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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form

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NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Firehouses of Hartford, Connecticut

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Fire Service in Hartford, Connecticut, 1789-1939

C. Geographical Data

The incorporated boundaries of Hartford, Connecticut

☐ See continuation sheet

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

Signature of certifying official — January 10, 1989 (Date)

Director, Connecticut Historical Commission
State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

for Signature of the Keeper of the National Register — 3-2-89 (Date)

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

The multiple property group - firehouses in Hartford, Connecticut - is organized with reference to a local historic context, Fire Service in Hartford, 1789-1939.

Hartford, the state capitol, is the second largest city in Connecticut, with a population of 136,392 (1980 census). It lies in the northcentral portion of the state along the west bank of the Connecticut River. Hartford was settled in 1636 by Thomas Hooker and his followers from Newtown, Massachusetts, and was incorporated in 1784. By 1850, the railroad replaced the river as the major means of transporting goods, and the population grew westward. Industrialization brought an influx of immigrants to the city to work in its many factories, including Colt Firearms and Pratt & Whitney Machine Tool Company. By 1870, the city had grown to over 37,000 inhabitants, ten times larger than that of any surrounding town. Apartments and commercial buildings sprang up in profusion. In the early 20th century, trolley lines were extended to outlying areas of the city, and neighborhoods of tree-lined single-family homes developed. The second half of the 20th century has seen a decline in Hartford's manufacturing industries, although its service industries, most notably insurance, have prospered. The city is now experiencing an unprecedented building boom in its downtown area.

Hartford has very few buildings surviving from the 18th and early 19th centuries, but retains a wealth of residential structures from the second half of the 19th century, its period of greatest building activity. A great many of these are 2 and 3-family houses and apartment buildings standing on small city lots. Along the edges of the central city are neighborhoods of early 20th-century single-family homes. The downtown is a mix of modern skyscrapers and late 19th and early 20th-century commercial buildings, with the Old State House (1796) as its central focus.

FIRE SERVICE IN HARTFORD, 1789-1939

One of the first acts of the founders of Hartford was to create the office of fire warden, charged with inspecting chimneys and making sure every house had a bucket and ladder for fighting fires. In 1789, with the town's population grown to over 5,000, the town ordered a tax of 300 pounds sterling "to buy engines and build cisterns," and appointed an engineer to direct citizen bucket brigades at fires.(1) The same year, the state legislature granted 30 men exemption from military service to act as Hartford firefighters, and the city's volunteer fire department was launched.

The city purchased its first fire engine in 1815. Engines at the time were hand-drawn, and operated by 15-20 firemen who rocked long pump handles, sending a continuous stream of water surging from a long nozzle. The engines suctioned water from cisterns, brick-lined wells located at street corners throughout the city and filled with water by bucket brigades. Six more engines were purchased before 1834, and companies of "regulars," volunteers exempted from military duty, were formed to operate each engine. The city's first hook and ladder company organized in 1812, and a sack and bucket company and a hose company formed soon after.

The city offered a premium of $5 to the first engine company on the scene at a fire, and local fire insurance companies soon followed suit. The premiums added fuel to an intense spirit of competition between the engine companies, which operated much like private fraternities or social clubs. The members of the companies had no exact definition of duties and some companies had more men than others. In response to

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these circumstances, the city reorganized the fire department in 1840, assigning 40-65 regulars and 10 volunteers to each of the seven engine companies, depending on the size of their engines, and a fixed number of regulars to the sack and bucket, ladder, and hose companies. The premium system was dropped, and the regulars were paid $5 per year.

The 1860s brought a series of changes to the city's fire service. One of these was the way in which fires were fought. In the 1840s, water for fighting fires was still obtained from a number of cisterns built throughout the city and, by that time, fed by wells or wooden conduits leading down from distant springs. By 1855, a reservoir near the corner of Asylum and Garden Street had been built, fed by a pumping station on the Connecticut River. Creation of the city's present water system was begun in 1865, with a series of water mains running from six reservoirs 8-10 miles from the city. Fire hose could then be connected directly to hydrants, providing water pressure comparable to that produced by the hand-pumped engines.

