

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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DATE ENTERED

NOV 29 1979

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME Asylum Hill - Historic Resources

HISTORIC Historic Resources of Asylum Hill (Partial Inventory; Historic and Architectural Properties)

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION roughly bounded by R.R. tracks, North Branch of Park River, Homestead Ave, and Walnut St.

STREET & NUMBER

See individual districts and properties NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

First - William R. Cotter

STATE

Connecticut

VICINITY OF

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Hartford

003

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multiple Resource	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

See individual districts and properties

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

VICINITY OF

STATE

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Hartford Land Records, Municipal Building

STREET & NUMBER

550 Main Street

CITY, TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

See continuation sheet

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Asylum Hill Multiple Resource Area is a section of Hartford, Connecticut, approximately one and one-fifth miles long in the east-west direction by four-fifths of a mile wide in the north-south direction, immediately west of the center of the city. It is centered on two east-west streets, Farmington and Asylum Avenues. The area is bordered on the south, east, and north by railroad tracks. The boundary on the west is the North Branch of the Park River. On a site where the elevation rises on the western edge of downtown the American Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb was erected in 1820, thereby establishing the name Asylum Hill for the area. The northern sector of the area, that is, the properties fronting on Sergeant and Ashley Streets, comprise the Sigourney Square National Register District, which has been approved by the Connecticut Review Board for the National Register.

The railroads and river formed self-evident boundaries for the middle and upper-middle class residential development of Asylum Hill during the second half of the 19th century. Such development was needed because earlier fine residential streets built up in the southern sector of the city offered no room for further expansion. The advent of horse cars and later trolleys along Farmington and Asylum Avenues provided convenient access to the "Hill." The pressure for additional pleasant residential areas thus could be satisfied by growth westerly on Asylum Hill.

The development of Asylum Hill is graphically shown on maps in 19th century Hartford city atlases, copies of which are attached. In 1869 only Asylum Avenue west to approximately Huntington Street was built up. The maps show the center of the area, along Farmington and Asylum Avenues, still largely occupied by substantial estates. Along Farmington Avenue are the names Talcott, Cooley, Beach, Dixon, Case, and Jewell, and along Asylum Avenue are Affleck, Willard, Goodwin, Collins, and Terry--all important family names in Hartford history. To the north of this central sector the Town Farm and Alms House occupied almost the full east-west dimension of the area (now the Sigourney Square National Register District), and to the south Hooker and Gillette had begun the development of Nook Farm.

The 1880 map shows a progression toward more intense use of the land. By this time houses had been built on the south side of Farmington Avenue between Imlay and Laurel Streets. Laurel Street had been opened to Niles Street and some of the Niles family property had become house lots 60 or 70 feet wide by 150 feet deep. One of the Collins properties had yielded to Atwood and Townley Streets. A dozen comfortable double houses had been built along Townley and Willard Streets. Asylum Avenue Baptist Church, St. Joseph's Cathedral, Asylum Hill Congregational Church, and Trinity Episcopal Church reflected the neighborhood's growing needs for religious institutions, and West Middle School on Asylum Avenue satisfied the need for educational facilities. Further indication of changes to come was given in the subtle difference recorded on the map in the names of the owners of the estates. For example, property formerly owned by "Jas. Dixon" was now owned by "Jas. Dixon, Estate." The old families' grasp on the land was beginning to weaken.

The 1896 map shows the area almost completely built up. The majority of the houses were constructed of brick, some of stone, and some of wood. One of the few estates remaining was

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Historic Resources of Asylum Hill
Hartford, Connecticut

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the Collins enclave on Asylum Avenue from Atwood to Woodland Streets. The Collins heirs held out until 1939 before selling this acreage for the home office of an insurance company. The turn of the century was the high point in the architectural and social history of Asylum Hill. The houses were large and substantial, the streets wide and tree-lined, development had largely been completed, and conditions were regarded as stable.

In the 20th century the stability proved to be short-lived. Many changes occurred. The expensive residential character of the neighborhood was altered by the demolition of homes for the purpose of erecting a number of buildings for a variety of business and commercial purposes. Immediately west of downtown three large insurance companies established their home offices and a newspaper plant was built. Other insurance companies and other enterprises moved into offices along Asylum Avenue and Woodland Street. Farmington Avenue west of Sigourney became a commercial strip. One of the city's two principal hospitals took over the northwest corner of the area. Hartford Public High School, formerly on the eastern edge of the area, was demolished in the 1960's for a highway. A new high school building was constructed on a site in Nook Farm, which was cleared of distinguished 19th century houses for the purpose.

Perhaps more importantly, many apartment houses were built. Early in the century the apartments were large and the buildings well constructed, but in more recent years as building costs increased, apartment houses of lower quality construction have become common, providing smaller and cheaper apartments in large numbers. In all, there are approximately 185 apartment houses now in the area. There has been little industrial development in Asylum Hill.

