

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only

received JUL 20 1987

date entered

SEP - 3 1987

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic N/A

and/or common Historic Resources of Downtown Bridgeport  
(Partial Inventory: Historic and Architectural Properties)

2. Location

street & number See continuation sheet N/A not for publication

city, town Bridgeport N/A vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Fairfield code 001

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> both	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Multiple	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> transportation
Resource Area	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name See continuation sheets

street & number

city, town \_\_\_\_\_ vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bridgeport City Hall - Town Clerk's Office

street & number 45 Lyon Terrace

city, town Bridgeport state Connecticut

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

State Register of Historic Places  
title (see continuation sheet) has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1986  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 S. Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

## 7. Description

<b>Condition</b>		<b>Check one</b>	<b>Check one</b>
<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

### METHODOLOGY

The documentation of the Downtown Bridgeport Multiple Resource Area (MRA) forms the end product of an intensive, integrated historical and architectural resource survey/National Register evaluation study compiled over the course of 1986 by Paul Loether and Dorothea Penar under the auspices of the City of Bridgeport and the Connecticut Historical Commission.

Work on the survey was initiated with a review of the records of the Connecticut Historical Commission, which indicated that the MRA encompassed seven properties which had been individually listed on the National Register prior to 1986 (for a detailed list of these properties, see Section 6:2). Survey work continued with the visual inspection, photographing, mapping, and cataloging of virtually every building located in the MRA. A detailed review of a wide range of primary and secondary documents was then undertaken for the purpose of compiling a general prose summary outlining the historic and architectural development of the MRA as a whole. Detailed research was also undertaken for all individual MRA properties except those listed on the National Register prior to 1986. Research on individual buildings was designed to develop an expanded, detailed, and accurate data base relating to construction dates and historic usages as well as architect, developer, and builder attributions.

The principal sources investigated in depth during the course of survey research included: local land, tax, and construction permit records; a series of detailed maps of the area dating from the 19th and 20th centuries; and old photographs and newspaper articles filed with the historic collections department of the Bridgeport Public Library. Other sources included a number of well-researched, published and unpublished works. Among the most useful of these works were local historian David Palmquist's Bridgeport - A Pictorial History, Municipal Registers of the City of Bridgeport, Bridgeport City Directories, and a draft of the detailed historical and summary of the history of Bridgeport compiled by Edward T. Mohylowski and Charles J. Hasbrouck as part of their 1985 "Historical and Architectural Survey of Bridgeport, Connecticut; Phase I - The East End."

The National Register study phase of the project was initiated immediately upon the completion of the survey. Utilizing the extensive survey-generated data, all MRA resources were carefully evaluated in light of existing

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**LOCATION (Cont.)**

The following is a list, by street and number, of all individual and historic district National Register properties located within the Bridgeport Central Business District Multiple Resource Area which were not listed as such on the National Register prior to January 1, 1987.

**- Historic Districts -**

**Bridgeport Downtown South Historic District**

Bank Street: Numbers 102, 110.

Broad Street: Numbers 925, 1006-18, 1050, 1057, 1083-95, 1072-94,  
1115-19, 1131, 1187.

Cannon Street: Numbers 33, 35, 39-45, 49-53, 59-69.

Elm Street: Numbers 166-70, 172-76.

Fairfield Avenue: Numbers 232-52, 239, 243, 245-47, 269-75, 274-78,  
277-81, 280-84, 288.

John Street: Numbers 60, 62, 66-68, 69-73, 134-40, 155.

Main Street: Numbers 811-15, 829-35, 855, 875, 914, 930, 939-51, 944,  
955-67, 956, 960, 966-68, 979-89, 984-86, 990, 991,  
993-1019, 996-98, 1021-29.

State Street: Numbers 98-118, 149-65, 167-69, 171-81, 189, 202,  
207-15.

Wall Street: Numbers 111, 115-17, 119-21.

