

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Russell, Samuel Wadsworth, House

Other Name/Site Number: Honors College, Wesleyan University

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 350 High Street

Not for publication: N/A

City/Town: Middletown

Vicinity: N/A

State: Connecticut

County: Middlesex

Code: 007

Zip Code: 06457

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property	Category of Property
Private: <u>X</u>	Building(s): <u>X</u>
Public-Local: <u>—</u>	District: <u>—</u>
Public-State: <u>—</u>	Site: <u>—</u>
Public-Federal: <u>—</u>	Structure: <u>—</u>
	Object: <u>—</u>

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>2</u>	<u>2</u> buildings
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u> sites
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u> structures
<u>—</u>	<u>—</u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>2</u> Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 2

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: N/A

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ 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 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

___ Entered in the National Register _____

___ Determined eligible for the National Register _____

___ Determined not eligible for the National Register _____

___ Removed from the National Register _____

___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 3**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC
Current: EDUCATION

Sub: Single dwelling/secondary structure
Sub: Educational facility

7. DESCRIPTION

ARCHITECTURAL CLASSIFICATION: MID-19TH CENTURY/Greek Revival

MATERIALS:

Foundation: Brownstone
Walls: Stucco
Roof: Metal (Lead coated copper)
Other:

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 4

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Samuel Wadsworth Russell House, a Greek Revival-style mansion, is located at the southeast corner of the intersection of High and Washington streets in a historic residential neighborhood now part of Wesleyan University. Built near the crest of a hill that rises from the Connecticut River to the east, the house faces west towards High Street. It consists of a tall, almost square gabled main block (48' x 46'), with a lower gabled wing (31' x 34') of the same style added at the northeast rear corner in about 1855. An associated, historically contemporary bathhouse, also in the Greek Revival style, is located to the northeast.

The sloping 2-acre site is landscaped with mature evergreens and deciduous trees that screen the buildings, including specimen cut-leaf beeches that frame the left elevation of the house. Although most of the planting beds have reverted to grass, some of the historic formal garden at the rear has been restored, including a long serpentine rose arbor bordered with English boxwood. A small summer house once stood at the east end of the arbor. Elms that once bordered the property on the north and west are gone, but the original simple perimeter wrought-iron fence there remains.

Square chamfered brownstone pillars, capped with carved acroteria, flank the wrought-iron gateway at the High Street entrance, which is articulated with Greek and Gothic motifs. Another set of identical pillars to the south frame a driveway entrance that leads to a small 1930s house and a Colonial Revival brick garage, built about 1920. Both of these buildings are considered non-contributing since they post-date the period of significance of the main house. Other historic changes to the original site include a c.1920 driveway from Washington Street to the rear of the house. A low, modern university building constructed about 1960 at the corner of Pearl and Washington streets is not included in the nominated property.

Both the main house and the wing have random ashlar brownstone foundations above grade, which are a full story at the rear, and stuccoed, load-bearing brick walls. On the main block, the stucco is scored to resemble coursed ashlar masonry. Six-over-six double-hung sash are found throughout the building. Four brick interior wall chimneys rise from the gable roof of the main block. A similar single stack is found in the Greek Revival-style wing, which has a matching reduced-scale entablature, a dentil course under the cornice, and a full pediment on the north side. The Greek Revival-style bathhouse, which rests on a brownstone rubble foundation, is sheathed with narrow horizontal flushboards and detailed with plain wall pilasters and matching end pediments. The original angled wing at its north end, which probably served as a woodhouse, is devoid of architectural detail.

The fully developed temple form of the house features a prostyle colonnaded façade porch of the Corinthian order, accessed by almost full-width brownstone steps. Two-story fluted wooden columns that support the shallow flushboarded façade pediment are capped with hand-carved capitals. The entablature of the pediment, which extends around the building and across the matching rear pediment, is fully elaborated with leaf-and-dart molding under the frieze and bead-and-reel astragal molding and a strong dentil course under the cornice. Bead-and-reel molding delineates the pediment tympanums. Anthemion screens cover the attic windows that pierce the main entablature on the side elevations and the pediment window at the rear.

The engaged corner posts that frame the five-bay façade beneath the porch have foliated capitals and egg-and-dart cornice moldings. Tall period sash are separated by recessed panels between floors. The trabeated Greek Revival doorway in the center bay has a high entablature with a projecting cornice and wide flanking pilasters. Its sidelights and divided transom, which have foliated frosted glass, are outlined by narrow projecting paneled bands, some of which contain an applied fret

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 5

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

molding. The door, which has ten recessed molded square panels, was originally double-leafed; it was recently converted to a single door for handicapped access. A wrought-iron and glass lantern is suspended under the center of the porch roof to just above the doorway.

Historic photographs and plans document the extent of the changes made to the main block. The original square posts of the rear colonnade, which rest on brick piers, now read as pilasters above the basement level, due to several remodelings. About 1855 the first-floor porch was enclosed for a dining room and pantries, leaving the space above on the second floor as an open solarium, with wrought-iron railings between the posts. (Railings of the same pattern are found at either end of the front portico.) Windows were added in the second and fourth bays and French doors with a five-light transom were installed in the center. The outside bays were fitted with bay windows at the first floor and double-hung sash at the second floor, with wrought-iron balconettes. Instead of the original center stairs, paired, curved metal stairs with delicate railings rise from grade to a small open porch and provide access to the first floor. The now internal rear doorway remains in the rear wall of the main block. It is similar to one on the façade, except that the sidelights and transom have a geometric glazing pattern and clear glass. The windows on either side are full height with nine panes in the lower sash. A small open porch at the southeast corner that was part of this remodeling was removed sometime after 1937, when Wesleyan University took possession. At that time the second-floor solarium was enclosed with tall casements with transoms between the posts.

With the exception of the enclosure of the rear porch as noted above, the interior plan of the main block is largely unchanged. On all three floors, rooms open off a wide center hall and were heated by fireplaces in the outer walls. On the first floor, two formal parlors, divided by closets, are found on the south side (see floor plan). The once matching spaces on the north side were combined into one room when the enclosed staircase and closet between them was removed sometime after 1937. The second-floor layout is similar, with offices occupying former bedrooms; all but the one in the northeast corner has a fireplace. The basement level was used for servants' quarters, with the kitchen for the house located in the northeast corner.

On the main floor, an internal Greek Revival doorway, which matches the one at the rear, divides the wide central hallway into a vestibule and stair. A double-run staircase rises along the south wall from an octagonal newel with pedestal; the balustrade has a molded railing and closely spaced balusters set directly on the treads. An applied quarter-fan decorates the end of each step.

Matching formal parlors are partially divided by closets, which contain square-paneled doors that slide and fold. Interior window shutters there and throughout the house display square molded panels and fold back against the jambs. Identical black marble fireplaces, which are centered in the outside wall of each parlor, have slim columns with Ionic capitals. The crystal parlor chandeliers, which are suspended from large foliated metal ceiling rosettes, are original, as are those in the single large north room, where similar but simpler marble fireplace surrounds are flanked by Doric columns.

All the public spaces are elaborated with original architectural detail and *trompe l'oeil en grisaille* decoration. Three types of moldings are found in the entablatures of the formal parlors. The painted frieze has bead-and-reel molding below and leaf-and-dart above, while the ceiling cornice is elaborated with egg-and-dart molding, as are the capitals of the wall pilasters. Foliated two-part, cast-metal or plaster paterae detail the corner blocks of the fluted door and window casings. Different corner blocks are used elsewhere; there is a grid design in the hall and a simpler foliated rosette in lower relief in the north room. In the latter space, there are heavy molded ceiling cornices but the entablature is omitted. A

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 6

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

carved four-part rose is used to decorate the architraves of the windows and doors in the upper hall.

Much of the wall painting was done in the late 1850s.¹ Mainly architectonic in nature, it creates the illusion of paneled walls, highlighted by anthemions and palmettes in the halls. A more elaborate composition with acanthus leaves and palmettes delineates the ceiling corners and the painted panels in the parlors, including those on the chimney breasts that frame portraits of Samuel Russell and his wife, Frances. The more delicate rinceaux of the parlor friezes and the fret design on the walls around the opening between these rooms may be earlier, possibly original, work.

Despite the Greek Revival exterior of the wing, rooms there are influenced by the Gothic style. Doors and window surrounds consist of a Tudor arch, resting on very attenuated half-column pilasters. Each half of the two-part window shutters has a single panel. The doors have recessed tombstone panels, a pattern repeated on the wainscot in the several rooms.

¹ It is likely that the painting is the work of William Borgelt (1835-1884), a German-born fresco painter who came to Middletown from New York at that time. The technique and paint scheme are similar to the stairhall painting in the 1828 Richard Alsop IV House, a nearby residence, which have been attributed to him.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 7**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: X Statewide: Locally: Applicable National
Register Criteria:A X B X C X D Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions):A B C D E F G

NHL Criteria:

1, 2, and 4

NHL Theme(s):

III. Expressing Cultural Values
 5. architecture, landscape architecture and urban design

V. Developing the American Economy
 6. Exchange and Trade

Areas of Significance:

ARCHITECTURE
 COMMERCE

Period(s) of Significance:

1812 - 1862

Significant Dates:

1828 - 1830, 1855

Significant Person(s):

Samuel Wadsworth Russell (1789 - 1862)

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

Ithiel Town (1784 – 1844)
 Alexander Jackson Davis (1803 – 1892)
 David Hoadley (Hoadley & Curtis, builders)

Historic Context:

XVI. Architecture
 D. Greek Revival

XII. Business
 D. Trade
 1. Export-Import

State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 8

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Significance Noted Above.**Statement of Significance**

Nationally significant for its direct association with the founder of Russell & Company, the legendary nineteenth-century leader in the American China trade, the exceptionally well-preserved Samuel Wadsworth Russell House is considered to be the premier domestic example of the Corinthian Greek Revival style in the Northeast. Conceived and executed during the early flowering of a classically derived national esthetic, Ithiel Town's design for this beautifully proportioned "urban villa" was widely disseminated, fostering the rise of the Greek Revival as the universal American style in the *antebellum* period. Additional significance is derived from a wealth of associated primary source material that provides insight into Town's career as one of the country's first professional architects, his role in the design and construction process, and the genesis of his partnership with Alexander J. Davis.

Historical Background and Significance

Samuel Wadsworth Russell (1789-1862) was a member of the first post-Revolutionary generation, a cohort who came of age with the new Republic. As Alexis de Tocqueville so acutely observed in *Democracy in America*, this generation was a new breed of modern men, who had to make their own way in the world. Generations of partible inheritance in Connecticut and other New England colonies, combined with extraordinary birthrates in the New World, had produced an acute land scarcity in the East, undermining a father's primary role to provide for his offspring and his cultural authority in the social order. Landless sons looked for new economic opportunities, migrated to the cities to participate in commerce and industry, or perpetuated their farming heritage on the Western frontier. A few entrepreneurial adventurers like Samuel Russell traveled much farther afield. One of the few Americans to establish an independent merchant house in Canton, China, Russell successfully challenged the British dominance of the international silk, tea, and opium trade and established what became the largest and most successful American firm involved in the China trade throughout the nineteenth century.² His Greek Revival mansion in Middletown stands as a testament to his financial success as a China trader. Upon his retirement from Russell & Company in 1836, Russell reinvested his enormous profits in industry, banking, and Western railroad stock. These investments allowed Russell to live in comfort for the rest of his life and leave a substantial inheritance for his widow and sole surviving son Samuel Wadsworth Russell, Jr., and also make large bequests to grandchildren and other relatives. Although much of Russell's fortune was devoted to various philanthropies during his lifetime, at the time of his death in 1862, the estate was valued at \$630,000.

Even though the family's impeccable colonial ancestry assured Russell a place in society, there was little else in his background to predict that this provincial youth would achieve such a measure of commercial success.

William Russell (1612-1664), the first of the family in the New World, was one of the adventurers associated with the founding of the Saybrook and New Haven colonies in the early 1600s, and the progenitor of a long line of Connecticut divines. The family had come to Middletown when the Reverend Noadiah Russell (1659-1713), William's son, was called to be the second pastor of the Congregational Church in 1698. One of the founders of Yale College and author of the Saybrook Platform (which reaffirmed Congregationalism as the established religion in Connecticut); Noadiah would be followed in his successful ministry in Middletown by his eldest son, the Reverend William Russell (b. 1690). The next generations produced several only moderately successful mariners, Samuel Wadsworth Russell's grandfather, Captain Samuel Russell (b. 1727),

² The details of the history of Russell & Company are largely drawn from Alain Munkittrick, "Samuel Wadsworth Russell (1789-1862): A Study in Ordered Investment," Honors Thesis, Wesleyan University, 1973, which was based on business records and correspondence in the Library of Congress (as well as published sources cited in the bibliography), but the interpretation and analysis of some specific events in Russell's business career is the author's.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 9**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

the first of that name, and his father, Captain John Russell (1765-1801), who died insolvent.

More distant relatives were quite prosperous; Russell's middle name came from his great uncle, Jeremiah Wadsworth of Hartford, one of the wealthiest men of the early national period. Wadsworth, who had married the Reverend William's daughter, Mehitable Russell, made his fortune during the Revolution as the Commissary General of the Continental Army and supplier of the French forces. Wadsworth, who died when Samuel was only 15, may have been an early role model, but there is no direct evidence that the nephew benefited from this distinguished connection.

The biographies of Russell and Wadsworth, two self-made men, were strikingly similar. Both were orphaned at an early age, Russell only 12 when his father died, and neither boy had any expectations of a substantial inheritance upon his majority. Deprived of the college education that had been the birthright of the Russell family for generations and customarily provided for his contemporaries (including his younger brother Edward A.), Russell began his career as an apprentice clerk in Middletown at Whittlesley & Alsop, merchants engaged in the maritime trade. Wadsworth had been apprenticed to his uncle, Matthew Talcott, who had a similar establishment in Middletown prior to the Revolution. Since Middletown was a major Connecticut River port, with the largest foreign tonnage of all the ports between New York and Boston, Russell's career choice may have seemed inevitable. However, in 1810, when Russell came of age and ended his apprenticeship, the city's status as a major trading center was beginning to decline. Coastal trade was on the wane and the West Indies trade had been severely curtailed by Britain's policy to restrict shipping between its colonies to British ships. Trade all but ceased during the War of 1812 as conflict erupted between the U.S. and Britain over America's position as a neutral carrier in international trade and Britain's practice of seizing neutral ships suspected of transporting goods for belligerent nations.³

There were several ways for impoverished young men to succeed in the maritime trade. Becoming a ship's captain by working up through the ranks could have its rewards, but the real fortunes were made in the merchant houses of Boston and New York where international trade consolidated after the war. Although marriage into a merchant family was a time-honored path to a partnership in an established house, Russell apparently hoped to succeed on his own merits. Leaving the care of his younger siblings in the hands of Samuel Wetmore, a relative on his mother's side appointed their guardian in 1810, Russell left for New York. There he joined the firm of Hull & Griswold, one of many merchant houses established there by Connecticut men specializing in the movement and exchange of assorted goods and commodities. Russell was selected to serve as supercargo on a company ship bound for Spain in 1812. As supercargo, he was responsible for the sale of the cargo of flour valued at \$25,000 and also the flour shipped on another company vessel bound for the same ports. Acting under a firm's instructions as well as his own assessment of the current market conditions, Russell would oversee the final disposition of these cargoes upon arrival at the destination ports. Since the War of 1812 with the British was imminent, this was a highly risky venture to entrust to an untried 23-year-old. Under more normal circumstances, the proceeds would establish bills of credit for future transactions, or be invested in European goods. But, with the expectation that war with England would disrupt foreign trade and create a shortage of hard currency at home, Russell was instructed to invest all the proceeds in Spanish silver dollars.

