

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only

received JUL 3 1986
date entered AUG 6 1986

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

1. Name

historic Woodrow Wilson High School

and/or common Woodrow Wilson High School

2. Location

street & number Hunting Hill Avenue and Russell Street N.A. not for publication

city, town Middletown N.A. vicinity of

state Connecticut code 09 county Middlesex code 007

3. Classification

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

4. Owner of Property

name Christopher Carr (Southern New England Management)

street & number 200 North Main Street

city, town East Longmeadow N.A. vicinity of state Massachusetts 01028

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Town Clerk's Office, Municipal Building

street & number de Koven Drive

city, town Middletown state Connecticut 06457

6. Representation in Existing Surveys See continuation sheet.

title State Register of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1986 federal state county local

depository for survey records Connecticut Historical Commission, 59 South Prospect Street

city, town Hartford state Connecticut

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input 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 type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Woodrow Wilson High School is a load-bearing masonry building of brick and concrete built in 1930-31 in the Georgian Revival style, with a Classical Revival-style entrance pavilion. It is located in the southern part of the City of Middletown in a suburban residential neighborhood which developed between 1930 and 1950. Prior to 1930, the area was primarily rural with a few houses built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The school site had been part of a working farm. Hunting Hill Avenue was laid out in this area when the school was constructed. Across Hunting Hill Avenue is the second Woodrow Wilson High School built in 1956. To the rear is a large municipal field which predates 1930 and formed part of the high school's playing field.

The original main block (200' x 65') has a hip roof covered with slate. It extends along Hunting Hill Avenue, facing east, with an axially balanced facade, three stories in height, and a centrally located entrance pavilion (Photographs #1, 2). See Exhibit A for schematic diagram of building. Constructed of simulated stone (cast of concrete), this pavilion has a full pediment with modillions, a two-story section containing two pairs of pilasters, flanking three-part, multipaned windows (second and third floors), and the main entrance to the building (Photographs #3, 4). The Classical Revival influence is displayed in the moulded swags in the panel between the windows, a motif which is repeated in the pediment, and the Corinthian capitals on the pilasters. On either side of the main pavilion a four-bay projection of brick is set off from the facade by the cast-concrete quoins, a Georgian Revival-style feature. The Georgian stylistic influence is also seen in the use of keystones in the window lintels of the entire facade. The more elaborate treatment of this type is reserved for the windows in the flanking four-bay sections, where the first- and second-floor windows utilize a one-piece, cast lintel facing which incorporates the keystone. The third-floor windows have brick lintels with a contrasting keystone of cast concrete. Similarly, "keystones" are found on the remaining windows of the facade at the first and second floors. The hip roof of the main block is covered with slate and surmounted by a belltower with a dome. The arched windows of the two-staged tower are presently hidden by modern aluminum siding, one of two exterior alterations made to the historic fabric of the building. The other was the addition of one set of modern windows in the top floor of the south elevation (Photograph #8).

Matching large tri-partite windows topped by semi-circular fanlights occur at each end of the main block and provide light to the stairwells at each end and the central corridors which run the length of the building. The glazing in the south end is a replacement. This typical Georgian Revival-style feature is also found at the rear of the original auditorium/gymnasium addition at the rear (Photographs #5, 6, 7). Also three stories in height and constructed of brick masonry, this addition has a one-story concrete block extension at the first floor to add additional floor space to the gymnasium (40' x 62'; Photographs #6, 7). In 1960 a large one-story brick addition (62' x 132'), which houses the offices of the superintendent of schools in Middletown, was added to the north elevation (Photograph #9).

The main block of the school is laid out with a typical plan: classrooms open off the central corridor. The corridor walls are finished with glazed square tile; the floors are currently asphalt tile except in the lobby, which has terrazzo floors. Banks of metal lockers are recessed into the walls. The classrooms are quite utilitarian, with

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Representation in Existing Surveys:

Middletown, Connecticut: Historical and Architectural Resources. Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, 1979.

Depository for survey records: Connecticut Historical Commission
59 South Prospect Street
Hartford, Connecticut

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plain painted or varnished oak trim (Photographs #12, 13). Doors to classrooms are glazed in the upper portion. A few classrooms have built-in shelves or cabinets; some were removed by the city before the building was sold in 1985. The original classroom spaces, as well as the special-purpose rooms, such as the library, shops, etc., which open off the central corridors, have minimal changes. Acoustical tile ceilings have been installed in the classrooms and corridors, lowering the ceilings to about one foot above the top of the window and door casings, and not hiding any significant architectural details. The lobby of the building, up one flight from the main entrance, has minimal architectural detail (Photograph #10), as does the auditorium (Photograph #11). In the library is a special feature: a mural depicting the history of Middletown, oil on canvas, commissioned by the Federal Arts Project in the 1930s and the work of a local artist, A. B. McCutcheon (Photograph #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 checked="" 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 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 1931, 1939, 1960 **Builder/Architect** Towner and Sellew Associates (architect)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Linus Baldwin (builder)

Woodrow Wilson High School was built in 1930–31 as the first "modern" high school in the City of Middletown. It has achieved considerable local historical significance, having provided an education for many of Middletown's citizens for 52 years--serving first as a high school, and in the last 28 years as a junior high school (Criterion A). Architecturally, it is significant not only as a well-designed representative example of a Georgian Revival-style institutional building, but also as a well-preserved example of a school specifically created to meet the requirements of an educational program considered to be quite progressive for its day (Criterion C). As such, Woodrow Wilson High School remains as historic tangible evidence of the American educational philosophy of the post-World War I period.