In addition to business and industrial development, the 20th century has seen the encroachment of urban decay into the Asylum Hill area. The big, old houses were remodelled into multiple apartments, and maintenance suffered. New, inexpensive apartment houses brought a higher population density with related problems of security and neighborhood crime. The socio-economic mix developed into the opposite extreme of what it had been at the turn of the century. But in the 1970's the tide began to turn again. A vigorous program of owner occupancy is now under way, with concomitant benefits of better maintenance and concern for neighborhood ambience through active neighborhood associations.

The purpose of this nomination is to identify and record those elements in the area that are of 19th century origin or character. The boundaries of component districts have been drawn to exclude so far as practicable 20th century influence seen to be at odds with the 19th century influences that are the basis of the nomination. Five buildings have been included by use of individual inventory forms. In total, less than half the area's overall land is included in the nomination.

In regard to survey methodology, it may be noted that the entire Asylum Hill area, and each building in it, have been examined by Anne Kuckro, Ann Havemeyer, and volunteer

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workers of the Hartford Architecture Conservancy in connection with that organization's ongoing Architectural Survey of Hartford under contract to the City of Hartford and the Connecticut Historical Commission. Ann Havemeyer assigned a construction date to each building by study of the city atlases, building permits, and appearance of the structure. Volunteers filled out a computer-readable inventory form for each building. Merle Kummer of the Conservancy directed a group of student volunteers who summarized the land records and wrote architectural descriptions for the more interesting houses. Information on Nook Farm has been furnished by The Stowe-Day Memorial Library at Nook Farm.

Approximately 275 structures in districts and recorded by individual inventory forms are covered by this inventory. Of these, 36 are considered not to contribute to the historic character of the area.

Most of the houses were built on Asylum Hill between 1880 and 1910, an era during which a wide variety of eclectic architectural styles were in fashion, including Queen Anne, High Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, Romanesque, Tudor Revival, Shingle and Stick Style, and the beginnings of the Classic Revival. All of these styles are represented in Asylum Hill, usually executed with careful craftsmanship in solid materials. Carpenters, joiners, brick layers, and stone masons did excellent work, frequently to the plans of well known architects whose designs are discussed more fully elsewhere in the nomination.

The scale and proportions of most of the houses fit the average lots that were 60-70 feet wide by 150 feet deep. Usually the house was set forward in the lot and filled most of its width, as can be seen in the attached 1880 and 1896 atlas maps, and current day map. There were few empty lots by World War II, and few parks, Sigourney Square being the chief exception. At the western edge of the area, along Forest Street and Woodland Street, the houses and lots were larger and the grounds were landscaped in park-like fashion, taking advantage of the attractive possibilities offered by the Park River. Farmington Avenue and Asylum Avenue were and are wider than the cross streets, but tall shade trees were planted along them all, and many of the trees survive to the present. The density of buildings and their relationship to one another have been changed primarily by the introduction of apartment houses in recent decades but most of these large new buildings have been excluded from the multiple resource districts.

At the turn of the century houses, churches, and schools comprised almost all the buildings in the area. Not even neighborhood grocery stores existed to the extent of more than two or three establishments, according to the old directories. There was no commercial activity of consequence. Now much of Farmington Avenue functions as a commercial strip, and there are a number of office buildings as well as insurance company home offices, all of which are excluded from the nomination.

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The ^{five} five districts and individual buildings in this nomination represent the 19th century character of Asylum Hill's heyday, singling out the outstanding buildings and most cohesive streetscapes. The Asylum Avenue District (Accompanying Documentation p.1-6a) contains the 19th-century institutional core of Asylum Hill, with several churches and a school as well as residences. The Collins and Townley Streets District (p.7-13) is a cohesive area of single and double houses from the last three decades of the 19th century. The Laurel and Marshall Streets District (p.14-20) has denser, more modest late 19th century streets, which include some early apartment houses. The Nook Farm and Woodland Street District (p.21-28) contains a number of outstanding houses, some developed as part of Nook Farm, the colony which once included Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe. The Imlay and Laurel Streets District (p.29-35) consists of middle-class housing from the last two decades of the 19th century. The five individually inventoried buildings, 136-138 and 142 Collins Street, 69 Farmington Avenue, 140 Hawthorn Street (John Hooker House) and 83-85 Sigourney Street are houses which do not stand in cohesive streetscapes yet have architectural or historic significance. Already on the National Register in Asylum Hill, but not included in this nomination, is the Sigourney Square District at the northern end (indicated on large map), and the Calvin Day House (Gray Lodge) at 105 Spring Street.

The general deterioration that set in, particularly after World War II, is by no means universal. Asylum Hill Congregational Church, Immanuel Congregational, and Trinity Church are now as elegant and as well maintained as they ever were. And in the Nook Farm sector the Mark Twain Memorial, Harriet Beecher Stowe House, and Day-Chamberlin House have been restored to a level of museum quality. Others, including the Lyman, Jacobus, Storrs, and Chaplin houses have been institutionalized and thus maintained. The vast majority of houses, however, have been converted to multiple residences by absentee landlords and have become run down to a greater or lesser degree. During the last five years a number of new owner-occupants have joined the core of resident owners who never left. Several insurance companies in the area have provided attractive financial incentives for their employees to buy houses in Asylum Hill. Neighborhood organizations have sprung up to speak for the community and promote its interests.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Asylum Hill was the fashionable residential section of Hartford in the late 19th century. The best materials and craftsmanship were used by leading architects in constructing the houses and churches, many of which still stand today, that give a sense of the area's affluent lifestyle at the turn of the century. Hartford's decision makers during these years lived on Asylum Hill. The surviving Victorian Gothic, Second Empire, Romanesque and Tudor Revival, Queen Anne, and Stick Style buildings are outstanding examples from this late 19th century upper middle class neighborhood.