After a successful voyage, which ended in 1813, Russell made arrangements to buy and sell goods for Hull & Griswold on a commission basis. Acting as their commission merchant for the Middletown market, the first Russell & Company was founded in a building he had leased there before he sailed. In executing this contract, Russell established a business policy that he followed throughout his merchant career. Although with his proven business ability, Russell brought considerable human capital to the table, he never risked his own

³ Morris, James M. *Our Maritime Heritage: maritime developments and their impact on American life* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979), 61-77.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 10**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

money. His partners, in this case John Griswold and Samuel Wetmore, always supplied all the financing, even though profits (and losses) were shared equally. Since the partnership arrangement was not exclusive, Russell & Company was still free to do outside business with several other firms in Boston, Providence, and New York.

In New York to drum up business, which included an unsuccessful attempt to establish a connection with John Jacob Astor, Russell met his bride-to-be, Mary Cotton Osborn.⁴ Somewhat surprisingly, although Mary was a daughter from a respectable Hartford family and a descendant of Cotton Mather, she was an orphan with neither dowry nor connections with the merchant trade. After they married in New York in 1815, the Russells and his sister-in-law Frances Ann Osborn returned to Middletown and took up residence with his widowed mother in the old family house on High Street. Russell was the sole support of a large household, which may have included an unmarried sister and his younger brother Edward, and by 1816, a newborn son.

With his Middletown commission business showing little return--Connecticut River commerce had not yet recovered from the war--and his contract with Hull & Griswold coming to an end, Russell once again was forced to seek new opportunities. Wetmore, who had an interest in several Providence firms, Hoppins & Company and Edward Carrington & Company, recommended Russell for the position of supercargo on a ship bound for Savannah, which was owned by both firms. There, an assorted cargo, which included Chinese tea and dishware, was traded for rice, tobacco and cotton. Sending the ship on to Hamburg, Germany, where the goods would be sold, Russell returned home by boat and stage. How profitable the venture was for Russell is not known, but it led to the definitive moment in his career, a contract to carry out a commission business in Canton, China, on behalf of Edward Carrington and the Providence merchants.

Arriving in China in 1802, Edward Carrington's connection to the commercial community there was through Samuel Snow, also of Providence and one of the first prominent American commission merchants in Canton. When Snow returned to America, he turned over his business to Sullivan Dorr of Massachusetts and James Oliver of Philadelphia, both residents of Canton. Dorr then passed it on to Carrington who carried on a highly successful commission business before departing in 1811. His clientele included merchants from Providence as well as Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. Carrington was also one of the first American residents to establish a close relationship with a major Hong merchant.⁵

The Hong merchants, known collectively as the Cohong, were a loosely structured merchant guild authorized by the imperial government to oversee all aspects of China's foreign trade in Canton. In return for the right to conduct trade with the foreign ships entering Canton, the Hong merchant was responsible to the Chinese government for customs and was accountable for any violations of trade laws and regulations committed by the foreign merchants. As such, the Hong merchant would generally purchase much of the ship's cargo, supply the products and commodities for the return voyage and serve as an important resource for the foreign merchants regarding various aspects of the Chinese system of commerce.⁶

Although present in China since the early eighteenth century, the origins of the Cohong are uncertain. The system seems to have arisen out of the government's low opinion of foreigners and merchants in general; an outlook apparently grounded in Confucian ideology and historical experience. The Chinese government, having no desire for direct contact with these groups, developed commercial practices and policies that served to sequester the foreign merchants conducting business on their soil. Thus the Cohong acted as a liaison between

⁴ Some sources give her family name as Mather.

⁵ Downs, Jacques M. *The Golden Ghetto: the American commercial community at Canton and the shaping of American China policy, 1784-1844* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1997), 146-150.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22-25. Hao, Yen-p'ing. *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 15-17.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 11

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

foreign and Chinese merchants and served as a buffer between the Westerners and the Chinese government.⁷

The Portuguese had been trading at Macao for almost 300 years when their monopoly was broken by the Dutch and the English in 1685. In 1757, by imperial edict, Canton became the sole port for foreign trade. Under the “Old Canton System” of foreign trade (1757-1842), the Cohong and the British East India Company, although dominant players, did not hold absolute monopolies over all foreign trade conducted in China. While the Hong merchants often handled the major export items of tea, silk and nankeen (a type of cotton fabric), this domain was occasionally shared with Chinese “outside merchants” or “shopmen” who supplied the foreign residents with other assorted necessities for everyday living. As well, the East India Company did not hold exclusive control over all British trade conducted in China. The “country trade” was a system by which private businessmen were authorized to conduct trade within the commercial domains of the East India Company. Also, there existed a number of “private traders”. These were British subjects in China, serving as representatives of other governments, who established agencies to receive and sell cargoes for various London companies. These “agency houses” were similar to the American commission houses.⁸

Canton foreign trade was centered on the factories, located just outside the city walls and covering an area of about twelve acres. Essentially a compound of buildings where business was conducted, each factory consisted of several two-to-three story, interconnected buildings. They served as the foreign merchant’s place of business as well as his warehouse and residence. The factories also provided a place of worship and recreation. When Americans became more involved in the China trade after the Jay Treaty of 1794, which normalized trade relations with England, they encountered a very international community dominated by the East India Company. In addition to the British residents in Canton, there were at various times Arab, Indian, and Armenian merchants as well as traders from Denmark, France, Sweden, Spain, and the Netherlands.⁹

Although silk and nankeen were important export products, from the late seventeenth through the nineteenth century it was the West’s voracious demand for tea that forged the strong commercial connection to China. Initially, with the exception of specie, there was no such equivalent demand for Western goods in China. Products such as fur, ginseng, and sandalwood were only profitable on the Chinese market for limited periods. Specie was, unfortunately, a difficult product to deal with. It was a prime target for pirates and required special handling and security facilities at the factories. As well, the prolonged use of specie as a medium of exchange for Chinese products was a drain on the silver reserves in the West. However, around 1800 China began accepting larger quantities of Indian goods and the demand for opium increased dramatically. With this change in the Chinese consumer market, opium soon became the one commodity that the West could consistently sell for cash or barter for tea and other products. Constantly in demand, opium soon replaced specie as a primary means of exchange in the China trade.¹⁰

Russell arrived in Canton in 1819 under arrangements made by Edward Carrington and several leading merchants of Providence.¹¹ At this time, British merchant houses dominated the Canton market, exporting most of the tea crop and importing opium from Turkey, India, and Persia. Opium was not legalized in China until 1858, but millions of dollars were made smuggling the drug into China in the early 1800s, especially by the British East India Company.¹² The Hong merchants of Canton only occasionally enforced the ban on opium. In fact, they allowed the establishment of a highly developed smuggling operation on Lintin Island in the Canton

⁷ Downs, 72-79.

⁸ Hoa, 5-27.

⁹ Downs, 27, 44-45.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65; 71, 105-107; 108-112. Hao, 35.

¹¹ Downs, 162.

