

CT Trust Resource ID: 2282

HISTORIC RESOURCE INVENTORY – BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

State Historic Preservation Office, DECD, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

*Note: Please attach any additional or expanded information on a separate sheet.

Inventory form modified for the Creative Places - Arts & Letters Project

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common): Wadsworth Atheneum Avery Memorial

Other Name(s) (Historic): Avery Memorial, Wadsworth Atheneum

Street Address or Location: 600 Main Street, Hartford

Town/City: Hartford

Village:

County: Hartford

Designation(s): SR, NR

Owner(s): Alfred E. Burr Memorial Wadsworth Atheneum

Public/Private: Non-Profit

Latitude: 41.7637 Longitude: -72.6727

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum

Historic Use: RECREATION & CULTURE: Museum

Accessibility to public: Yes Exterior visible from public road? Yes

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: during open hours

Style of building: Art Deco / Modernist Date of Construction: 1934

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate) Cut Stone

Structural Systems(s): Structural iron or steel

Roof(Type): Skylights, Hip, Flat (Material): Glazing, Built up

Number of Stories: 2 Approximate Dimensions: See continuation sheet

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: No If yes, explain: NA

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

Surrounding Environment: High building density

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The Avery Memorial is one of five components of the Wadsworth Atheneum – the Wadsworth Building, Colt Memorial, Morgan Memorial, Avery Memorial, and the Goodwin Building - occupying a block bounded by Main Street, Prospect Street, Atheneum Square North, and the Alfred E. Burr Mall. The Avery Memorial is at the northeast corner of the complex. The east side along Prospect Street has a narrow lawn edged with low stone curbs. The north side fronting Atheneum Square North is a hardscape with tall five-foot high, granite-faced retaining walls enclosing raised tree planters. The north entrance to the Avery Memorial's ground floor has a paved plaza abutting the building and is in use as the barrier-free entrance to the entire museum complex.

Other notable features of building or site:

The exterior of the Avery Memorial is a blocky three-story building in a severe Art Deco style with doors centrally placed in the north and east sides, and windows on the first and second floor perimeters. The third floor east side is a solid wall ornamented with shallow fluted pilasters, bas reliefs, and incised inscriptions. Its Tennessee marble cladding matches the Morgan to the south. The north elevation expresses its third floor with a steeply sloped skylight wall between two square corner towers. This area housed the Hartford Art School. The remaining two sides of the building abut other blocks of the museum complex. The Avery Memorial completed the enclosure of a central court area by connecting the adjacent blocks (HAC 1978, 94).

At the interior, a central court rises from the ground level through all three floors to a hipped atrium skylight. The central court is ringed by an interior gallery with display space at each level, also doubling as corridors accessing the outer perimeter galleries. The north entry vestibule leads through into the interior court where a central pool creates a setting for the c. 1600 Italian Mannerist statue Venus with a Nymph and Satyr by Pietro Francavilla, which was acquired as a centerpiece for the space. The ground level of the court with its pool and statuary conveys the guiding concept of the court as an exterior space transposed into an interior by enclosure with a glass roof. The steel structural frame cantilevers inward over the central space and this creates a column-free ground floor experience; it also allows the theater level below to be column-free. The theater is reached from twin stairs in the north vestibule, and is Art Deco in style.

Architect: Morris & O'Connor Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

A. Everett 'Chick' Austin, Jr. (1900-1957) was among the first professional museum directors in the country, a graduate of a program at Harvard University directed by Edward W. Forbes and Paul J. Sachs. He was the Director of the Wadsworth Atheneum from 1927 to 1944, and brought the museum to prominence as a nationally known art museum by introducing modernist art and design and by staging theater and film events in addition to art exhibits. Austin wanted to make the Wadsworth 'a museum of living things – pictures, sculpture, architecture, decorative arts, even music and movies – as well as of fine examples of the past' (Gaddis 2000, 309). Austin also taught art history at Trinity College in Hartford.

As he became increasingly committed to modernist architectural design, in particular for the Avery Memorial, Austin remained passionate about the art of the past, purchasing for the museum European Baroque and Mannerist works at a time when they were not yet highly valued and also displaying American period interiors. The Avery Memorial, the first American museum to exhibit modern art of the twentieth century in a contemporary setting, embodies the career of Chick Austin and his role in the art movements of the 1920s and 1930s.

Sources:

Darbee, Herbert C. 1970. Wadsworth Atheneum National Register Nomination No. 70000709. National Park Service.
 Gaddis, Eugene. 1984. Avery Memorial, Wadsworth Atheneum: the first modern museum. Hartford: Wadsworth Atheneum. 2000. Magician of the Modern: Chick Austin & the Transformation of the Arts in America. New York: Alfred A Knopf Inc.
 Hartford Architecture Conservancy (HAC). 1978. Hartford Architecture Conservancy Survey Volume One: Downtown.
 Harvard Art Museums web site. "History and the Three Museums." Accessed at <http://www.harvardartmuseums.org/about/history-and-the-three-museums>.
 Comparative Details, Morris and O'Connor Architects. September 1938. Pencil Points, v. 19.
 Ransom, David F., Gaddis, Eugene R. 1994. A. Everett Austin, Jr. House National Historic Landmark No. 94001189. National Park Service.
 Schwarz Gallery web site. Accessed 7/11/2014 at <http://www.schwarzgallery.com/artist/469/Kristians-Tonny>.
 Wadsworth Atheneum web site. Accessed at <http://www.thewadsworth.org/about/history/>.
 Weber, Nicholas Fox. 1992. Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art 1928-1943. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock **Date:** 6/14/2014

View: Interior View

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** April 21, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



Wadsworth Atheneum, Avery Memorial - Interior view

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____
District ☐ S ☐ NR **If NR, specify:** ☐ Actual ☐ Potential