

STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECTICUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(860) 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: Afro-American Center Historic: Thomas MacDonough Russell House
2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: _____ COUNTY: Middlesex
3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 343 High Street
4. OWNER(S): Wesleyan University PUBLIC PRIVATE
5. USE: Present: Afro American Studies Center Historic: Residence
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: yes no
Interior accessible: yes, explain _____ no

DESCRIPTION

7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Georgian Revival DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1901-02
8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
 clapboard asbestos siding brick
 wood shingle asphalt siding fieldstone
 board & batten stucco cobblestone
 aluminum siding concrete: type: poured foundation cut stone: type: marble sills and lintels
 other: wooden trim
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
 wood frame: post and beam balloon
 load bearing masonry structural iron or steel
 other: _____
10. ROOF: type:
 gable original flat mansard monitor sawtooth
 gambrel rear shed hip round other _____
 material:
 wood shingle roll asphalt tin slate
 asphalt shingle built up tile other: 54'x35' (wing 18'x38')
11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2½ APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 1954 addition 77'x37'
12. CONDITION: Structural: excellent good fair deteriorated
 Exterior: excellent good fair deteriorated
13. INTEGRITY: Location: on original site moved, when: _____
 Alterations: no yes, explain: West dormitory wing added 1954; interior remodelled 1954; repairs for fire damage 1968
14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
 barn shed garage other landscape features or buildings: _____
 carriage house shop garden _____
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 large Colonial Revival building faces east from the southwest corner of High Street and Washington Terrace. It is surrounded by lawns on its large corner site. Across High Street is the imposing Greek Revival Russell House (1828). This area, Middletown's most prestigious 19th century residential district, is now a part of the Wesleyan University campus.

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

Front entrance with side lights and elliptical fanlight
Columned two story entrance portico with half round fanlight in pediment
Pedimented dormers and balustrade on hip roof

SIGNIFICANCE

Builder: Robert W. Burke

Architect: _____

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This large scale Colonial Revival house was built for Thomas MacDonough Russell in 1901-1902. Thomas MacDonough Russell was an architect and civil engineer, and the founder and president of the T.M. Russell Engineering & Supply Company. He served as Mayor of Middletown in 1908-09. In 1916 he became president of the Russell Manufacturing Company, founded in 1834 by his great-grandfather Samuel Russell, who built Russell House across the street. Thomas MacDonough Russell moved into Russell House in 1930, and his own house was sold to Wesleyan in 1934 for use as a faculty club. In 1954 renovation converted the building into quarters for the John Wesley Club, a non-fraternity social organization. This included a thirty room dormitory addition to the west. An extensive fire in 1967 ended a one year occupation by EQV fraternity; after repairs the building was used to house offices and students. It is now occupied by the Afro-American Society.

This house makes use of Colonial Revival decorative elements on a grand scale: Palladian windows; denticulated cornices; pedimented dormers; balustrade on hip roof and two story columned entrance portico. These elements combine with the large scale, symmetrical

(see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Robert Svec
date: 5/78 view: east
negative on file: Roll 20, #24

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; 1915 Aeroview Map; "John Wesley House" file, Wesleyan Archives

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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center hall plan and large chimney masses to create one of the best examples of Colonial Revival architecture in Middletown. Both Thomas MacDonough Russell's brother Samuel Russell, Jr., and father, Samuel Russell, Sr. were also trained as architects. Speculation concerning the attribution of this building to one of these men rests on this training and similarities to other Russell family buildings which, however, are also undocumented designs. This house marked the end of High Street's reign as the preferred residential neighborhood of Middletown's leading families. This character was transformed during the 20th century by Wesleyan University's ever-expanding presence in the area.