¹² British gunboat diplomacy in the so-called Opium Wars of 1839-1842 and 1856-1860 also forced China into accepting new treaties, which opened 50 new Treaty Ports and the interior to Europeans and missionaries, and resulted in the British occupation of Hong Kong.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 12**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

estuary. Under the “Lintin System”, ships arriving off Canton would transfer their opium to a storeship at Lintin before proceeding upriver to the Whampoa anchorage. Chinese traders would buy opium chits in the Canton foreign factories some ten to twelve miles upriver from Whampoa, often paying in specie. The Chinese trader would then exchange the chits for opium stowed on the storeships at Lintin.¹³ The factory merchant could either keep the profits from his sale or he could reinvest the proceeds into export products, and the profits from these commodities could be applied to another shipment of opium or invested elsewhere. Only when smuggling became too overt or smugglers were inadvertently caught in the act were the Hong officially “embarrassed” and heavily fined by the mandarins in Peking.

Americans, were for the most part excluded from the Indian and Persian markets by British control of sea lanes in the Persian Gulf, and thus restricted for a time to Turkish opium, which was exported through Europe and transshipped to China through American ports. As early as the 1790s American vessels were calling on Smyrna (modern Izmer), the principal port for opium exchange. By 1804 ships from Baltimore and Philadelphia were making regular calls. Americans initially purchased opium from the British and Greek houses there but as the trade developed, American houses began to be established to handle the American trade. At least four American merchant houses existed in Smyrna by late 1820. Principal figures associated with this early trade were brothers James and Benjamin C. Wilcocks who sailed for relatives R.H. Wilcocks and William Waln, all of Philadelphia. The Perkins brothers of Boston, who had been associated with the Turkish opium trade since the 1780’s, formally organized their Smyrna merchant house in 1816.¹⁴ As well, Benjamin C. Wilcocks was frequently associated with the Indian opium trade. Residing in China between 1808 and 1827, he made several trips to India where he conducted an extensive drug business with his largest Bombay client as well as other opium shippers. It is uncertain if Cushing and others associated with the Turkish business may have also explored the India opium market during this period. Both of these families would be associated with Russell during his tenure in Canton.

During his first five years in China, Russell operated in accordance with the instructions provided by his Providence partners.¹⁵ Even though the terms of his Canton contract appeared quite liberal and a vote of confidence in an untried China agent, there was little risk involved for the Providence firms, which made an initial capital investment of only \$20,000. All proceeds of sales in Canton were to be reinvested there, with Russell receiving a two-percent commission on all import and export business generated by every vessel consigned to the port that was owned by his co-partners. In addition they paid for Russell’s living expenses in China, and provided \$500 per annum to support his family during his absence. At the end of the five-year contract, Russell would receive an equal share in the profits. With high hopes, Russell set out on the ship *Fame* carrying Indian cotton for sale in Le Havre or Amsterdam for bills of credit or specie, before proceeding to China around the Cape of Good Hope. Leaving Gibraltar in late June 1819, the ship arrived in the Portuguese port of Macao off Canton in September. A port of entry some 80 miles south of Canton proper, it was jointly governed with the Chinese and walled off from the mainland. Since foreign vessels were banned from Canton, *Fame* remained at anchor in Whampoa, some ten miles downstream, and Russell proceeded upriver on a small Chinese riverboat to the foreign compound on the banks of the Pearl River.

It was obvious from the tenor of the partners’ correspondence and the demands made on Russell, and especially their refusal to increase the trading fund, that they had little faith in Russell’s abilities as a commission agent. Since at least one partner, Edward Carrington, was very familiar with the complexities of the Chinese market, having been the American consul there in 1802-1804, their attempt to regulate the business from afar was

¹³ Downs, 122-123.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 162.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 13**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

unrealistic. Although Russell, on his part, set up the company, leasing space in one of the so-called “factories,” where foreign traders worked and lived just outside the walls of Canton, and did his best to meet the partners’ requirements, there is no evidence that he participated in the opium trade. As a result, this first China venture was not particularly profitable, returning only about \$15,000 to each of the five partners in 1823.

As evidenced by his letters to his Providence partners, it is clear that Russell was quite conversant with all the details of the opium trade and may have planned to enter the market when conditions were more favorable.¹⁶ Although he often advised his partners on other trade possibilities, notably ginseng, which was well regarded by the Chinese and grown in New England, no imports were as highly valued as opium. In Russell’s opinion, “[opium] is the only article...which of late can be said to have a profit” in the depressed China market.¹⁷ While the Chinese characterized opium as “the dirt that despoiled its people,” only one American house refused to participate on moral grounds. Like most Europeans and Americans at the time, Russell simply saw the trade advantages. Indeed, with single drug cargoes selling for as much as \$50,000, smuggling would have solved his cash problems and allowed him to compete with Perkins & Company of Boston and other American houses actively engaged in the Turkish drug trade.

Although his first China venture was not commercially successful, Russell had made three valuable friendships that stood him in good stead in his remaining years in Canton. Chief among them was John Perkins Cushing, also orphaned at an early age and cousin to brothers James and Thomas H. Perkins of Boston. With earlier success in the opium and fur trade, the brothers had employed their cousin to work in the Canton end of their business under their associate Ephraim Bumstead. Upon the unexpected death of the senior associate, Cushing was left in charge of the Canton office at 16. Under Cushing, the firm of Perkins & Company was formally established in Canton in 1806.¹⁸ The Sturgis and Forbes families of Boston, long-time associates of Cushing and the Perkins family, would also have future dealings with Russell.¹⁹ The second influential friend and business partner was Philip Ammidon, agent for Brown and Ives of Providence, who had shared the Russell & Company “godown” (office) and Russell’s personal quarters. The third was his relationship with Houqua, the leading Hong merchant, who specialized in the tea trade, selling mostly to the British East India Company and to American firms, most notably Perkins & Company.²⁰ Houqua would remain a life-long friend of Russell’s.

When Cushing proposed to Ammidon that they enter into a partnership with Russell, whom he considered to be “one of the best men in the country,” a deal was soon struck between the three men. Russell went into partnership with Ammidon in 1824 and established Russell & Company exclusively as a commission house.²¹ Acting as a free commission agent, the company could do business with any merchant house in the world. More importantly, since Cushing and Ammidon had business connections in India, and the partners hoped to break the British monopoly in that region. Ammidon soon left for India carrying letters from Cushing and Houqua, leaving current business in Russell’s hands. The anticipated profits of even a share of the market were enormous; British imports of opium at that time averaged \$15 million annually. Evidently Ammidon made some successful deals with the Parsi opium growers in India, for the partnership was renewed for another four

¹⁶ Some of Russell’s reluctance was due to the turmoil in the drug market. Several highly publicized international incidents caused the Emperor to issue orders to his mandarins to rigidly enforce the opium ban and banish any Hong merchant involved in smuggling. Indeed the ensuing agitation of the Hong and their preoccupation with pacifying Peking during this period often interfered with normal trade. The most important incident, the “*Emily* Affair,” took place in 1821. After a member of the crew of this American ship was tried by the Chinese and executed for accidentally killing a Chinese woman, opium was found in a subsequent search of the vessel. When the Hong search of other ships at Whampoa uncovered large amounts of opium, the vessels involved were summarily sent off in ballast (*sans* cargo). Although old “China hands” did not take the event too seriously, when the ban on opium was enforced for at least 18 months, American vessels carrying the drug sold their cargoes in Manila and Java.

¹⁷ Russell & Company to Carrington & Company, June 30, 1821, Russell & Company Collection, Library of Congress.

¹⁸ Downs, 119, 151.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 155-157, 159-161.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 14**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

years in November 1826, well in advance of the starting date, January 1, 1828, to allow Russell to return home.