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**LOCATION (Cont.)**

**Bridgeport Downtown North Historic District**

Chapel Street: Numbers 78, 89-105.

Elm Street: Numbers 84, 90-94

Fairfield Avenue: Number 140.

Gold Street: Number 79-81.

Golden Hill Street: Numbers 54, 145-53, 172-92, 225.

Main Street: Numbers 1079-95, 1105, 1111-27, 1120-26, 1128-36,  
1131-37, 1138-44, 1148-50, 1149-53, 1152-62,  
1155-59, 1179-95, 1180-88, 1192-94, 1196-98, 1200-10,  
1207-17, 1218-20, 1214-16, 1219-47, 1224-28, 1238-48,  
1250-52, 1258-60.

Middle Street: Numbers 109-11, 115-17, 119-25, 127-47, 140, 166-74,  
181-207, 190, 209-11, 227-41, 240, 254-62, 269,  
274, 281-89, 295.

**Golden Hill Historic District**

Chapel Street: Number 110.

Congress Street: Numbers 267, 273, 285, 293-97.

Golden Hill Street: Numbers 225, 239, 263, 279-97, 307, 319, 333-47.

Lyon Terrace: Numbers 44, 45, 54-56, 64, 74.

**- Individual Sites -**

Congress Street: Number 155.

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OWNER OF PROPERTY (Cont.)

**Proposed National Register Historic Districts:**

**Bridgeport Downtown North Historic District:**

Multiple Ownership - more than 50 properties.

**Bridgeport Downtown South Historic District:**

Multiple Ownership - more than 50 properties.

**Golden Hill Historic District:**

(Multiple ownership - less than 51 properties)

<u>Property Address</u>	<u>Owner/Mailing Address</u>
110 Chapel Street:	Alexander R. Finlayson 110 Chapel Street Bridgeport, CT 06604
267 Congress Street:	Jeanmarie Ryan 267 Congress Street Bridgeport, CT 06604
273 Congress Street:	N. Edwin Antignani and Robert Maresca 275 Congress Street Bridgeport, CT 06604
285 Congress Street:	Kenneth A. Janello 285 Congress Street Bridgeport, CT 06604
293-97 Congress Street:	Raymond B. Rubens and Samuel J. Lazinger 297 Congress Street Bridgeport, CT 06604

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**OWNER OF PROPERTY (Cont.)**

**Golden Hill Historic District (cont.)**

239 Golden Hill Street: Charles L. DeSiena and John D. Guman, Jr.  
239 Golden Hill Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

263 Golden Hill Street: City of Bridgeport  
c/o Stephen R. Sasala, AICP  
Office of Development Administration  
City of Bridgeport  
45 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

279-97 Golden Hill Street: Joseph A. Caserta  
124 Old Battery Road  
Bridgeport, CT

307 Golden Hill Street: Harry W. Congdon Association, Inc.  
307 Golden Hill Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

319 Golden Hill Street: Golden Hill United Methodist Church Trustees  
341 Golden Hill Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

333-47 Golden Hill Street: Golden Hill United Methodist Church Trustees  
341 Golden Hill Street  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

44 Lyon Terrace: Ernest A. Christopher  
44 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

45 Lyon Terrace: City of Bridgeport  
c/o Stephen R. Sasala  
Office of Development Administration  
45 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

54-56 Lyon Terrace: Salvatore C. DePiano, Trustee  
155 Holland Road  
Bridgeport, CT 06610

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**OWNER OF PROPERTY (Cont.)**

64 Lyon Terrace: Paul T. Tremont and Bernard Green  
64 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

74 Lyon Terrace: Lawrence J. Merly and Richard T. Meehan, Jr.  
76 Lyon Terrace  
Bridgeport, CT 06604

**Proposed Individual National Register Listings:**

Property Address

Owner/Mailing Address

55 Congress Street:	City of Bridgeport c/o Stephen R. Sasala, AICP Office of Development Administration City of Bridgeport 45 Lyon Terrace Bridgeport, CT 06604
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**REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS (Cont.)**

The following is a list of surveys pertaining to properties located in the Downtown Bridgeport MRA which were completed prior to 1987. Copies of each of the surveys listed below are filed with the Connecticut Historical Commission in Hartford, Connecticut. Copies of all federally sponsored surveys are also filed with the U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C.