The city bought its first steam fire engine in 1861, and by 1865 all hand-pumped engines were gone. The steam engines, together with a disastrous fire at the Colt Armory in 1864, led the city to establish a full-time, partially paid fire department. The new steam engines required fewer men to operate, so three full-time men and two "bunkers," who stayed at the firehouse from 11:00pm to morning, were assigned to each station, supplemented by firefighters on call, or "callmen."

As the city's buildings grew taller, longer ladders, up to 75' in length, were required and were carried on long trucks. The weight of these ladder trucks, as well as that of the steam engines and hose carts, required that they be hitched to horses. The city acquired its first self-propelled steam engine in 1876, followed by two others, one of which, called "Jumbo," was the largest steam pumper in the country at the time.

The department constructed fire stations for its seven fire companies during the 1860s and 70s to house the steam engines, ladders, hoses, and horses, and provide sleeping quarters for the men. Once electricity was installed in the stations, the department boasted that it could automatically open the station doors and harness the horses at the sound of the alarm. Brass sliding poles were introduced in three firehouses in 1883, and eventually became a standard feature in all of the stations.

An additional change in the 1860s was the installation of a fire alarm system in 1868. Hartford was the first city in New England to adopt the Gamewell fire alarm system, which relied on a network of "fire boxes" at locations throughout the city, each with a number corresponding to its section of the city. When the hook inside the box was pulled, the number was transmitted to the central alarm room at Fire Headquarters and announced on a tape and bells. The fire box system is still in use, but now is supplemented by telephone and radio communications.

By 1882, all the hose companies had disbanded since the hoses could be carried on the engines. Conversely, seven new engine companies were organized between 1895 and 1909 to serve Hartford's growing population.

The fire department began to convert to a fully paid force in 1907. Motorization of the department's apparatus began the same year, and the first pumper with an internal combustion engine was purchased in 1914. Within ten years all the horses were gone. Motorized hook and ladder trucks were purchased between 1911 and 1924. Additional ladder companies were created at that time, and the ladder companies moved in with the engine companies.

At least six new fire houses were built between 1919 and 1939, some on the same sites as their predecessors. No new firehouses were constructed in the city between 1940 and 1961.

End Notes

(1) Historical and Illustrated Memento of the Fire Department of Hartford, Connecticut, 1898 (Hartford: Hartford Fire Department, 1898), p. 35.

F. Associated Property Types

I. Name of Property Type Firehouse

II. Description

The design of Hartford's firehouses is a reflection both of the architectural styles and tastes of the periods in which they were built and of the changes in the organization and technology of the city's fire service. For purposes of comparison, Hartford's fire stations can be placed into one of four general periods of construction. The first period extends from the beginning of the volunteer fire service in 1789 to the establishment of the paid force in 1864. During the second period, from 1864 to 1895, new firehouses were constructed to house both the firemen and the horses required to pull the firefighting apparatus. The third period, 1895-1915, was a period of expansion in the fire department, and ladder companies joined engine companies in the same firehouses. In the final period, 1915-1939, the design of firehouses changed to accomodate motorized apparatus, and the reach of the

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III. Significance

The significance of Hartford's firehouses derives from their association with the evolution and growth of its fire service. The firehouses are the most visible reminders of the nature and location of the fire service over its history.

Changes in the technology and organization of the fire department influenced the design, both interior and exterior, of new firehouses and modifications to existing firehouses. For example, firehouses built after the establishment of the paid fire department were 2-3 story structures with dormitories and lounges for the firemen. When horses pulled the apparatus, the firehouses included stalls and hay lofts. When long lengths of hose were used to fight fires, the firehouses featured tall hose-drying towers.

The design of the firehouses also reflects the priorities of the fire service at the time of their construction. Firehouses of the late 19th century were a source of

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IV. Registration Requirements

National Register-eligible firehouses in Hartford should possess integrity of workmanship, materials, location, and character, as well as associative significance by virtue of their role in the history of Hartford's fire service.