Since Russell was required to be back in Canton when the new contract commenced, only 14 months later, and much of his leave would be spent at sea, there was little time left to settle his family affairs. There had been several deaths in the family. Russell's sister, Lucy W., who had married Henry G. Bowers in 1811, died in 1825. His wife, Mary, had died in childbirth soon after Russell first shipped out for Canton, leaving two sons in the care of their aunt, Frances Ann Osborn. During this visit, Russell and Frances were married and she became the mother of his third son, Samuel Wadsworth Russell, Jr. Other matters needed his attention. Finding the old mansion in disrepair, he began making plans for a new house, and even found time to solicit new consignment business in the United States, including most notably the sale of opium for John Jacob Astor. In April 1827, having spent only two months in Middletown, Russell sailed for China and was back in Canton by October of that year.

The business records of Russell & Company for the second Chinese venture are incomplete. But it is known that Russell gained the commission business of the only two merchant houses in Manila and bought out some smaller competitors in Canton. As well, during this time while Russell & Company was growing into a very successful commission house, Perkins & Company was in the process of reducing its substantial and highly successful business. As early as 1818 Cushing began to turn over the company's commission business to other Canton associates that included James P. Sturgis & Company, the Wilcocks representatives, and Russell & Company. This included Cushing's opium shipments. In 1820 Cushing brought on his cousin Thomas Tunno Forbes to train for the business. Forbes, however, died in 1827 before assuming control of the firm. Cushing, eager for retirement and lacking another suitable heir, made arrangements to dissolve the firm. Honoring a sealed letter left by Forbes requesting that Russell take over all the business and with the knowledge that his cousin and Russell had had a successful dealings in the past, Perkins & Company was absorbed by Russell & Company.²² With the concurrence of the Perkins management, Russell, who had expected to leave China in 1830 delayed his departure to set up the management structure of the combined companies, still under the name of Russell & Company.

During this time Ammidon had been on leave from the business. Unable to return in 1828, Ammidon provided Russell with William H. Low, a very capable replacement with business connections in Philadelphia and Salem. In 1830, when Ammidon was still unable to return to Canton, another replacement Augustine Heard of Boston, was recommended. Both Low and Russell accepted Heard and Ammidon was terminated from the partnership.²³ Cushing, who had returned to Canton, was very influential in the merger and reorganization of the two companies. Under his direction Augustine Heard was made the representative of Perkins and their associated Boston firms. Robert Bennet Forbes was given charge of the Russell & Company storeship business on the Lintin station and John Murray Forbes was placed with the firm as an assistant in line for partnership.²⁴ Both these men were relatives of the deceased Forbes. Upon completing their work in March 1831, both Cushing and Russell returned to America..

Although the business styles of the two firms had been quite different, they were still complementary. Perkins & Company had been primarily a buyer and shipper of China cargoes for their Boston clientele. Cushing orchestrated the entire trade and he and his partners were generally the owners of the products, which included opium. Russell and Company was exclusively a commission house and did not necessarily own the goods it handled. Rather, the firm provided services that included marketing of imports (including opium which it sold for Perkins & Company on their storeship) investing the proceeds, securing freight, negotiating bills, finding

²² *Ibid.*, 119, 151, 156-157, 159-161.

²³ *Ibid.*, 162.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 15**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

insurance, etc.²⁵

By the time Ammidon left the firm, his dealings had made Russell & Company one of the most important American sellers of the opium in Canton, second or third in the trade behind the British firms of Jardine Matheson & Company and Dent & Company.²⁶ In absorbing Perkins & Company, Russell & Company's clientele base expanded to include the commission business of major firms in Providence, Boston, New York, Salem, and Philadelphia. As a "terminal general partnership", the membership of Russell & Company changed frequently. Drawing from the ranks of friends and family, as partners attained their desired fortunes and retired, new associates were brought on to ensure the success of the firm.²⁷ Thus, in less than a decade after Samuel Russell's departure from Canton, Russell & Company had secured its position as one of the premier American trading houses in Canton through a succession of partners who brought with them considerable talents and valuable connections.

Russell & Company continued to prosper as a major marketer of opium. Initially its Indian opium trade was only about half that of the Turkish trade but with the cancellation of the East India Company's charter this trend was reversed. Undeterred by the first Opium War, carried on 1839-1842, the company with its own fleet of China clippers managed to hold its position in the Turkish trade and became the third largest purveyor of the drug from India. By 1842, Russell & Company had become the largest and strongest American house in China and it would continue to hold this premier position until closing in 1891.²⁸

In 1836, however, Russell had withdrawn from the company, asking the current manager to bring his China affairs to a close, with the request that his profits be invested in teas or bills of exchange on London. Upon hearing of his retirement, Houqua, the Hong merchant, wrote to Russell expressing his regret since "your name...has been associated with it [the house] during the whole course of its existence."²⁹ Acknowledging that Russell had earned a "competent fortune," Houqua congratulated him on his success in life and concluded with his "sincere wish that you may live long to enjoy the fruit of your industry," a reference to the mansion in Middletown. Known as the "China palace" for its rich Oriental appointments, including several gifts from Houqua, Russell lived there until his death in 1862. The company that carried his name lived on: ships from Canton flying the distinctive blue and white diamond flag of Russell & Company were found in all the major world ports well into the early twentieth century. The house, inherited by Samuel W. Russell, Jr., remained in the family until 1937, when it was deeded to Wesleyan University by his great-grandson, Thomas MacDonough Russell, Jr.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 156-157, 159-162.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 126-128

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 126-128, 171-173.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 126-128, 189.

²⁹ For this and the following quotation, see Houqua to Russell, January 14, 1837, Russell & Company Collection, Library of Congress.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 16

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Architectural Significance

The Samuel Russell House represented a turning point in American architecture. It was a new approach to residential construction that marked the demise of the dominant craftsman tradition and represents the emergence of the professional architect. For the new homes of the bourgeoisie, master builders, once solely responsible for all aspects of design and construction, now often worked from professionally drawn plans and specifications, a separation of roles not as clearly defined as it is today. Indeed, many craftsmen could have qualified as architects but simply chose not to do so. Some architects also acted as the agent for the client, soliciting and negotiating construction bids on his/her behalf. Such was the case with the Russell House, built by Hoadley & Curtis, a firm headed by David Hoadley, one of the last great master builders of Connecticut, to a design created by Ithiel Town, one of the more prominent members of the new profession of architect in the Northeast. Together this collaboration produced a Greek Revival-style residence recognized by contemporary practitioners and modern architectural historians alike for its exceptional sophistication, integrity of design and proportions, and superb craftsmanship.

Less well known is the fact that the house Russell envisioned, a Late Georgian pile, “well built, strong and substantial, the work...to be plain and neat,” is not the building that stands today. Relying on Samuel Hubbard, his friend in Middletown who was to buy the lot and supervise construction in his absence, Russell sent detailed instructions from Canton in October 1827.³⁰ A plan and a model were sent off by the first available ship for a brick house, 44 feet square, with high ceilings and unadorned plaster walls. His plans even specified methods for fireproof construction and the laying of finish floors over mortar, and called for a separate bathhouse, to be supplied with hot water from the kitchen wing. The only luxury items required were marble fireplaces and window glass; the latter Russell planned to import from Germany. Perhaps in his isolation from American society, Russell was unaware that the house he described, essentially the type built for Middletown ships’ captains and merchants of his father’s generation, was out of fashion. There was no mention of hiring an architect. Russell was sure that “a Mason and Carpenter could build the house for \$5000,” a not unreasonable expectation, since even houses of this scale had been erected by master builders since colonial times. The story of why and how Russell’s concept was transformed into an expensive Greek Revival mansion of some pretension can illuminate not only the cultural climate in this transitional period, but the genesis of an ubiquitous American style that spread from the East Coast to the Midwest and the Deep South by mid-century.

