

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION

59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM

For Buildings and Structures

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY			
TOWN NO.:	SITE NO.:		
UTM: 18/	/	/	/
QUAD:			
DISTRICT:	S	NR:	ACTUAL POTENTIAL

IDENTIFICATION

- 1. BUILDING NAME: Common: Honors College Historic: Russell House
- 2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: _____ COUNTY: Middlesex
- 3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 350 High Street
- 4. OWNER(S): Wesleyan University PUBLIC PRIVATE
- 5. USE: Present: University functions Historic: Residence
- 6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: yes no
Interior accessible: yes, explain with permission no

DESCRIPTION

- 7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Greek Revival DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1828
- 8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
 clapboard asbestos siding brick
 wood shingle asphalt siding fieldstone
 board & batten stucco scored to resemble ashlar cobblestone
 aluminum siding concrete: type: _____ cut stone: type: brownstone
 other: flushboarded pediment foundation
- 9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
 wood frame: post and beam balloon
 load bearing masonry structural iron or steel
 other: _____
- 10. ROOF: type:
 gable flat mansard monitor sawtooth
 gambrel shed hip round other _____
material:
 wood shingle roll asphalt tin slate
 asphalt shingle built up tile other: _____
- 11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 3 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 46'x68' (north wing 31'x34')
- 12. CONDITION: Structural: excellent good fair deteriorated
Exterior: excellent good fair deteriorated
- 13. INTEGRITY: Location: on original site moved, when: _____
Alterations: no yes, explain: North wing added ca. 1855; rear portico enclosed ca. 1855
- 14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
 barn shed garage other landscape features or buildings: bathhouse
 carriage house shop garden and necessary
- 15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: College campus
 open land woodland residential scattered buildings visible from site
 commercial industrial rural high building density

16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: This Greek Revival mansion faces west from the southeast corner of High and Washington Streets. The large scale of execution and the imposing qualities of the architecture enable this building to dominate the surrounding area. High Street during the 19th and early 20th centuries was the most prestigious residential area in Middletown. It is now part of the campus of Wesleyan University.

17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):

Full height Corinthian portico
Trompe L'oeil interior wall paintings

SIGNIFICANCE

Architect: Ithiel Town Builder: Curtis & Hoadley (New Haven)

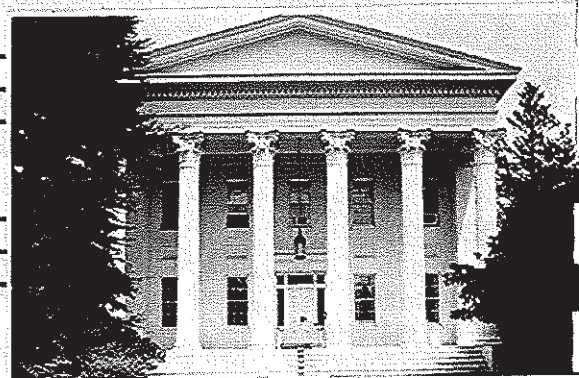
18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This building was erected in 1828 for Samuel Russell (1789-1862). Russell founded the trading firm of Russell & Company in Canton, China after serving there as trading representative of the Providence firm of Edward Carrington & Company. Between 1818 and 1831 Russell's fortune was made in the illegal yet highly profitable importation of Turkish and Bengal opium into the port of Canton and the exportation of fine teas and silks from there to Europe and the United States. In 1828 when his house was built Russell was in Canton, and his friend Samuel D. Hubbard worked with Mrs. Russell to supervise the building of the house. In 1831 Russell returned to Middletown and his new home where he resided until his death in 1862. Four subsequent generations of Russells occupied the house until it was given to Wesleyan by Thomas MacDonough Russell, Jr. in 1936.