**Federal Surveys (National Register Listings)**

- "Barnum Museum/Barnum Institute of Science and History (804-20 Main Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 11/7/72.
- "Fairfield County Courthouse/Bridgeport City Hall" (202 State Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 9/19/77.
- "Fairfield County Court House/Court of Common Pleas" (172 Golden Hill Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 1/2/82.
- "Hotel Beach/Hotel Barnum" (140 Fairfield Avenue, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 12/6/78.
- "Palace and Majestic Theaters" (1315-57 Main Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 12/14/78.
- "Sterling Block and Bishop Arcade/Bishop Block and Post Office Arcade" (993-1005 Main Street, Bridgeport, Connecticut): listed on National Register - 12/20/78.
- "United Illuminating Company Building" (1115-1119 Broad Street, Bridgeport Connecticut): listed on National Register - 2/21/85.

**Local Surveys**

- "Bridgeport Historic Resources Inventory, Phase II - Central Business District." - 1986.



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**METHODOLOGY (Cont.)**

National Register criteria. Properties deemed eligible for nomination to the National Register were then selected and appropriately catalogued as three historic districts and one individual site based on the current physical and visual characteristics of the MRA noted below (for a statistical summary of MRA National Register components, see Section 7:6, 7).

Large redevelopment projects executed in whole or in part since World War II have had a significant impact on the integrity of the historic appearance of the MRA as a whole. To a great extent, the construction of post-World War II limited-access highways in conjunction with demolition and new construction predetermined the appropriate arrangement of the MRA's National Register components as well as the MRA's overall boundaries. For example, the southwestern quadrant of the MRA is almost wholly dominated by post-World War II office buildings, parking garages, and a retail shopping mall constructed in accordance with the city's massive 52-acre State Street Redevelopment Plan of the 1960s.

During this same era, many of the 19th- and early 20th-century structures which once stood along Main Street and Housatonic Avenue in the northern end of the MRA were demolished in anticipation of new construction, much of which was never executed. Notable concentrations of post-1937 construction are also located between Fairfield Avenue and Cannon Street east of Broad Street, and in the State Street/Fairfield Avenue corridor between Water and Main Streets. As a result of the highly intrusive character of such modern demolition and construction, the bulk of the structures which today continue to provide an effective sense of downtown Bridgeport's historic pattern of development have been divided into three, distinct historic district groupings or individually identified.

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Downtown BridgeportSection number 7 Page 3**DESCRIPTION**

Located near the geographical heart of Bridgeport, the MRA encompasses the core of the city's present downtown commercial area, which evolved from the core of the 18th-century maritime village of Newfield and early 19th-century Borough of Bridgeport. The boundaries of the MRA as a whole are defined for the most part by prominent man made and natural physical/visual barriers. These barriers include: the Pequonnock River to the east; the raised roadway of Interstate 95 to the south; and the large, limited-access state highway known as Connecticut Routes 8 and 25 to the west and northwest. The northern boundary of the MRA is formed by a short segment of East Washington Avenue which extends east from Connecticut Routes 8 and 25 to the Pequonnock River.

Most land encompassed within the MRA assumes the form of a slightly inclined plane which rises gradually toward the base of a prominent knoll known as Golden Hill at the MRA's northwestern edge. Shaped like an irregular teardrop suspended from the north, the MRA embraces four major north/south traffic arteries: Water, Main, and Broad Streets, and Lafayette Boulevard, which forms the principal access road into the area from the Connecticut (now John D. Lodge) Turnpike. The foremost east/west traffic arteries traversing the MRA are Congress, Golden Hill, John, and State Streets, and Fairfield Avenue.