History

From the eighteenth century until 1930, the City of Middletown had been divided into two school districts, the City District and the Town District. The first high school was built in 1895 in the heart of the City District, only two blocks from the downtown commercial center on Main Street. Like many cities in the northeast, Middletown had experienced a rapid population growth in the postwar period, largely due to immigration from Europe. This growth was the climax of a trend that had begun in the mid-nineteenth century with large-scale immigration from Ireland. As early as 1920, school records indicate that 50% of the population of the City District were foreign born. The increase in population was not confined to the City District, however. Over half of the high school students lived in the surrounding Town District; the majority of these lived in the southern part of town where residential development was keeping pace with industrial growth. A new elementary school, the Farm Hill School, had been built here to meet the needs of the neighborhood. The original high school facilities had become inadequate and, perhaps more importantly, outmoded in view of the prevailing educational philosophy which decreed that the whole child must be trained in living as well as work skills, in a moral, healthful atmosphere. The "corrupting" influence of the city's business district was clearly not conducive to this approach to education. When a 20-acre site in a rural/residential area just south of the industrial section became available, the Middletown Common Council, at the urging of the school board, authorized the building of a new school on the site. Originally intended to be a junior high through eighth grade to encourage more students to remain in school past the elementary level, the final plans called for a high school to house 750 pupils, at a cost of \$260,000, a considerable sum at the height of the Depression.²

The new school was designed by architects Towner and Sellew to be the most progressive response to the new "psychology of learning." For the first time in Middletown, three courses of study were provided: college preparatory, commercial, and general. In addition to standard classrooms, the plans also called for many specialized rooms. They included a rifle range; carpenter and metalwork shops; a science lab; drafting, art, and music rooms; and several rooms set aside exclusively for the girls to learn homemaking

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acree of nominated property 16

Quadrangle name Middletown

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	6	9	6	2	1	0	4	6	0	1	3	6	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

B

1	8	6	9	6	2	6	0	4	6	0	1	0	5	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

C

1	8	6	9	6	1	9	0	4	6	0	1	0	4	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

D

1	8	6	9	6	1	7	0	4	6	0	1	1	0	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

E

1	8	6	9	6	0	0	0	4	6	0	1	0	2	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

F

1	8	6	9	6	0	0	0	4	6	0	1	3	2	0
Zone	Easting			Northing										

G

Zone	Easting			Northing										

H

Zone	Easting			Northing										

Verbal boundary description and justification Middletown Land Records 181:286

The boundary includes the Woodrow Wilson High School and its associated playing fields to the south and east on Farm Hill Road and Hunting Hill Avenue.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries N.A.

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

state	code	county	code
-------	------	--------	------

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jan Cunningham, Consultant, edited by John Herzan, National Register Coordinator

organization Cunningham Associates

date 2/10/86

street & number 98 Washington Street

telephone (203) 347 4072

city or town Middletown

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 June 24, 1986

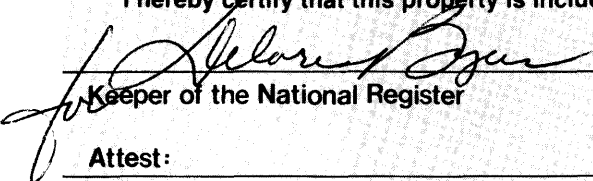
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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

Entered in the
National Register

date

8/6/86

for 
Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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skills. Even a completely furnished model living room was incorporated in the design. This broad program of teaching life and career skills had a practical basis, but it was also believed to be important in order to have each child develop his/her full potential. The socializing influence of education was also considered to be an effective antidote to the perceived general decline in public morality which preceded the Depression.³ In addition, schools were expected to promote the qualities needed in the workplace, diligence and punctuality--in sum, the goals set forth by Dewey and other liberal educators of the early twentieth century, who saw public education as the agent of social reform and the basis of democratic ideology.⁴

There was an explicit effort to make the construction of the school a local endeavor, an understandable attitude in this period. The then serving Mayor Bielfield was quoted in the local newspaper concerning the number of jobs that school construction would provide, "expecting that 80 men would find work for the expected full year of construction."⁵ The architects were a local firm chosen out of a field of five from all over the state. Their office was on Main Street in the Guy Rice Building. William T. Towner (1870-1950), the principal partner, also served as the head of the building committee. Towner was born in Hastings, England and educated at the Royal Institute of London. He came to this country in 1890 and maintained a practice in New York. The last 20 years of his life he lived and worked in Middletown, specializing in school buildings and churches.⁶ The contractor was also a Middletown man, Linus Baldwin, who had built two other public schools and a large parochial school, St. Mary's, in the city. Even the name chosen for the school had local significance. Although the identification of the school with Woodrow Wilson was hardly surprising at this time, as he was much admired by the general public as the "war president," Wilson was "well-remembered by old residents" of Middletown from his tenure⁷ as a professor of history at Wesleyan University (then a college) from 1888-1890.