The Russell House was designed by Ithiel Town, one of the period's foremost architects and a major proponent of the Greek Revival style in America. David Hoadley, a prominent New Haven builder-architect, superintended the construction. The house has

(see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: John E. Reynolds
date: 7/78 view: west
negative on file: Roll 29, #1



(see continuation sheet)

COMPILED BY:

name: John E. Reynolds date: 5/78
organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

19. SOURCES: Middletown Land Records; Middletown City Directories; Jesse Alsop, "Samuel Russell House," Old Houses of Connecticut Series (FERA, 1935); Connecticut State Historical Commission Survey, 1970; Alain D. Munkittrick, ed., "The Samuel Russell House Correspondence" (unpublished,
20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

none known highways vandalism developers other: _____
 renewal private deterioration zoning explanation: _____

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CONTINUATION SHEET

Form number: 18&19 Date: 5/78Russell House350 High Street, Middletown, Ct. 06457

#18

the form of a Greek temple with six full height Corinthian columns supporting a heavy entablature and low flushboarded pediment. The front (west) wall has five bays with recessed panels between the first and second story windows except in the center bay, where pilasters support a high entablature over the double entrance door. This doorway is surrounded by side and overlights whose frames are decorated with fretwork. The windows on the two-bay side facades are separated vertically by panels like those on the front. Stucco scribed to resemble large block ashlar covers the brick masonry walls.

An anthemion decorative motif is used on the portico column capitals, front corner pilasters, and in the attic window screen covers. The heavy entablature has three bands in the architrave; a band of foliated molding under the plain frieze; and a denticulated cornice defined by a bead and reel molding and an elaborate crown molding. Around 1855 the rear portico was enclosed and is now divided by six pilasters (originally square pillars) into five bays of windows with small protruding balconies in the end bays. A two story north wing, added around 1855, is attributed to Alexander Jackson Davis, a former partner of Ithiel Town. Although not consistent with the symmetry of the whole, it is treated sympathetically through the use of identical pilasters and entablature.

The Russell estate occupied all of the block bounded by High, Court, Pearl and Washington Streets. Extensive grounds behind Russell House sloping down to Pearl Street were planted with formal gardens which included boxwood imported from England and plants brought from China by Samuel Russell. A double stair of intricate ironwork was added to the rear of the house at the time the portico was enclosed. It leads from the first floor down to the garden lawn.

The interior is divided by a spacious center hall with two rooms on either side. A stairway with landing is at the end of the hall. The four chimney stacks are placed in the outside wall of each of the rooms off the hall. The south parlors communicate through a set of folding doors, while the original north rooms have been opened up to provide a single large space.

Close attention to detail characterizes the decorative treatment throughout the interior. Trompe l'oeil wall paintings simulate panelling on the walls of the north main rooms, entrance hall, and stair-well. Similarly elaborate decoration is seen in the marble fireplaces with Ionic columns supporting the mantle pieces, and in the recessed panelling of the doors and folding window shutters. A wide frieze and heavy cornice of decorative plaster define the high ceilings of the interior.

The Russell House represents a significant stage in the development of Greek Revival architecture in America. In his work Town and Davis, Architects, Roger Hale Newton mentions the Russell House as "indicative of the hand of Town in its undeniable sophistication." Professor Talbot Hamlin places its design "in the richest Greek vein" and also states that "its Corinthian columns and open plan are urban and magnificent rather than in the simple old tradition." Newton elaborates on the latter point when he states that the communicating suite of parlors with their grand scale "may have reflected an urban development quite contrary... to the prevailing modern provincial places." The Russell House demonstrates an early attempt by Ithiel Town to match the sophisticated design of an imposing Greek temple form with a compatible interior plan suited to living

and entertaining on a grand scale. This plan was used in Town and Davis' later work in New York, and its successful application to the temple form provided a basis for vernacular interpretations of the Greek Revival style which dominated residential construction until the advent of picturesque architecture.

The construction of the Russell House in 1828 established a standard of luxury and elegance for the residential architecture on High Street during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Although many other imposing homes were built in this area of Middletown, the Russell House was never surpassed in sophistication and grandeur. It stands a monument to the personal qualities of Samuel Russell and to the exciting era of the China trade when Russell carried Middletown's mercantile tradition to its greatest heights.

#19

GMPT files, May, 1972); A.D. Munkittrick, "Samuel Wadsworth Russell (1789-1862); A Study of Ordered Investment" (unpublished thesis, 1973), Honors College File, Wesleyan Archives; Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America, (New York: Dover Publications, 1964); Roger H. Newton, Town & Davis Architects, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1942); 1851 Clark Map; 1877 Bailey Map; 1915 Aeroview Map