Overall, the MRA encompasses approximately 225 acres of land and 218 major structures. While these major structures include some examples of wood-frame construction, most buildings have load-bearing or curtain wall-style masonry exteriors of brick, cut stone, cast stone, and/or concrete block. A number of post-World War II structures also incorporate large exterior-wall panels of glass and/or Cararra glass. Most of the MRA is dominated by a mixture of small-, medium-, and large-scale commercial, religious, and municipal structures, roughly 80 percent of which date from the 1890s through the 1980s. The majority of these buildings are sited close to the street and each other, range from one to 11 stories in height, and have flat, low-hip, or shed roofs masked in whole or in part by parapets.

Only a handful of houses are included within the MRA. Most are situated near the crest of Golden Hill, date from the decades around the turn of the 20th century, and are presently used for professional office space. The majority of these houses are 2 1/2-story brick and/or frame structures topped by gable or gambrel roofs.

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Downtown BridgeportSection number 7 Page 4**DESCRIPTION (Cont.)**

The MRA's most notable public park space is a small green bordered by State, Bank, and Main Streets in the heart of the banking district, an area dominated by relatively high-style and monumental commercial structures designed by prominent late 19th/early 20th-century architects. Another large, open, park-like space is located adjacent to the rear of the present Bridgeport City Hall at 45 Lyon Terrace. Other open areas include a number of large and small grade-level parking lots which, like several modern, multi-level parking garages, are scattered throughout the MRA as a whole.

Virtually all of the MRA's historically significant architectural resources are located in its northwestern, northeastern, and southeastern quadrants. Historic architectural styles represented in these quadrants include varying interpretations of the Greek Revival, Italianate, late Gothic Revival, Romanesque, Beaux Arts, Georgian Revival, Colonial Revival, Art Deco, Tudor Revival, and Neoclassical modes. These portions of the MRA also encompass a number of modest, essentially functional late 19th- and early 20th-century commercial structures which, despite their lack of significant exterior stylistic characteristics, continue to form an integral part of the MRA's historic pre-World War II architectural mosaic.

The quadrants noted above include the MRA's three proposed historic districts, which encompass a total of approximately 57 acres of land and 129 properties. One hundred and one of these properties retain 102 buildings which contribute to the historical and/or architectural significance of their respective districts.

These portions of the MRA also embrace seven properties which are already listed on the National Register on an individual basis. These properties include: the Fairfield County Court House at 172-92 Golden Hill Street, the Barnum Museum at 804-20 Main Street, the Sterling House and Bishop Arcade at 993-1019 Main Street, the Hotel Barnum at 140 Fairfield Avenue, McLevy Hall at 202 State Street, the United Illuminating Company Building at 1115-25 Broad Street, and the Palace and Majestic Theaters at 1313-57 Main Street. Except for the Palace and Majestic Theaters, each of the National Register properties noted above also forms an integral component of one of the MRA's three proposed historic districts described on the following pages. The MRA's northeastern quadrant also includes an additional property deemed eligible for nomination to the National Register on an individual basis -- the former Connecticut Railway and Lighting Company Car Barn at 55 Congress Street.

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**DESCRIPTION (Cont.)**

The physical integrity of most of the MRA's historically/architecturally significant structures ranges from good to excellent. Individually listed National Register structures retain a substantial level of historic architectural integrity. Only a handful of 19th- and early 20th-century historic district buildings were altered between the 1950s and 1980s to the point where they can no longer be considered as contributory. In most cases, significant exterior alterations to historic district buildings are limited to non-historic storefronts and/or signage fabric. The bulk of such modifications generally appear to be reversible, or have only limited impact with respect to the significant architectural characteristics of a building as a whole. While in need of extensive rehabilitation, the significant exterior features of the roughly half-dozen deteriorating historic structures located in the districts either remain substantially intact or appear to be in reparable condition. Despite alterations and modern intrusions, historic building groups in each of the districts continue to effectively function as coherent and cohesive representations of the types of streetscapes which dominated most of the MRA by the early 20th century.

