

CT Trust Resource ID: 3208

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): Eckersley-Hall School; Middletown Senior Center

Other Name(s) (Historic): Eckersley-Hall School/Durant School/ St. Sebastian's School

Street Address or Location: 61 Durant Street, Middletown

Town/City: Middletown Village: County: Middlesex Designation(s): SR

Owner(s): City of Middletown Public/Private: Public

Latitude: 41.5441 Longitude: -72.6488

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Government/social: Senior center

Historic Use: Education: school

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

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: during open hours

Style of building: 20th century Georgian, Neo-Classical Revival Date of Construction: 1928-29

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate) Concrete, Brick

Structural Systems(s): Load bearing masonry

Roof(Type): Gable (**Material:**) Tile

Number of Stories: 1, Basement **Approximate Dimensions:** 56' x 117'

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site **Moved, When:** NA

Alterations?: Yes If yes, explain: Rehabilitation as senior center, 2014

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Barn

Surrounding Environment: Residential

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The Eckersley-Hall School was a neighborhood school, occupying a wedge-shaped site in a historic residential neighborhood of nineteenth-century homes. Since discontinuation of use as a parochial school, the property has been rehabilitated as a senior center. It was individually listed on the State Register of Historic Places in 2010.

Other notable features of building or site:

Eckersley-Hall School, a brick masonry, Georgian Revival-style building (56' x 117'), was completed in 1929. The one-story school has a gabled, parapeted roof and a raised basement. Brick masonry walls, laid in a Flemish bond, have cast-stone quoining at all four corners. The roof is sheathed with the original cement-tile shingles. A brass-domed cupola centered on the ridge (Cunningham 2010).

A WPA mural is located in the former kindergarten room in the southeast corner of the first floor. The mural (5' x 15') was painted with oils on canvas by artist Albert McCutcheon in 1936. The mural depicts realistic portraits of the artist's daughters set against a surreal landscape of the Connecticut River Valley that includes a large elephant, art deco lightning-bolt waves, and lollipop trees.

Architect: Unknown Builder/Maker: Linus Baldwin

Historical or Architectural importance:

For Architectural significance of the building, see Cunningham, 2010 State Register Nomination.

Artist Albert McCutcheon (1901-1990), painter of the mural, was a Middletown native. He attended the Durant School, predecessor of the Eckersley-Hall School. He studied at the Yale School of Fine Arts and in Paris. For a period of several years McCutcheon worked as a free lance easel painter, mural painter, and interior designer. He also worked as an ecclesiastical restorer. During the Great Depression he was employed by the Federal Art Project (FAP) of the Works Progress Administration (WPA). He completed three murals for the FAP.

The surrealistic style of this mural is unusual and creates a fantasy land for its audience of children. A subsequent commission at Woodrow Wilson High School includes more conventional subjects, including historical scenes (Cunningham 2010).

Sources:

Carley, Rachel. 2014. Creative Places: Modern Arts and Letters in Connecticut. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation & State Historic Preservation Office. Background on WPA art programs.

Cunningham, Jan. 2013. Eckersley-Hall School State Register Nomination. Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office.

McCutcheon WPA Mural 'Rediscovered' at St. Sebastian's Open House. 11/14/2010. Middletown Eye blog. Accessed at: <http://middletowneyenews.blogspot.com/>.

McCutcheon, Albert. WPA Art Inventory, Connecticut State Library. Accessed at <http://ctstatelibrary.org/mccutcheon-albert/> Includes additional sources.

Photographer: Middletown Press photo **Date:** 2014

View: Southwest view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** April 28, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



Eckersley-Hall School, Middletown Senior Center (Middletown Press photo)

FOR OFFICE USE:

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