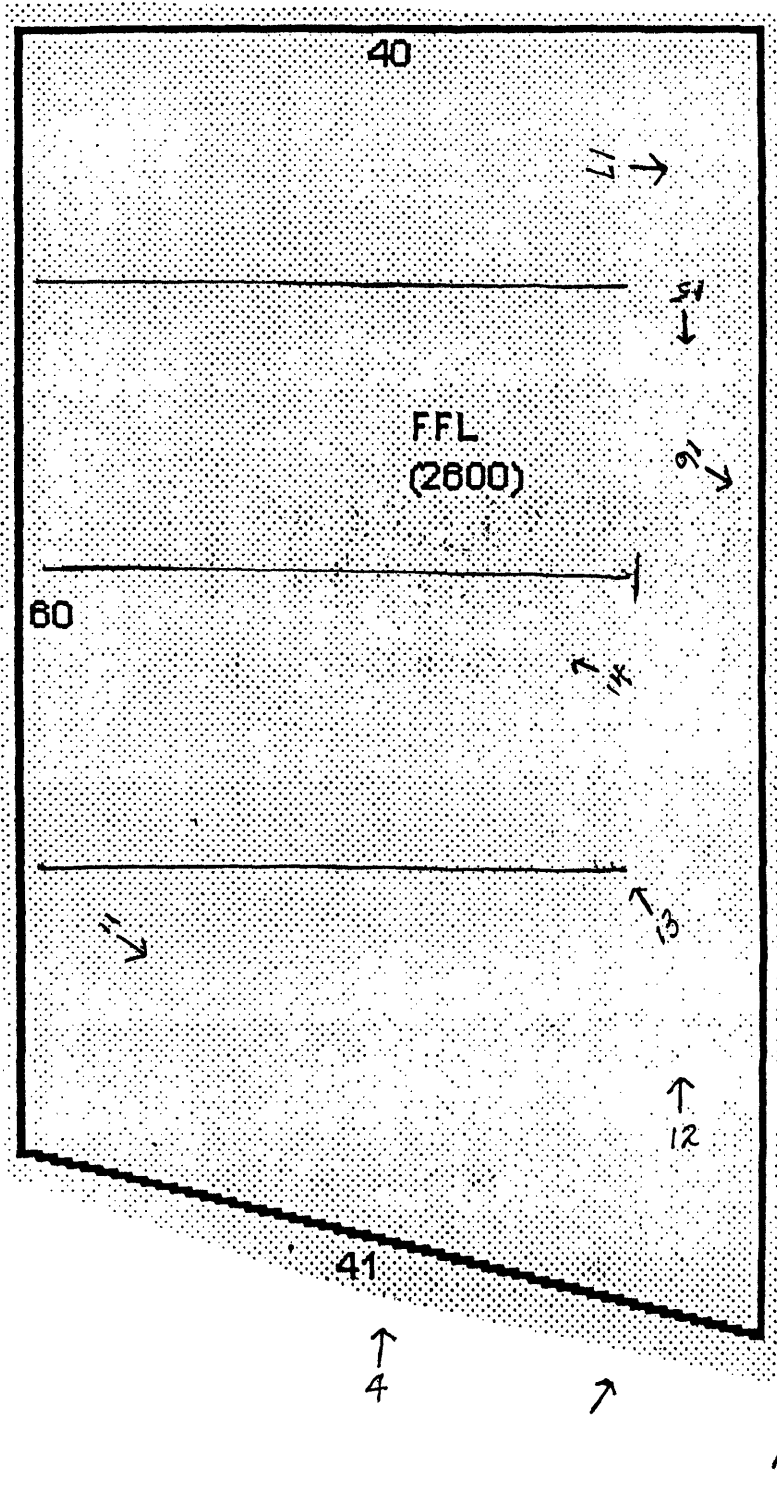


SCALE 1:2400  
(1 INCH = 200 FEET)



CONTOUR INTERVAL 2 FEET  
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT DATUM

1000-FOOT GRID BASED ON THE  
METROPOLITAN DISTRICT PLANE RECTANGULAR COORDINATE SYSTEM  
CONNECTICUT COORDINATE GRID SHOWN IN BROWN