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DESCRIPTION (Cont.)

**Downtown Bridgeport MRA - Statistical Summary**

Downtown Bridgeport MRA (in entirety)

Acreage: approximately 225

Properties: approximately 245

Buildings: 218

National Register Properties Listed Prior to 1986

1. Barnum Museum/Barnum Institute of Science and Technology (804-20 Main Street).\*\*
2. Fairfield County Courthouse/Bridgeport City Hall (202 State Street).\*\*
3. Fairfield County Courthouse/Court of Common Pleas (172 Golden Hill Street).\*\*
4. Hotel Beach/Hotel Barnum (140 Fairfield Avenue).\*\*
5. Palace and Majestic Theaters (1315-57 Main Street).
6. Sterling Block and Bishop Arcade/Bishop Block and Post Office Arcade (993-1005 Main Street).\*\*
7. United Illuminating Company Building (1115-19 Main Street).\*\*

(\*\*Properties also located within proposed MRA historic districts.)

Properties Proposed for Individual National Register Listing

1. Connecticut Railway and Lighting Company Car Barn (55 Congress Street).

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**DESCRIPTION (Cont.)**

**Downtown Bridgeport MRA - Statistical Summary (cont.)**

Proposed MRA Historic Districts

Bridgeport Downtown South Historic District

Acreage: approximately 27

Properties: 62

Structures: 62

Contributing Structures: 50

Bridgeport Downtown North Historic District

Acreage: approximately 20

Properties: 51

Structures: 49

Contributing Structures: 38

Golden Hill Historic District

Acreage: approximately 10

Properties: 16

Structures: 16

Contributing structures: 14

## 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

**Specific dates** See #7: building inventories  
**Builder/Architect** See #7: building inventories

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

#### Criterion C -

The Downtown Bridgeport MRA is historically significant as the area which emerged over the course of the 19th and early 20th centuries as the commercial, financial, social, and cultural heart of Connecticut's foremost early 20th-century urban-industrial center. The MRA is architecturally significant for two reasons. First, it retains three notable concentrations of buildings, as well as two substantially intact, relatively isolated structures, which effectively document the area's principal period of significance. Second, it retains a sizable number of distinguished individual buildings designed in a variety of different architectural styles. Many of these latter buildings are known to have been designed by locally or nationally renowned 19th- and early 20th-century architects, such as A.J. Davis, Cass Gilbert, James Gamble Rogers, Warren Briggs, George Freeman, E.B. Caldwell, Dennison and Hiron, and Ernest G. Southey.

#### Historical Background

The early history of Bridgeport's modern central business district can be traced to the 18th-century emergence of the Town of Stratford's village of Newfield. Prior to the Revolutionary War, the village of Newfield consisted of little more than a few hardy families occupying a handful of houses clustered along the Pequonnock River near the head of Bridgeport Harbor by the western end of the present Stratford Avenue Bridge.

As a result of New England's post-Revolutionary boom in the coasting and West Indies trades, Newfield's advantageous location adjacent to one of Connecticut's better natural harbors soon fostered its development as a thriving maritime village. By 1800, the village's population and economic viability had reached the point where the state legislature was willing to incorporate it as a distinct governmental entity -- the Borough of Bridgeport -- within the larger Town of Stratford.

