

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: Davison Art Center Historic: Richard Alsop IV House
- 2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown VILLAGE: _____ COUNTY: Middlesex
- 3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 301 High Street
- 4. OWNER(S): Wesleyan University PUBLIC PRIVATE
- 5. USE: Present: Art Center Historic: Residence
- 6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: yes no
Interior accessible: yes, explain galleries; restored rooms open no

DESCRIPTION

- 7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Greek Revival-Italianate DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1838-1839
- 8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):

<input type="checkbox"/> clapboard	<input type="checkbox"/> asbestos siding	<input type="checkbox"/> brick
<input type="checkbox"/> wood shingle	<input type="checkbox"/> asphalt siding	<input type="checkbox"/> fieldstone
<input type="checkbox"/> board & batten	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> stucco	<input type="checkbox"/> cobblestone
<input type="checkbox"/> aluminum siding	<input type="checkbox"/> concrete: type: _____	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> cut stone: type: <u>brownstone</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> other: _____		
- 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: 45'x38'; wing 54'x19';
- 11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2 APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: gallery 43'x22'; library 57'x60
- 12. CONDITION: Structural: excellent good fair deteriorated
Exterior: excellent good fair deteriorated
- 13. INTEGRITY: Location: on original site moved, when: _____
Alterations: no yes, explain: Colonnade enclosed; gallery and library wings added
- 14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
 barn shed garage other landscape features or buildings: parking lot, north side; iron fence along High Street
 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 stately mansion faces east to the Connecticut River from the west side of High Street opposite the intersection of Court Street. It is set back from the street atop a rise. A high iron fence borders the property along High Street. This house makes an important contribution to the elegance and high style which characterized High Street as the preferred residential area in nineteenth-century Middletown. It is now part of the campus of Wesleyan University.

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

- Tuscan veranda with elaborate ironwork
- Stucco scribed to resemble ashlar
- Trompe l'oeil paintings exterior (figures in niches)
- Interior wall paintings
- Antique furnishings

SIGNIFICANCE L. Beach Platt & Francis Benne Architect: _____ of New Haven
 Barzillai Sage-mason Builder: Isaac Baldwin-carpenter

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: The Alsop house was built in 1838-1839 by Richard Alsop, IV for his twice-widowed mother, Mrs. Maria (Alsop) Dana. The firm of Platt & Benne of New Haven was evidently responsible for the design, although it is possible that they drew their inspiration from Ithiel Town's own home in New Haven, which may account for the similarities of the two structures as well as for a former attribution of the Alsop House to Town himself. The well-known Middletown builders, Barzillai Sage and Isaac W. Baldwin, performed the masonry and carpentry work, respectively. The house remained in the hands of the Alsop family until its acquisition in 1948 by Wesleyan University.

This house is significant architecturally for its transitional Greek-Tuscan Italianate appearance. The cubical, two-story, central block with overhanging eaves is flanked by colonnaded one-and-a-half story wings. A swag and tassel design decorates the frieze of the central block, which also displays a veranda supported by delicate ironwork and surmounted by an intricate balustrade.

A rear colonnaded wing which originally housed servant's quarters and service facilities (see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: John E. Reynolds
 date: 11/77 view: east
 negative on file: Roll 2, #20

COMPILED BY:

name: John E. Reynolds date: 9/78
 organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
 address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457



19. SOURCES: Research provided by Smith Edwards Architects, 331 Wethersfield Ave., Hartford, Ct. 06114, 1979; Descriptive Brochure, "The Davison Art Center" Wesleyan University

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

Item number: 18 Date: 9/78

Richard Alsop IV House
301 High St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

#18

has been enclosed. At the west end of this wing are attached an art gallery of recent construction and the art library, originally the stable.

The interior of the Alsop house is noted for its decorative wall paintings. The stair hall displays trompe l'oeil painting of figures in niches, while the parlors, dining room and morning-room feature oil-on-plaster paintings. The parlor paintings are classically derived and some of the subjects are Raphaelesque in origin. In the morning room the formal classicism of the parlors is replaced by scenes derived from the "rural" Italian tradition of wall decoration. Local birds and insects are featured in these scenes. The dining room displays a painted frieze.

The main rooms of the house are furnished with period antiques and provide a suitable atmosphere in which to display the wall painting.

In its carefully restored condition, the Alsop house remains a monument to the skill of its designers, while serving Wesleyan University and the community as an art center.