Upon completion the school received public acclamation. In his annual report to the City of Middletown in 1931, the year it was finished, the superintendent noted that it was a building in which "no essential detail was omitted which is necessary to meet the demands of present-day education." The newspaper reported that New York contractors⁸ had inspected the work which "would pass for a half million dollar job in the big city."

By 1956 a new high school was needed. It was also called Woodrow Wilson and was built directly across the street; the older school became a junior high or middle school. The 1970s saw the building of yet another high school, called Middletown High, and the conversion of the 1895 building to elderly housing. With the current decline in enrollment, the two later high schools have been consolidated across Hunting Hill Avenue, and the original Woodrow Wilson High School, the first "modern" high school in Middletown, closed in June, 1984.

Architecture

In its form and style Woodrow Wilson High School resembles many of the schools built in Connecticut in the 1920s and the 1930s. As such it is a well-preserved example of

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Georgian Revival architecture. But to dismiss the building as merely representative of school architecture of the period is to miss the point. The school committee had travelled all over the state to see what other school systems were building. It is perhaps inevitable that they chose the Georgian Revival or "Colonial" style. It was appealing for several reasons. The new high school had to make a statement, to be as modern as the school's new educational program. Despite the fact that it has become an institutional architectural cliché, the Georgian Revival was the very latest institutional style, completely different from the "old-fashioned" Romanesque Revival high school built in 1895. More importantly, it was a style that embodied American traditional values, a most appropriate forum for the educational philosophy being espoused.

Towner and Sellew created a school for the City of Middletown that not only met the requirements of the educational program, but was also a monument to civic pride. The pride was justifiable. In 1931 the construction of this large a building represented a major commitment on the part of Middletown's citizens to the value of education. No public buildings of this size would be built in Middletown for another 50 years.

Within the limits of the budget the architects designed a building that had many of the architectural elements found in schools of the period: an imposing entrance and Georgian and Classical detailing. Less expensive materials were utilized to good effect. Cast concrete was substituted for carved limestone or terra cotta; standard red brick was chosen over textured or colored brick. Not only was this cheaper construction, but it also emphasized the "Colonial" appearance of the building, which is how it was referred to in public print. Raising the foundation was also cost-effective. It provided another level under more than half the building, but it served another purpose as well: making the building appear larger and more imposing.

Before the school was built the architects eliminated more than 17 items from the plan as a cost-saving measure. The \$50,000 saved from the original amount bonded was used for the purchase of school equipment and furniture. It is evident that some of the savings eliminated non-essential items such as interior architectural detail. Even the public spaces like the auditorium and entrance lobby, where money is usually expended, have minimal detail. Surprisingly enough, one of the more costly non-essential architectural features was retained, the large arched opening at the rear of the stage in the auditorium. Although the opening was fitted with double glazed doors, probably to facilitate the moving of stage sets or equipment, this feature is more decorative than functional. It may have been retained in the final plans to add architectural interest to the rear (west) elevation, a highly visible secondary facade (see Photograph #5 taken from Farm Hill Avenue to the west). Its small flanking windows are integrated with the rest of the design by the addition of keystones. Because the windows received no architectural treatment on the inside, it was apparently intended that part of the rear wall of the stage be curtained off from public view. The central opening is cased and could be visible during school assemblies, but certainly was hidden by stage sets or backdrops during dramatic productions.

(See continuation sheet 8:4 for notes.)

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NOTES:

1. School population breakdowns by nativity were derived from School Committee Reports and compared to Federal Census compilations for relevant years. See Janice P. Cunningham, "The Development of American Public Education: The Middletown Experience 1820-1920." On file at the Greater Middletown Preservation Trust.
2. Annual Report of the Superintendent of Schools, 1930.
3. A review of the Public Health and County Court records for 1925 - 1931 confirms this general perception at least in Middletown. Social disease and crimes against persons increased dramatically in this period. Arrests for public drunkenness and petty theft were also on the rise.
4. Report of the Town School Committee: 1929.
5. Middletown Press, October 31, 1930.
6. Ibid., April 20, 1950.
7. Ibid., January 14, 1931; July 11, 1931.
8. Ibid., August 8, 1931.

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Major Bibliographic Sources

Annual Reports of the City of Middletown, 1929-1932.

Annual Reports of the Superintendent of Schools/Town School Committee Reports, 1928, 1929, 1930, 1931.

Avery Index of Architects' Obituaries, Avery Library, Columbia.

Cunningham, Janice P. The Development of American Public Education: The Middletown Experience, 1870-1920." Wesleyan University, 1976. (On file Greater Middletown Preservation Trust, Middletown.)

Katz, Michael. The Irony of Early School Reform. Cambridge: Harvard, 1968.

Middletown Land Records.

Middletown Press. Middletown, Connecticut.