At the beginning of the 19th century, streets in what is now the center of downtown Hartford, such as Prospect, Pearl, Ann, Elm, and High Streets, were the location of important homes. As the city grew and downtown became an undesirable area for homes, large residences were built south of downtown in the Charter Oak-South Green neighborhood. As desirable sites in this area immediately south of downtown were filled up, attention turned to the hill west of downtown and most of Hartford's fine houses for several decades were built on Asylum Hill. In mid-century the houses were surrounded by extensive grounds forming estates of considerable pretension. Among the families living along Farmington and Asylum Avenues in such estates were the Cooleys, active in finance; the Beaches, who conducted an importing business and were bankers; the Dixons, one of whom was a United States Senator; the Jewells, who conducted a manufacturing business and had one member who was Postmaster General and Ambassador to Russia; the Goodwins, important in trade and real estate development; the Collinses, merchants and bankers; and the Terrys, instrumental in forming an early insurance company. As the century waned the estates were broken up into conventional building lots.

The story of the sequence of desirable addresses for important people may be seen in capsule form in the sequence of home addresses of members of Hartford's oldest continuing law firm, Gross, Hyde and Williams. The first Mr. Gross lived on Elm Street, in center city. Mr. Hyde lived south of downtown on Charter Oak Place. The next generation of the Gross family lived on Asylum Avenue near their church, the Asylum Avenue Congregational. In the second decade of the 20th century the Gross family moved from Asylum Hill, further west. The term of their residence in Asylum Hill coincided with the area's peak period of prosperity and prominence.

The quality of Asylum Hill architecture derived in large part from the ability of the architects who designed houses there. Hartford architects William C. Brocklesby, Octavius Jordan, Hapgood and Hapgood, George Keller, and Isaac A. Allen, Jr., are known to have

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worked in the area. Out-of-town architects represented in Asylum Hill include Frederick C. Withers, Edward Tuckerman Potter, Richard M. Upjohn, Patrick C. Keely, Ernest Flagg, and Francis H. Kimball. Their work is discussed in "Accompanying Documentation."

From the Civil War to World War I, Asylum Hill was the area in Hartford where the best families lived. These people engaged the services of the best architects and contractors to design and build their homes. The buildings that remain in place from this era give valuable insight into the architecture and neighborhood relationships of an affluent 19th century neighborhood.

The survey and inventory of Asylum Hill being conducted by the Hartford Architecture Conservancy are part of a citywide project to be completed in 1978. At that time the Conservancy's report will become one of the planning tools available to city and state agencies. The research records and photographs generated during the project will be deposited at the Stowe-Day Research Library, where they will be on file for use by the public and by government agencies who may wish to consult them.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

F. Perry Close, History of Hartford Streets, Hartford: The Connecticut Historical Society, 1969.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY See individual districts and properties

QUADRANGLE NAME Hartford North QUADRANGLE SCALE 1:24 000

UTM REFERENCES See individual districts and properties

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See individual districts and properties

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Sally Zimmerman, Merle Kummer, and David Ransom

ORGANIZATION

Hartford Architecture Conservancy

DATE

April 16, 1978

STREET & NUMBER

65 Wethersfield Avenue

TELEPHONE

203 525-0279

CITY OR TOWN

Hartford

STATE

Connecticut 06114

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

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

STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER SIGNATURE

John W. Sherman

TITLE

Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

DATE

September 28, 1978

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Carol D. Skell
 ATTEST: *Carol D. Skell*
 CHIEF OF REGISTRATION

DATE

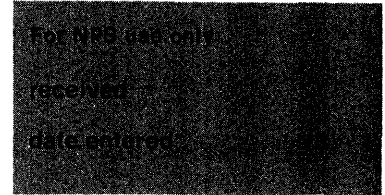
11-29-79

DATE

11/28/79

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

dnr-11

Name Asylum Hill Historic Multiple Resource Area Additions
State Hartford County, Connecticut

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

1. Garden Street District

Substantive Review

Keeper

Attest

Retain

ret ✓ 2. Linke, William L., House

Entered in the
National Register

for
Keeper

Delores Byers 7/24/84

Attest

ret ✓ 3. Spencer House

Entered in the
National Register

for
Keeper

Delores Byers 4/24/84

Attest

ret ✓ 4. House at 36 Forest Street

Entered in the
National Register

for
Keeper

Delores Byers 7/24/84

Attest

Not already in National Register
5. Myers and Gross Building

Substantive Review

Keeper

Attest

Forrest Dunlap 3/31/87

6. Apartment at 49-51 Spring Street

Substantive Review

Keeper

Attest

Forrest Dunlap 3/31/87

7.

Keeper

Attest

8.

Keeper

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest