

Hurlbutt Street School
Name of Property

Fairfield, CT
County and State

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
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
2	0	Total

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

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

EDUCATION/school

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/museum

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

no style

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation stone

walls weatherboard

roof wood shingle

other _____

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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The Hurlbutt Street School is located in the central eastern part of the Town of Wilton, less than a mile from the Weston border. Facing east and sited quite close to this rural road, it is a wood-frame gable-roofed structure (20' x 27") with a gabled facade (Photograph #s 1, 2). There is a full-width, shed-roofed addition across the west (rear) elevation that dates from 1938 (Photograph #s 3, 4). To the rear of the building is a two-hole privy, a contributing building associated with the school.

The schoolhouse has a wood-shingled roof and white clapboarded walls. Cornerboards and window and door trim are highlighted by a dark contrasting color. An open cupola with a bell is located near the front of the ridge. Its shouldered-arched openings are defined by narrow pilasters with capitals and a small hipped roof terminates in a plain finial. The sash of the two large nine-over-six windows on either side of the central front door, as well as the sash of two similar but smaller six-over-six windows on each of the side elevations, contain old glass and appear to be original. Window and door lintels have slightly projecting molded cornices. The door itself, which is also to period, has six recessed panels bordered by narrow projecting molding. The privy, sheathed with vertical boards, rests on a foundation of unmortared stacked brick.

Both the school and the privy were moved to this small site, which is only slightly larger than the building's footprint. It is bordered by low stone walls located about ten feet to the north and less than one foot on the south side. Originally located farther down the road to the south, the school was first moved in 1876-1877 to a new site immediately adjacent to its present location. Among the changes to the building at that time were the addition of the present cupola with bell and a full-width addition across the front for a vestibule and cloak room. The gabled roof of the vestibule had a slightly lower ridge than the original building. It is possible that the extant privy dates from this period as well. In a photograph of the site taken in 1925 that includes the schoolyard, there were two privies south of the school; the one with two doors appears to be this building. (It is probable that the other is no longer extant.) After the school closed as an educational facility in 1935, the land reverted to its private owners, necessitating a second move, this time just about ten feet to the north, where it was set on its present foundation and the now non-functional privy was placed on its temporary foundation. The front vestibule addition was removed, returning the school to its "original" appearance and a new addition was created at the rear of the building.¹ To access the addition, the windows in the rear wall of the school room were replaced by doors.

The interior of the classroom, which is now furnished with school furniture and accessories appropriate to the early twentieth century, has plastered walls and pine floors (Photograph #s 5, 6, 7). Originally the room was heated by a wood- or coal-stove, located in one of the rear corners. As part of the 1938 restoration and conversion to a community center, a pine mantelled fireplace was installed in the center of the rear wall. Its brick stack ran up the outside of the original rear wall inside the new addition. Following a chimney fire in 1984, the fireplace was bricked-in and another stove with a pipe flue installed. Except for the fire-damaged middle of the rear wall, the plaster work is original. Badly cracked, it was carefully repaired with fiberglass cloth in 1995. The only decorative feature is the picture molding that runs around the room just below the ceiling. A bronze chandelier that once hung from the center of the room is no longer extant but its location is still marked by a circular molding and hanging hook.

While it is believed that materials from the vestibule were re-used in the addition, at the present time this space, which contains a kitchen, gives no indication of that tradition and appears to be mostly new fabric. Although it has an older appearance, even the rear ell door was not the one originally used for the vestibule. In addition, the two rear six-over-six windows, which could have been the early ones from the rear wall, appear to be newer replacement sash and do not have old glass like the rest.

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.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or 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

1834 - 1935

Significant Dates

1834/1877

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

N/A

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 repository:

Wilton Historical Society

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Statement of Significance

A fine representative example of a nineteenth-century district schoolhouse and tangible expression of the longstanding commitment of the people of Wilton to education, the Hurlbutt Street School has served this neighborhood since 1834. After a century of service, the building, which is the only historic school in town preserved largely in its original state, became a community center and today is a living museum for the school children of Wilton. ²

Historical Background and Significance

Until the nineteenth century Wilton was part of Norwalk. Set off as a separate parish in 1726, the town was incorporated in 1802. The first parish meetinghouse was located near the present Norwalk border where many of the first 30 families had settled in the first decade of the eighteenth century. Within two generations, settlement had dispersed into the rest of the territory claimed by Norwalk and the institutional center of town evolved farther north in its present location near an existing gristmill on Comstock Brook. Situated just to the west of the old Norwalk-Danbury Road (State Route 7), the center, where a new church was erected in 1790 and a townhouse completed in 1832, is little more than a mile southwest of the Hurlbutt Street School.

Because education of the young was such an integral part of colonial society, schools were established soon after parish formation. The people of the Hurlbutt Street District, as it came to be known, were concerned about education from the very beginning. There was a school in this area as early as 1728, at that time one of five in the parish. For most of the century classes were held in area houses. In 1792 the Wilton Ecclesiastical Society set the bounds of the parish school districts. The Hurlbutt Street District, then known as Harrie's Ridge District, was number nine. It was about this time that the first building was constructed here specifically for educational purposes. When that school, which from all reports served as many as 90 children, was abandoned due to deterioration, land was deeded for a new school in 1833 at "Hurlbutt's Hole." The present schoolhouse was erected the following year. According to local sources, it was built in one day by local men at no cost to the town, the beginning of a tradition of self-sufficiency in the district that has continued throughout the building's history.