HELCO Maple Ave. Sub-Station  
Hartford, CT

**Figure 2**

Ground Plan and Photo Key

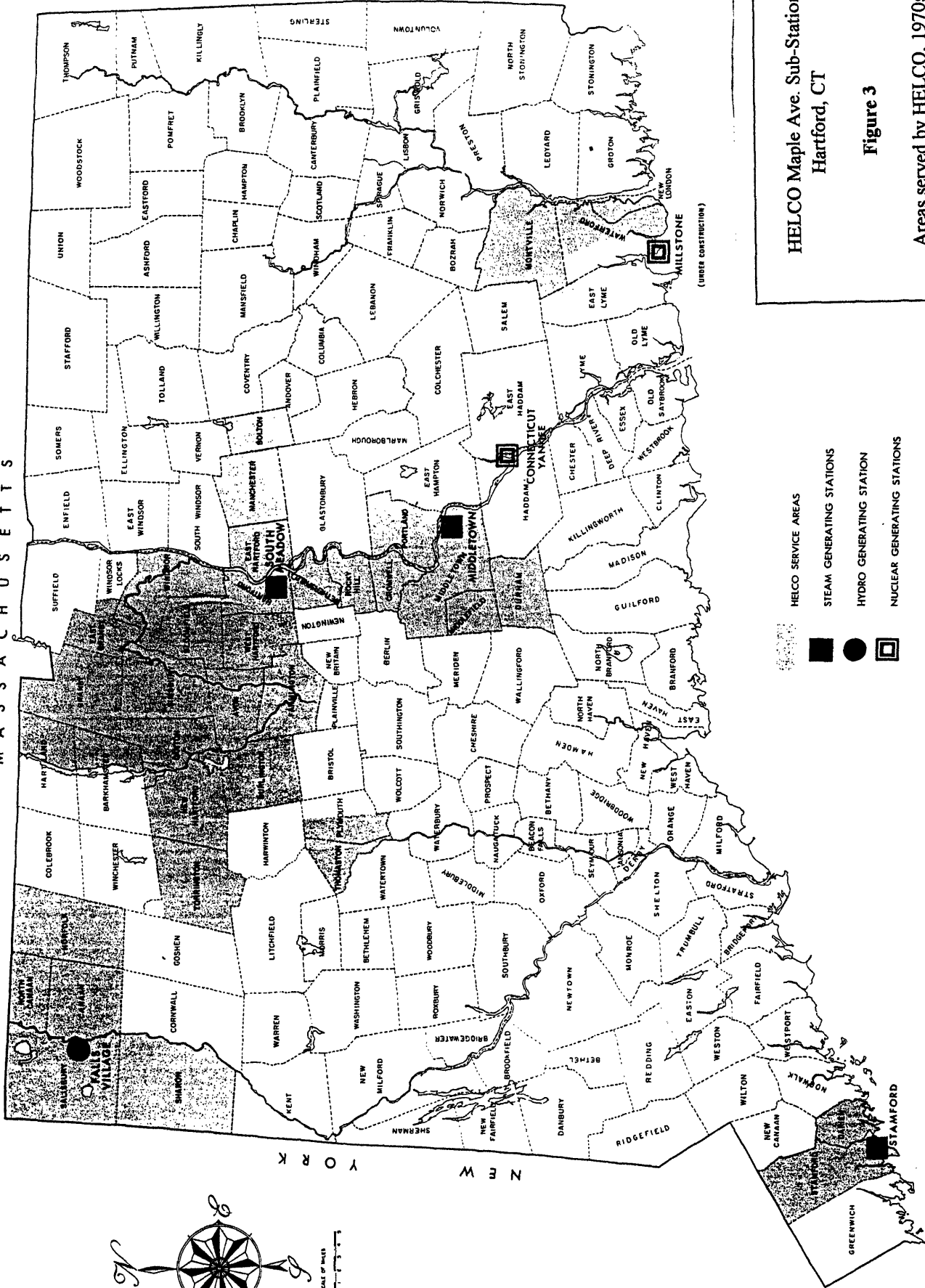
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MASSACHUSETTS



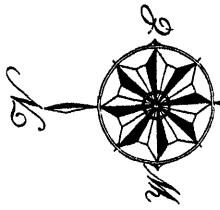
HELCO Maple Ave. Sub-Station  
Hartford, CT

Figure 3

Areas served by HELCO, 1970s

Source: "Bringing You Electricity"

- HELCO SERVICE AREAS
- STEAM GENERATING STATIONS
- HYDRO GENERATING STATION
- NUCLEAR GENERATING STATIONS



SCALE OF MILES