During the years that Russell spent in China, architectural style based on Roman classicism had run its course. The Georgian Revival of the late eighteenth century, heavily influenced by the Italian Renaissance and often expressed in the motifs of Andrea Palladio, had segued into the Federal style by the 1790s. Derived from the English Adam style and re-interpreted by New World carpenter builders in the Northeast from the many pattern books of the day, especially those of Asher Benjamin of Boston, the Federal style became increasingly attenuated and effete by 1820. As more young men and women received a classical education in the private academies that sprang up throughout the East, the Roman ideal that had permeated the Revolutionary experience had given way to a new understanding and appreciation of the arts and democratic ideals of Greece. Disturbed by the excesses and ultimate failure of the French Revolution, Americans were reassured by the Greek war for independence from Turkey (1820-1830), a pure revolution which reaffirmed and justified the American experience; the death in 1824 of English poet Lord (George Gordon) Byron in that struggle was widely mourned. Greek Classical orders, now recognized as the precursors of Roman classicism, began to appear in builders’ manuals in 1826, the year that Asher Benjamin first included them in his series. Still on the horizon

³⁰ Russell to Hubbard, October 26, 1827, Russell House Correspondence (hereinafter RHC). This letter was first of an extensive house correspondence that continued to August 1829, and included seven letters from Russell, ten from Ithiel Town, and six from Hoadley, or his firm, along with a few from Edward A. Russell, Samuel’s brother, who was liaison with Town in New York. The remainder generally consists of bills of lading for lumber and window glass, the latter imported from Europe. For this nomination, the author relied on typed transcriptions in the Russell Library, Middletown, Connecticut, transcribed from the originals in the Library of Congress.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 17**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

was the universal mantle of Grecian culture that descended over American society in the next decades. It was manifested not only in Greek Revival doorways on countless colonial houses, but Greek names for towns and cities, and a whole generation of children named for Greek heroes. Although master builders were largely responsible for the widespread dissemination of the vernacular Greek Revival in the *antebellum* period, it was the self-styled professional architects who experimented with the Greek building principles that truly launched the new style. Chief among them was Ithiel Town, who architectural historian Roger Newton has called the “Father of the Greek Revival.”

Not surprisingly, the new Greek Revival mode was first taken up by the elite and several turned to Ithiel Town for the design. Among them was Eli Whitney, the renowned arms manufacturer, who had commissioned Town for such a house before his death in 1825. Essentially a Georgian Colonial house embellished with Doric porches, it too was built by Hoadley. Town had also designed an Ionic order temple-fronted house with wings in Northampton, Massachusetts. More Palladian than Greek in plan, it was constructed by Isaac Damon in 1827 for Russell’s former brother-in-law, Henry Bowers, and his second wife. Damon, a master builder renowned throughout the upper Connecticut Valley for his churches and houses, was currently building a bridge across the Connecticut River. Like many bridges of the day it utilized the Town lattice truss, a patented design that made a fortune for the architect. Although neither the Eli Whitney nor the Henry Bowers house has survived, they represented the first steps of a progression towards the pure style and clarity of form that Town sought and achieved in the Russell House. Features of both were incorporated in the interior design of the Russell House.³¹

In the era before academic architectural training was a prerequisite to entering the field, early architects like Town were largely self-taught. While later architects had the benefit of an informal apprenticeship system, in which established men took on promising newcomers, as Town did with Alexander Jackson Davis and Henry Austin, Town’s only known training was a stint in Asher Benjamin’s Boston office. Widely traveled and well-read, Town studied the work of other architects in major American cities. He compiled an extensive library devoted to architecture and the arts, which included *Antiquities of Athens*, one of the first books to provide measured drawings of Grecian temples, published in London in 1762.

Roger Newton believed that Town’s design for the Eagle Bank in New Haven in 1824, an exact replica of the Ionic prostyle Erechtheum on the Athenian Acropolis shown in *Antiquities of Athens*, was the American prototype for the temple form.³² Such a sweeping statement, however, conveniently ignores William Strickland’s Second Bank of the United States of 1818 in Philadelphia, the first of many public buildings modeled on the Parthenon. Perhaps closer to the mark was Newton’s view that the Eagle Bank “established for all time the precedent for giving correct rendering of an actual temple.” The Eagle Bank failed and construction stopped with the foundation, but Town’s temple plan survived in the Russell House, albeit transmuted into the Corinthian order.

For Newton, Russell House was the first of a number of “country seats” executed in the grand manner, which established Town & Davis as “full fledged Revivalists.” In commenting on “its undeniable sophistication,” he compared the “richness of the apartments” to Regency examples in England, such as Carleton House Terrace, or even some parts of Buckingham Palace. Perhaps unaware of the similar layout of the Bowers House, Newton also noted that the “handsome pair of parlors....virtually one grand salon,” marked the New England debut of an interior plan that became the hallmark of the firm’s townhouses in New York.

³¹ The Bowers House was purchased by Samuel Russell in the 1850s, apparently to use as a rental property. *The Bowers House, Northampton, Mass*” (Springfield, Massachusetts, Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, 1954).

³² For this and the following, see Roger Hale Newton, *Town & Davis Architects* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 123-125.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 18**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Among the other architectural historians who addressed the special qualities of Town's design are Talbot Hamlin and William H. Pierson, Jr. Hamlin believed that its design "is in the richest Greek vein and its Corinthian columns and open plan are urban and magnificent rather than in the simple old tradition."³³ He was the first to print the Russell family legend that the Eagle Bank columns were reused in the facade portico. Nothing has been found to refute this belief, and given Town's well-documented insistence upon proportions that would accommodate such tall columns, the story has a ring of truth. Although Town specified the *faux* marble treatment to enhance the temple concept, he may have had second thoughts about the suitability of a form so obviously identified with public buildings; hence his pencilled notation on the original plan, "Needs a fence to give it a residential character." Pierson remarked on the totality of the design, in which "the dynamic presence of the inner spaces is integrated with the columnar rhythm," and "the knowledgeable but sensitive touch of the professional is on every hand."³⁴ Such integration was uncommon in even much later Greek Revivals of the temple form, where the colonnade was simply an embellishment applied to a conventional house.

Most architectural historians mistakenly assume that Russell House was designed by the firm of Town & Davis, generally acknowledged as the first fully developed architectural office in the United States.³⁵ A remarkable and complementary partnership... Town the talented structuralist, and Davis, the self-named "artistic composer"... while short-lived (1829-1835; 1842-1843), the firm produced major buildings, including the State House of 1831 in New Haven, the Old Customs House in New York City, and several state capitols in the Midwest. In the case of the Russell House, however, Davis' contributions to the actual design were limited. It is clear from architectural records and existing correspondence in the Library of Congress that Town was the sole architect; Davis, having joined the firm well after the project was underway, drafted and probably designed some interior details: ornamental door casings and the plan and elevations of the folding doors in 1829.³⁶ Davis himself credits Town in several places: his plan for the "principal floor" (undated) was titled "Residence, Planned for Mr. Russell, by I. Town, esq.,"³⁷ and a pencilled notation in Davis' handwriting, "I. Town, Architect," appears on the perspective engraving of Davis' pencil rendering for *History and Topography of the United States* in 1831.

The Russell House correspondence confirms that the house was designed well before Davis became a partner on February 1, 1829. The "plans complete," drafted by Thomas Rust, were transmitted to Hubbard on June 26, 1828, while Town was in South Carolina.³⁸ Town's bill for services in the amount of \$150 was not transmitted until October 1829, but details of the house were discussed by Town in his first surviving letter to Hubbard in August of 1828.³⁹ The plan went out to bid prior to September 6, 1828, since acceptance of the Hoadley & Curtis estimate of \$7000, including \$1000 for the west portico, was recommended in Town's letter of that date. Although sure that Russell would consent to the cost of the portico, he felt that the decision could be deferred, or a less expensive doorway portico could be substituted. Apparently Town's plan was sent off to Canton before the bid was received. While awaiting "instructions from Mr. R." the architect contracted with Hoadley & Curtis, but continued to refine the design, making changes that added to the cost.