For associative signficance, the firehouse being evaluated should have been built as a building specifically designed to shelter firefighting equipment and, if built after 1864, to house the firemen on duty. Other ancillary resources on the same parcel as the firehouse and used by the fire department for storage or repair of equipment or training of firefighters may have associative significance as well.

A firehouse need not still be used as such in order to have associative and architectural significance. However, at a minimum it should retain those features which characterize it as a firehouse: large front entrance bays, which provided access to the interior by firefighting apparatus; an apparatus room, a large room used for housing the firefighting equipment and machinery; a hose drying tower or drying racks; sleeping quarters for the firefighters (in firehouses constructed after 1864); sliding poles and chutes (when original), which provided rapid access from the second floor to the first floor apparatus room; a "watchroom" (when original), which served as the office and alarm center of the firehouse; and original massing,

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[ ] See continuation sheet for additional property types

department extended to the new streetcar suburbs of the city.

Fire department records do not reveal the nature or location of Hartford's fire stations during the early years of the department. In most cities, firehouses prior to the 1850s were utilitarian structures designed to shelter the fire engines, and little else. By the 1850s, cities began to build more substantial stations, often with meeting rooms upstairs as gathering areas for the volunteer companies. (1) Hartford's Hayden Hook and Ladder Truck House, which stood at 275 Pearl Street on the site of the present Fire Headquarters, was a firehouse of this first period. The small two-story brick firehouse (circa 1855) was designed in a transitional Greek Revival/Italianate style, with a full gable pediment over a wide frieze and double windows.(2)

Firehouses of the second period, 1864-1895, were more elaborate in decoration, yet shared similar characteristics. In general, these houses were 2 to 3-story square Italianate-style buildings constructed of red brick with prominent bracketed cornices and bracketed hose-drying towers resembling cupolas. The firehouses of the "new" fire department were designed to stand out from their neighbors, and in general effect looked similar to grand Italianate mansions of the period. Large arched entrance bays and windows were common, as well as corner pilasters and cornices between the first and second floors. Typical of the period was the Charter Oak Steam Fire Engine House, Number 1 (circa 1865), which stood on the site of the present firehouse at 197 Main Street. The station featured two sets of double arched windows within two larger arches, a wide overhanging bracketed cornice, and two large arched entrance bays.

A large amount of the interior space of these firehouses was devoted to the care and feeding of the horses, which commonly were kept in stalls at the rear of the first-floor apparatus room, where the engines were housed, and next to a harness room. Feed bins and a hay loft were housed above them at the rear of the second floor in a room with loading doors and a feed chute. The rest of the second floor commonly was devoted to the dormitory, locker room, bathroom, and a lounge for the firemen. The interiors of the firehouses of the period were generally much simpler than the exteriors, with narrow wainscot paneling over the walls and ceilings, and wooden floors.

While firehouses of the second period shared similarities in design, those of the third period, 1895-1915, displayed a variety of forms and styles. The use of steel frame and, later, reinforced-concrete construction meant that exterior building materials could be applied to produce a variety of effects. The new houses also featured a "watchroom," the location of the alarm system and telegraph, which commonly had a separate door facing the street.

In 1895, two new firehouses were built for Engine Company 7 and the new Company 8,

and were considered by the department to be "models of their kind." Both designed in the Colonial Revival Style, the large 2-story brick houses featured Palladian windows, modillioned cornices, and tall, prominent hose towers which rivaled the steeples of nearby churches in height and elaboration. By the turn of the century, the design of the new stations was more subdued, and with shorter lengths of hose in use, the hose towers became shorter and plainer and were moved to the rear of the station. Typical of the period is the station for Engine Company 14 (1905) at 35 Blue Hills Avenue, a massive 2-story building with a high hipped roof, decorative brick quoins, and splayed lintels.