Despite economic hardships associated with the Great Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812, the borough's emergence as a significant commercial port and population center continued at a dramatic pace during the early 1800s. (In 1820 Bridgeport's population was roughly 15 times as large as it had been in 1790.) By 1821, the borough's rapid expansion and growing importance as a port had resulted in its incorporation by the Connecticut legislature as a fully independent town.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheets

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property approximately 225 (Downtown Bridgeport Multiple Resource Area)  
Quadrangle name Bridgeport Quadrangle scale 1:24000

### UTM References

A	1 8	6 5 1 7 0 0	4 5 6 0 7 3 0	B	1 8	6 5 2 1 2 0	4 5 6 0 2 6 0
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	1 8	6 5 2 1 0 0	4 5 5 9 7 5 0	D	1 8	6 5 1 7 8 0	4 5 5 9 2 1 0
E	1 8	6 5 1 6 0 0	4 5 5 9 2 1 0	F	1 8	6 5 1 3 6 0	4 5 5 9 6 1 0
G	1 8	6 5 1 5 4 0	4 5 6 0 6 8 0	H			

### Verbal boundary description and justification

See section # 7 and attached maps; see also - continuation sheets relating to historic districts and sites.

### List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A
state	N/A	code	N/A	county	N/A	code	N/A

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title J. Paul Loether/Principal, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization J.P. Loether Associates date March 20, 1987

street & number 35 Pierpont Street telephone (203) 787-3437

city or town New Haven state Connecticut

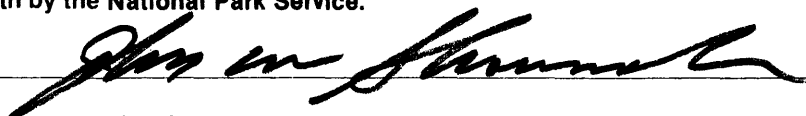
# 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

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



title Director, Connecticut Historical Commission

date July 17, 1987

### For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

*Patrick Anders*

date 9/3/87

Keeper of the National Register

Attest: See Continuation Sheet for Justification

date

Chief of Registration



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**SIGNIFICANCE (Cont.)**

Growth and prosperity continued in Bridgeport during the 1820s and 1830s. During this era, portions of the core village area, especially in the environs of the waterfront, gradually began to assume a more commercialized appearance. Many streets increasingly became lined with groups of business-related structures, such as tradesmen's shops, inns, markets, wharves, and warehouses. (Many of these early business-related structures were destroyed in a massive fire which engulfed much of the area adjacent to the city's waterfront in December of 1845.) As a means of consolidating and stimulating the area's growing commercial interests, in 1836 Bridgeport's expanding "downtown" core was finally incorporated as a city and granted municipal powers distinct from those of the surrounding Town of Bridgeport.

The continued growth and prosperity of the new City of Bridgeport through the 1850s remained strongly tied to its development into a major regional commercial and transportation center. From this standpoint, the selection of Bridgeport's harbor as the terminus of the 1840 Housatonic Railroad line from New Milford gave the city an advantage over other notable Fairfield County ports of this era. This advantage was both sustained and enhanced by the attraction of a number of other railroad lines over the course of the ensuing years. By the early 1850s, downtown Bridgeport had achieved an enviable position as one of the state's principal commercial and transportation loci. In 1853, the city's emerging status as Fairfield County's preeminent regional center was further boosted when, following intensive lobbying on the part of a number of its citizens, Bridgeport was selected over Norwalk as the new county seat.

While commerce and transportation continued to play a highly significant role in the City of Bridgeport's growth well into the 20th century, by the onset of the Civil War, industrialization had begun to emerge as the principal determinant of Bridgeport's future character. The successful attraction of the Wheeler and Wilson Sewing Machine Company in 1856 by the city's most renowned 19th-century resident, showman and entrepreneur P.T. Barnum, presaged a virtual explosion of industrial development, related immigrant worker-based population growth, and the development of large new residential neighborhoods in Bridgeport as a whole over the course of the next 70 years.