Letters from Town reveal his interest in the proportions and how decisions were made about exterior finishes

³³ Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York: Dover Books, 1944), p. 176.

³⁴ William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and Their Architects* (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976), p. 456

³⁵ According to *Great Georgian Houses*, the house was designed by David Hoadley, the principal of Hoadley & Curtis. Apparently he took in a partner when he relocated from Waterbury to New Haven and it was Curtis who actually supervised construction of the Russell House.

³⁶ A.J. Davis Papers, New York Public Library, as cited in Jane Davies to Alain Munkittrick, December 29, 1971.

³⁷ A.J. Davis Collection, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Print Department.

³⁸ Henry Titus, another New York architect, had submitted his plan on June 6.

³⁹ Town to Hubbard, New York, August 14, 1828, RHC. The original bill does not exist but the amount and date were referenced in William Peters to Hubbard, New Haven, December 30, 1929, RHC.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 19**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

and interior details. Having increased the width of the house by four feet, Town lobbied heavily for adding at least a foot to the principal story to bring the facade into proportion, assuring Hubbard that “once [we] get the proportion restored...”, there would be no further alterations.⁴⁰ Although the resolution of this issue was obviously in Town’s favor, the discussion dragged on for months, still unresolved in July of 1829. Also, anxious to avoid any appendages that would mar the geometry of the temple form, Town had already decided on a ten-foot high foundation, a feature that allowed for the kitchen and servants’ quarters in the basement, an urbanist layout Town often preferred, rather than in a wing. To meet Mrs. Russell’s objection that then the house would look too tall, he proposed to regrade the site, even though he was convinced that the appearance of the building would not be affected, as proportion, in his mind, was “judged from the portico, the most prominent part.”

Even though Town felt the cost “to raise the finish of the 1st story” was negligible, Hoadley & Curtis revised their bid upward to \$8500.⁴¹ Various ways to reduce the cost were explored, including Hubbard’s suggestion that the less expensive Tuscan order be used. The response was pure Town: “this is an Order that I do not acknowledge,” remarking “even the Doric order would be much too heavy...and the Ionic equally expensive.”⁴² Town also stated that “Hoadley was so far into the affair that no change can be made except to your disadvantage,” which suggests that construction had finally begun. However, Town did not come to Middletown to meet with Hubbard and Mrs. Russell to site the house until sometime in early February.⁴³ In any event, Hoadley & Curtis would not have been constructing a masonry building in winter and had only fabricated interior doors and window sash.

While all parties waited on Russell’s approval of the design, Hoadley was frustrated by the delays and blamed Town. Having returned the contract plans to Town for redrafting at the new height, Hoadley was at a loss and, with the architect off to New York, had even searched his Town’s New Haven rooms for the new plans. At the very least, he wanted to get the carver started on the capitals while they “are not much Drove with work...” since they soon would be in “the hurrying time” for building.⁴⁴ Town on his part was unapologetic since he had “been there [New Haven] a week or more ready to give them any information whatever...,” claiming that he had urged them to take copies of the new drawings at that time.⁴⁵ As to Hoadley’s concern about the capitals, Town had already provided a book for reference and had even suggested that “their Carver come [to him] and hear the full explanation.” By February 17, Hoadley refused to continue without plans and hinted that raising the house would cost even more.

It was not until December 1828 that Russell received word from Hubbard about Town’s plan. Considering that his ideas on the building had been almost totally disregarded and even the lot Hubbard purchased was not of his choosing, Russell may have been somewhat dismayed. Only in the location of the bathhouse were Russell’s requirements met; and even there, it is unlikely that he expected the pedimented and pilastered structure that stands today. In his reply, however, which would not reach Middletown until at least the end of March, Russell readily conceded that “my knowledge of the arts and science of building is somewhat imperfect” and expressed his approval both as to location and style, indicating that he was “pleased that you have consulted more her [Mrs. Russell’s] taste and wishes than my ideas on the subject.”⁴⁶ Since apparently Russell had not yet received either of Hoadley’s bids, there were other surprises in store. But having recognized that such a “different House” would cost more than the \$7500 set aside for the house and lot, he sent off an additional

⁴⁰ Town to Hubbard, New York, January 9, 1829, RHC.

⁴¹ David Hoadley to Hubbard, October 20, 1828, RHC.

⁴² Town to Hubbard, New Haven, January 16, 1829, RHC.

⁴³ Town to Hubbard, New Haven, January (Sunday evening), 1829, RHC.

⁴⁴ Hoadley & Curtis to Hubbard, January 26, 1829, RHC.

⁴⁵ Town to Hubbard, New Haven, February 4, 1829, RHC.

⁴⁶ For this and the following, see Russell to Hubbard, Canton, December 13, 1828, RHC.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 20**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

consignment to cover the expense. In the meantime, Hubbard was to call on Mrs. Russell for any excess, or to advance the money if the cargo was delayed.⁴⁷

By the summer of 1829, Town took a greater interest in the interior finishes and details, largely at the behest of Mrs. Russell. Clearly now his principal client, she was not happy with the plain interior that Town preferred and had called for details she had seen in the homes of Henry Bowers and Mrs. Eli Whitney. Although he continued his practice of sending pattern books for the builder's use, for the first time Town began to utilize Davis' considerable drafting talents. While making it clear that "a kind of fancy architrave somewhat in the style of Mr. Bowers" was not to his taste, Town sent sketches of similar corner ornaments for Mrs. Russell and her friends to consider for the "best rooms."⁴⁸ He suggested that they could be cast in lead at little expense, even though "Hoadley might not expect [them]."⁴⁹ Although well aware that what suited him "might be thought too plain," Town had sent a sample of the pattern he much preferred for the "common architraves" by an earlier stagecoach (presumably the rose design he first recommended, which was used in the upper hall).⁵⁰ Judging from the paterae actually used in the parlors, which exhibit a quite delicate stylistic sensibility, they must have been the work Davis mentioned in his Day Book, and they also were typical of the refined and elegant Greek Revival detail popularized by Minard Lafever. There is no mention in the correspondence of the interior fresco work, and indirect evidence implies that the Russell House walls and ceilings still were unadorned in 1839.⁵¹

A month later, Town had Davis prepare drawings for interior shutters that would "corropond [*sic*] to other [room] finishes...." and also with [the ones at] Mr. Bowers."⁵² Curiously enough, in his cover letter, Town found fault with the design and indicated that the stiles, as drawn, were much too thick. The pattern of the folding parlor doors also came from the Bowers House. Town had to make a trip to Northampton to inspect them before plans were drawn, perhaps indicating that interior finishes there were left to builder Isaac Damon's judgment. When Mrs. Russell also fancied how the windows were cased at Mrs. Whitney's, no plans were drawn. Instead, a somewhat beleaguered Town, who in July "hardly knew how to meet all your views," simply referred Hubbard to Hoadley, who had done that work at Whitney's.