Firehouses built for the fire department's new full-time professional force between 1908 and 1915 had a decidely commercial appearance, many with flat or low hipped roofs and with decorative embellishments limited to the facade. An example is the station for Engine Company 15 (1909), designed in the Colonial Revival style and which featured a modillioned cornice (since removed) and stone stringcourses that extended across the facade. The station for Engine Company 2 (1910), built as a replacement for an Italianate firehouse of the second period, was designed with an elaborate Italian Renaissance facade on an otherwise simple red brick building. The facade features beige bricks in a basketweave pattern above arched windows set in concrete panels, and originally supported a projecting bracketed cornice with a clay tile pent roof. This firehouse still retains its horse stall doors and the hay loft on the second floor.

The introduction of motorized apparatus during the forth period, 1915-1939, brought a marked change to many of Hartford's firehouses. With the horses gone, fewer men were needed, and companies were reduced in size. Gone were the horse stalls, tack rooms, and hay lofts, and firehouses designed for horses were either replaced or had their back rooms converted to kitchens and lounges. New firehouses showed a preference for lighter interior colors, glazed brick or tile for the walls, and skylights providing additional light.

The station of Ladder Company 1 at 275 Pearl Street, which was also the fire department headquarters, was the first to be built for motorized apparatus. Like its predecessors, it had the appearance of a commercial building, with a stone Renaissance Revival facade on a structure of brick and reinforced concrete. Within eight years the building was remodeled, in a new style, and expanded, as engine and ladder companies consolidated in the same building.

Two new stations built in the streetcar suburbs in the 1920s were designed to blend with the neighborhood, and looked much like large Tudor Revival style homes. The stations for Engine Company 9, 655 New Britain Avenue, and Company 16, 636 Blue Hills Avenue, both the work of the Hartford architectural firm Ebbetts and Frid, are different in design while sharing a number of stylistic features, including multi-colored brick facades with half-timbering and slate roofs that sweep over one-story watchrooms.

The same year Ebbets and Frid designed a new, smaller firehouse for Company 1 downtown at 197 Main Street, but chose a Collegiate Gothic style less residential in appearance. The interiors of all three houses were relatively simple, with white tile lining the walls of the apparatus rooms.

Firehouses built in the 1930s were designed by the city's architectural department, the Hartford Architecture Bureau, and are characterized by a very limited use of ornamentation on the exterior and virtually none on the interior. The stations for Engine Companies 5 and 6, located at 129 Sigourney Street and 34 Huyshope Street, respectively, are two-story brick structures with brownstone trim, incised with Art Deco designs, and metal casement windows, often grouped in twos and threes. The interiors are plain, with glazed cement block lining the walls of the apparatus room. Overall, these Modernistic-style buildings illustrate concerns for cost and functionalism that were to determine firehouse design in Hartford over the next forty years.

End Notes

(1) Rebecca Zurier, The American Firehouse (New York: Abbeville Press, 1982), p. 32, 57.

(2) A late 19th-century photograph of the Hayden Hook and Ladder Truck House, as well as photographs of other 19th-century Hartford firehouses, are housed in the Horace B. Clark Photographic Collection at the Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford.

pride for local fire companies, and were designed to be noticed. Conversely, those built after World War II were designed to blend in with the neighborhood or to serve a merely functional purpose, with the architectural form secondary to concerns for efficiency and cost.

Four of Hartford's pre-1940 firehouses are still served by engine and ladder companies that date back to the establishment of the paid department in 1864.

Hartford's firehouses are also notable as good examples of a variety of architectural styles and of the application of these styles to the design of a unique building type, the firehouse. The most prevalent styles extant are the Colonial Revival, Renaissance Revival, Collegiate Gothic, Tudor Revival, and Modernistic. Those of the Tudor Revival style, the stations of Engine Companies 9 and 16, are especially fine examples of the application of a residential style to firehouse design, resulting in picturesque stations that blend effectively with their surroundings.