During the second half of the 19th century, a number of smaller and even a few of the city's larger industrial enterprises were established within or

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Downtown BridgeportSection number 8 Page 3**SIGNIFICANCE (Cont.)**

along the fringes of Bridgeport's expanding downtown. However, most eventually situated along the railroad rights-of-way to the north, east, and south of the city's antebellum core. As Bridgeport's development into Connecticut's foremost early 20th-century industrial and population center progressed, most of this antebellum core gradually began to shed its remaining residential vestiges. As banks, meeting halls, retail shops, restaurants, hotels, and markets grew in both size and number, by the latter decades of the 19th century the city's downtown not only became firmly established as the undisputed commercial, financial, social, and cultural heart of Bridgeport proper, but the greater Bridgeport area as well.

Fueled by a constantly increasing influx of immigrant workers, the steady expansion of Bridgeport's population during the late 19th/early 20th centuries led to ever-increasing demands for the provision and improvement of municipal and quasi-municipal services. In order to meet these increasing demands, by the early 20th century the city government embarked upon a program to improve municipally funded fire protection and educational and library services and facilities, both within the city's downtown and Bridgeport as a whole.

One of the most important improvements in local quasi-municipal services during this era proved to be the further development and expansion of Bridgeport's public transit system. By the end of the first decade of the 20th century, numerous electrified streetcar lines operated by the Connecticut Railway and Lighting Company crosshatched Bridgeport's downtown. Perhaps more important, streetcar lines were continually being extended further and further outward from the city's central business district into outlying suburban neighborhoods and adjacent towns. As the system's expansion progressed, it helped to sustain downtown Bridgeport's status as the region's preeminent urban center by providing the rapidly growing number of residents in Bridgeport's hinterland with relatively ready access to all which the city's booming central business district had to offer.

The World War I era proved to be the heyday for downtown Bridgeport in terms of its development as a prosperous urban-industrial center. However, with the end of the war came the cancellation of virtually all war-related orders, drastic cutbacks in industrial production on the part of most city

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## SIGNIFICANCE (Cont.)

firms, and extensive worker layoffs. Virtually overnight, Bridgeport was plunged into a severe postwar economic recession. By the early 1920s, however, Bridgeport had begun to experience a return to some measure of prosperity. This economic resurgence was reflected in the widespread resumption of major new construction within its downtown. The resurgence was sustained until the onset of the Great Depression, during which the downtown entered into an era of physical and economic decline from which it never fully recovered.

As in most of the state's aging industrial centers, by the early 1950s Bridgeport's central business district faced a number of growing problems. They included rising crime rates, outmoded traffic patterns, and street congestion brought on by the rapidly expanding use of personal automobiles and inadequate parking facilities. Perhaps most important, the increasing outmigration of the city's middle-class residents to the suburbs and the rise of suburban shopping plazas worked in concert to foster the decline in importance of Bridgeport's downtown as a commercial center.

Like similar Connecticut communities such as New Haven, Bridgeport's early post-World War II attempts to successfully deal with these problems soon became focused on the development and implementation of major downtown redevelopment programs. One of the most significant results of Bridgeport's redevelopment efforts of this era was the construction of the present limited-access highways along the southern and western perimeters of its downtown. The other major result was the demolition of virtually all extant structures in the downtown's southwestern quadrant to make way for the construction of modern office buildings and a shopping mall in accordance with the provisions of the city-sponsored, 52-acre State Street Redevelopment Plan of the 1960s.

## Architectural Significance

The remaining historic structures in the downtown Bridgeport strongly reflect the development of the MRA's appearance and character during its period of greatest significance. The area includes numerous good, substantially intact examples of streetscapes dominated by buildings designed and built between 1840 and the onset of World War II for commercial, municipal, industrial, residential, or religious usage. From the standpoint of design, these buildings include an extremely broad and interpretative variety of popular architectural styles ranging from the Greek Revival mode of the mid-19th century (photograph 15) to the late Italianate, Romanesque, Queen

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Downtown BridgeportSection number 8 Page 5**SIGNIFICANCE (Cont.)**

Anne, Gothic Revival, Art Deco, and various classically derived revival modes of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries (photographs 1, 2-30). From a visual standpoint, the exterior detailing, stylistic qualities, construction materials, proportions, scale, and/or siting characteristics of these historic buildings clearly distinguish them from the post-World War II construction which today dominates the remainder of the MRA.