To help bring the house to completion, Edward Russell, Samuel's brother who worked at Geo. Douglass & Co., a merchant house in New York, became quite actively involved in October 1829. He already was quite familiar with the plans, having actually redrawn the grade lines on Town's elevations, after consulting with Bowers. While rarely successful in catching up with Town in his New York office when Hubbard needed quick answers, Edward did arrange for the services of trades- and craftsmen, presumably when locally qualified people were not available, to make locks and other hardware, or to install the marble fireplaces (selected by Town) and the iron fence. For the latter feature, Edward had already sent along a plan which he got from "Mr. Bower's triman [*sic*]."⁵³ After hiring a "first rate Smith" for the hardware, Edward queried Hubbard about the operation of the folding doors. Apparently the door plans were not precise, for "The Smith wishes to know" if they are "what is called slid and fold back," in which case the hinge would be rabbitted, or do they fold on one side and slide on the other.⁵⁴ One of his last tasks was to send a man to Middletown to set the "mantel pieces [*sic*]," before the house was completed in June 1830.

⁴⁷ Hubbard also was called upon to act for Mrs. Russell in the purchase of the small lot to the south, where Edward A. Russell would erect his Greek Revival house in 1841. A cube-form transitional house, it was built to a plan drawn by A. J. Davis, who also provided a sketch of the Ionic *in antis* doorway.

⁴⁸ For this and the following, see Town to Hubbard, New Haven, July 29, 1829, RHC.

⁴⁹ A rather sly reference to Hoadley's grumbling about being held to a contract that had no provision for charging for revisions.

⁵⁰ The rose design had been Town's choice from the beginning. Town to Hubbard, August 14, 1828, RHC.

⁵¹ See Lousia Mather Mansfield to Joseph K. F. Mansfield, December 15, 1839, Also Correspondence, Middlesex Historical Society Archives, Middletown, Connecticut.

⁵² Town to Hubbard, New Haven, August 29, 1829, RHC.

⁵³ Edward Russell to Hubbard, New York, October 31, 1829, RHC.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* February 25, 1830, for this and following quotation.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 21**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

The Russell House was a unique architectural phenomenon, seemingly without historical precedent. Never before had the design of a single house had such influence on the direction of American residential architecture or been so widely publicized. That it launched the careers of Town & Davis is generally acknowledged. In fact, it could be said that in the Russell House, Town may have first discovered that acceptance of the stark formality of his beloved temple form required the mediating artistic presence of Davis, a blending of talent that set the tone for their successful working relationship. It is somewhat ironic that long before Russell even caught his first glimpse of his house from the deck of a sloop on the Connecticut River in the summer of 1831, it was known to the American public. It became part of the builders' lexicon as early as 1829, when it was included in Minard Lafever's *Young Builder's General Instructor*, and later in the 1835 edition of his *The Beauties of Modern Architecture*. The Russell House was widely imitated, especially after the engraved rendering appeared in Hinton's *Topography of the United States* in January 1831, setting in motion a stylistic trend that prevailed for almost 40 years.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 22

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

Architects' Emergency Committee, Bottomley, William Lawrence, chairman. *Great Georgian Houses of America*, vol. 1. New York: The Kalkoff Press, 1933-1937.

Beers, J. W., ed. *History of Middlesex County*. New York: J. W. Beers & Co., 1884.

Benjamin, Asher. *The American Builders' Companion Or, a New System of Architecture*. Boston: R.P.& C. Williams, 1816 (5th edition).

_____. *The Architect; Or, the Practical House Carpenter*. Boston: R.P. & C. Williams, 1841-1857.

_____. *The Builders' Guide Or Complete System of Architecture*. Boston: Perkins and Marvin; Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1819-1854. (Later issues called *The Architect; or, Complete Builders' Guide*.)

_____. *The Practice of Architecture*. New York: Collins & Company, 1833-1851.

(*The Bowers House*. Springfield, Massachusetts: Connecticut Valley Historical Museum, 1954.

Bruchey, Stuart. "Success and Failure Factors: American Merchants in Foreign Trade in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries." *Business History Review* XXXIII, no. 3 (1958).

Davies, Jane B. Letters to Alain D. Munkittrick, December 16, 1971 and October 11, 1975.

Downs, Jacques M. *The Golden Ghetto: the American commercial community at Canton and the shaping of American China policy, 1784-1844*. Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1997.

_____. "American Merchants and the China Opium Trade, 1800-1840. *Business History Review* 42 (1968).

Dulles, Foster Rhea. *The Old China Trade*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1930.

Forbes, W. Cameron. "Houqua: The Merchant Prince of China, 1769-1843." *The American Asiatic Association* (December 1940).

Hao, Yen-p'ing. *The Commercial Revolution in Nineteenth-Century China*. Berkely: University of California Press, 1986.

Hamlin, Talbot. *Greek Revival Architecture in America*. New York: Dover Publications, 1944.

Hinton, John H. *History and Topography of the United States*. 2 vols. Boston: S. Walker, 1884 (reprint of 1831 edition).

Inwood, Henry W. *The Erechthion at Athens*. London: J. Carpenter & Son, 1827.

LaFever, Minard. *Beauties of Modern Architecture and the Young Builders General Assistant*. New York:

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 23

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

Larson, Henrietta M. "A China Trader turns Investor: A Biographical Chapter in American Business History." *Business History Review* XII (1933).

Marshall W. Tuttle & Co., 1829.

Middletown, Connecticut. Land Records, MSS.

_____. Probate Records, MSS.

_____. Russell Library Archives. Russell House Correspondence, typescript, transcribed from originals at Library of Congress.

_____. Wesleyan University. Olin Library and Honors College. Russell House Files.

Morris, James M. *Our Maritime Heritage: maritime developments and their impact on American life*. Washington: University Press of America, 1979.

Munkittrick, Alain. "Samuel Wadsworth Russell (1789-1862): A Study of Ordered Investment." Honors thesis, Wesleyan University, 1973.

Northampton, Massachusetts. Northampton Historical Society Archives. File: Street Prospect (Henry Bowers House).

New York. New York Public Library, Manuscript Division. A. J. Davis Papers. Day Book, vol. 1.

New York. Metropolitan Museum of Art. Print Department. A. J. Davis Collection.

Newton, Roger Hale. *Town & Davis Architects*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1942.

Peck, Amelia, ed. *Alexander Jackson Davis: American Architect 1803-1892*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc. for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1992. Introduction by Jane B. Davies.

Pierson, William H., Jr. *American Buildings and Their Architects*. The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1976.

(A) *Short History of the Russell House*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University, n.d.

Stuart, James, and Nicholas Revett. *The Antiquities of Athens*. vol. 1 (of 4). London: J. Haberkorn, 1762-1816.

Washington, D.C. Library of Congress. Russell & Company Collection, MSS.

_____. Samuel Russell Papers, MSS (house correspondence).

Wiebenson, Dora. *Sources of Greek Revival Architecture*. Philadelphia (University Park) and London: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1969.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE**Page 24**

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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 (Specify Repository): New York Public Library
Metropolitan Museum of Art

10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 2 acres

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	18	695470	4603380

Verbal Boundary Description:

The boundaries of the nominated property are shown on attached site map labeled "Schematic Site Plan: Samuel Wadsworth Russell House."

Boundary Justification:

The boundaries encompass the remaining undivided property historically associated with the Russell House, which represents the major part of the original acreage that ran between High and Pearl Streets. The property was reduced in size by both historical and modern institutional development. It was subdivided on the south side to accommodate the Edward A. Russell House by 1840. Property along Pearl Street that was once part of the gardens is now occupied by a modern building constructed by Wesleyan University in the 1970s.

SAMUEL WADSWORTH RUSSELL HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

Page 25

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Jan Cunningham, National Register Consultant

Telephone: (860) 347 4072

Date: February 2000

Edited by: Carolyn Pitts, Patty Henry and Hallie Brooker
National Historic Landmarks Survey
NRHE (NC-400)
1849 C Street,
Washington, DC 20240

Telephone: 215/597-8875; 202/343-8163; 202/343-8170

DESIGNATED A NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK
August 7, 2001