Several of the firehouses are fine examples of the work of noted local architects, including Ebbets and Frid (1927 - c. 1947), Smith and Bassette (1910-1940), Russell F. Barker (1873-1961), and Zunner and Sellew (c. 1908). Two are the work of the Hartford Architectural Bureau, a city department supervised by architect Frank W. Whiton which was active during the 1930s.

Two of Hartford's firehouses are listed on the National Register as contributing structures within historic districts. They are the station of Engine Company 3 at 275 Pearl Street, in the Ann Street Historic District, and Company 5 at 129 Sigourney Street, in the Asylum Hill Multiple Resource Area.

fenestration, and exterior decorative elements as designed or as modified while the building was used as a firehouse prior to 1940.

Changes in firehouse entrance bays made to accomodate larger equipment have been a common practice in Hartford. Firehouses with such altered entrance bays may still be architecturally significant if the upper stories of the building are of good design and relatively intact and if the building overall is a good example of its style or type of construction. Similarly, changes to interior features are common to adapt a firehouse to new technologies or equipment. These interior changes may not affect the firehouse's significance as long as the building's exterior remains relatively intact.

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

The multiple property listing for firehouses in Hartford was based on a field survey of all extant firehouses in the city, the historic resources survey conducted by the Hartford Architecture Conservancy, discussions with Hartford Fire Department officials, and a thorough study of pertinent primary and secondary references. The National Register criteria were applied to each property, and a determination of eligibility made on the basis of those criteria and the relationship of the building(s) to the historic context.

Currently there are fourteen firehouses in Hartford, eight of which pre-date 1939. From fire department records and historic photos it is known that at least ten firehouses in the city have been demolished.

Because firehouses are designed and constructed to serve a narrowly defined purpose, each maintains a close association with historical patterns of development in local fire service. Therefore, a single historic context, Fire Service in Hartford, 1798-1939, was chosen to provide the best framework for evaluating the design, function, and setting of this property type at the local level.

[X] See continuation sheet

H. Major Bibliographical References

Broome, Theodore. Record of the Hartford fire department, fire alarms, and miscellaneous fires, 1789 to 1913. In manuscript collection, Connecticut Historical Society.

Burpee, Charles W. A Century in Hartford: History of the Hartford County Mutual Fire Insurance Company. Hartford: Case, Lockwood and Brainard Co., 1931.

Connecticut Historical Society. Horace B. Clark Photographic Collection, Hartford Fire Department Photographic Collection.

Grant, Ellsworth Strong and Marion Hepburn Grant. The City of Hartford, 1784-1984. Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1986.

Hartford Architecture Conservancy Survey. Hartford Architecture. Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1978. 3 Vols.

[X] See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional documentation:

- [X] State historic preservation office
- [ ] Other State agency
- [ ] Federal agency
- [X] Local government
- [ ] University
- [X] Other

Specify repository: Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford Public Library

I. Form Prepared By

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The standards of integrity for evaluating each firehouse were based on an analysis of the condition of existing firehouses, on the registration requirements as listed in Section F.IV, and on the National Register standards for assessing integrity. Information from historic photographs and other research literature was also used to assess the relative condition of each property and to determine the degree to which allowances should be made for alterations.

Ancillary resources related to fire service in Hartford were evaluated only to the extent that they supported, or were located on the same parcel with, an existing firehouse. Ancillary resources include fire alarm boxes, cisterns, and buildings designed for the repair and maintenance of firefighting equipment or for the training of firefighters. A complete survey of these ancillary resources, were one to be conducted, could reveal additional property types related to the historic context deserving of further study and nomination.

Hartford Fire Department. Historical records and photographic collection, Hartford Fire Department public information office.

Hartford Public Library. "Scrapbook." Microfilm collection of news clippings and memorabilia. Vol. VII, p. 160 (1936).

Historical and Illustrated Memento of the Fire Department of Hartford, Connecticut, 1898. Hartford: Hartford Fire Department, 1898.

Weaver, Glenn. Hartford. Woodland Hills, CA: Windsor Publications, Inc., 1982.

Zurier, Rebecca. The American Firehouse. New York: Abbeville Press, 1982.