A number of the MRA's remaining historic structures reflect important aspects with respect to the historic development of the MRA as well as Bridgeport as a whole. For example, the 1854 Fairfield County Courthouse (now McLevy Hall) at 202 State Street stands as an important reflection of Bridgeport's establishment as the seat of Fairfield County in the 1850s. The numerous monumental banking structures, office buildings, retail stores, and hotels erected in the vicinity of State, Main, and Broad Streets and Fairfield Avenue during the early 20th century strongly reflect the fact that this era was the heyday for downtown Bridgeport as a prosperous urban-industrial center. Likewise, the construction of the massive Bridgeport High School (now Bridgeport City Hall - photograph 29) building on Lyon Terrace in 1914-16 provides clear evidence of the city's industrial-based prosperity and population boom during years immediately prior to the United States' entry into World War I. Today, the former Connecticut Railway and Lighting Company Car Bar at 55 Congress Street stands as the last tangible vestige of an early 20th-century public transit system which formed the principal tie between downtown Bridgeport and its expanding early 20th-century suburban hinterland.

From a purely architectural standpoint, the MRA encompasses a number of distinguished individual buildings. These buildings include several which were individually listed on National Register prior to 1987, such as the Neoclassical-style Palace and Majestic Theaters (designed by Thomas Lamb, 1921-22), the Greek Revival-style McLevy Hall (designed by A.J. Davis, 1854), and the Richardsonian Romanesque-style Fairfield County Courthouse (designed by Warren Briggs, 1888).

The MRA's historic districts also retain a number of outstanding commercial structures whose designers remain unknown. Examples of such structures include the Barnum-Thompson and Staples Buildings (photograph 12) and the F.B. Curtis Building (photograph 18). However, most of the many individually distinctive buildings in the districts are known to stand as

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**SIGNIFICANCE (Cont.)**

examples of the work of prominent architects. Buildings for which definitive attributions are known include the Richardsonian Romanesque-style Bridgeport Boys Club (Warren Briggs, 1900 - photograph 20), the Neoclassical-style Bridgeport Trust Company (George Freeman, 1915 - photograph 11), the Neoclassical-style Bridgeport Savings Bank (Cass Gilbert, 1917 - photograph 11), the Neoclassical-style Mechanics and Farmers Savings Bank (Ernest G. Southey, 1930 - photograph 8), the Neoclassical-style Bridgeport High School (James Gable Rogers, 1914 - photograph 29), the Colonial Revival-style Morris Plan Bank (E.G. Southey, 1924 - photograph 10), and the Art Deco-style Bridgeport Hydraulic Company (Ernest G. Southey, 1931 - photograph 7), to name but a few.

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Multiple Resource Area  
Thematic Group

Name Downtown Bridgeport MRA  
State Fairfield County, CONNECTICUT

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

Cover

~~Substantive Review~~

for Keeper Patrick Anders 9/3/87

1. Connecticut Railway and  
Lighting Company Car Barn

for Keeper Patrick Anders 12/3/87

Attest Barry Savage 12/3/87

2. Golden Hill Historic  
District

~~Substantive Review~~

for Keeper Patrick Anders 9/3/87

Attest Barry Savage 9/3/87

3. Bridgeport Downtown North  
Historic District

~~Added in 1981  
National Register~~

for Keeper Delores Byers 11/2/87

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

4. Bridgeport Downtown South  
Historic District

~~Added in 1981  
National Register~~

for Keeper Delores Byers 9-3-87

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

5.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

6.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

7.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_

8.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

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9.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

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10.

Keeper \_\_\_\_\_

Attest \_\_\_\_\_