As many as 30 pupils in grades one through eight attended school here until the Wilton schools were consolidated and the school closed in 1935. Typically, most of the nineteenth-century teachers were young women who either already lived nearby or boarded in the neighborhood. But at least one young man, the Reverend John Davenport, who was a student here, taught for a time before he became a minister. Among the twentieth-century teachers was Angeline Post, who served the district from 1918 until the school closed. It was during her tenure that electricity was installed (1929) and an experimental teaching program was conducted, supervised by Columbia University's Teachers College (1928-1933).

A ladies' auxiliary was organized in 1929 to improve the quality of education at the Hurlbutt Street School. Members of the board included former pupils and area residents. Due to their efforts, it was the first school in town to feature playground equipment, weekly art classes, a dental clinic, and a hot lunch program. Local residents donated a radio (still in the building) in 1929, so the pupils could listen to President Herbert Hoover's inaugural address. Through this modern device, music lessons were provided by a popular radio program of the period, which was conducted by Walter J. Damrosch (1862-1950), a noted German-born American composer and musician.

The auxiliary reorganized in 1937 as the Hurlbutt Street Community House, Inc., a non-profit corporation founded to purchase the building from the Town of Wilton. Because it was no longer used for religious or educational purposes, the school had to be moved from

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its site, which had been donated by D. N. Van Hoosear in 1877. Land was deeded by Clinton Van Hoosear, a descendant, and the Cudlips, neighbors to the north. Plans were drawn up for the school's restoration as a community center on the new site by Evans and Moore, an architectural firm in Woodbridge, Connecticut. Labor was donated and some of the restoration funds were raised through food sales and community suppers.

In addition to maintaining the building, the organization carried on the school's long tradition as a community center that had begun in the nineteenth century. During that period, not only did people congregate here for "socials," the schoolhouse was used for a Sunday school and singing school. Prayer meeting and preaching serices were conducted by several local ministers. In more recent times, the school has been used by the Red Cross and Girl Scouts, and members provided aid disaster victims and local families. Together with the Wilton Garden Club, they created the Memorial Wildflower Garden behind the school. In 1970 the school and its site was designated as "Historic District No. 4" by the Wilton Historic District Commission. Although the name of the school organization was changed in 1974 to Hurlbutt Street School House, Inc., its members continue their service to the community by maintaining the building as a museum. Today Wilton's school children visit on a regular basis, some groups spending a whole day there to more fully appreciate the experience of education in a one-room schoolhouse.

End Notes:

1. According to reminiscences of Clinton Van Hoosear, published in the *Wilton Bulletin* in February 1938, the original 1834 building was much smaller and had a door in the southeast corner, which suggests that more substantial changes were made after the school was moved in 1877. Because of the moves some of the physical evidence that might support or deny his contention has been lost, so the "original appearance" question cannot be definitely resolved. However, the form of the building and the pitch of the roof, as well as the sash pattern and muntin profile of the present windows, are consistent with a 1834 building date. In addition, although it is possible that the facade fenestration simply was rearranged, the front windows match the rest and have the same wavy old glass lights. In the same article, Van Hoosear also stated that the building was lengthened by a third after the 1877 move. Since the windows on the side elevations are equally spaced from the ends, such an increase in length seems unlikely. He may be referring to the added vestibule, but that addition appears to be only five or six feet in depth in the 1925 photograph.

2. Although several other schoolhouses have survived, they have been remodeled for commercial or residential purposes.

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9. Major Bibliographic References

- Atlas of New York and Vicinity*, New York, 1867.
Hubbard, G. Evans. *Annals of Wilton*. Wilton, 1971.
Hurd, Hamilton D. *History of Fairfield County, Connecticut*. Philadelphia, 1881.
Map of Fairfield County, Connecticut, Philadelphia, 1858.
McMahon, Mary. "Cultural Resource Survey of Wilton, Connecticut." Wilton, 1989.
"Recollections of Schooldays at the Hurlbutt St. Schoolhouse." Transcribed tape recordings, 1977.
Russell, Carole. Interview, September 25, 1995.
Wilton Bulletin. February 15, 1938; April 7, 1976

10. Geographical Data

Verbal Boundary Description

The nominated property is described in the Land Records of the Town of Wilton in Volume 46, Page 518 and Volume 48, Page 31.

Boundary Justification

The nominated property described above includes all the surviving buildings historically associated with the Hurlbutt Street School during its period of significance and the present associated site.

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List of Photographs

Photographer: Cunningham Associates Ltd.

Date: 9/95

Negatives on file: Connecticut Historical Commission

1. Facade, facing W
2. Facade and north elevation, facing SW
3. North and rear elevations, facing SE
4. Rear addition and privy, facing SW
5. Rear elevation and privy, facing E
6. Interior, facing E
7. Interior, facing NW
8. Interior, facing SW