

CT Trust Resource ID: 1118

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): US Post Office, New London

Other Name(s) (Historic): US Post Office, New London

Street Address or Location: 27 Masonic Street, New London

Town/City: New London Village: County: New London Designation(s): SR, NR

Owner(s): United States Postal Service Public/Private: Public

Latitude: 41.3554 Longitude: -72.0962

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: GOVERNMENT: post office

Historic Use: GOVERNMENT: post office

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

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: During open hours

Style of building: Neo-classical revival, Art deco Date of Construction: 1933

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

Structural Systems(s): Structural iron or steel

Roof(Type): Flat (*Material*): Built up

Number of Stories: 3 **Approximate Dimensions:** 111' x 178'

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: Shed

Surrounding Environment: Commercial

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The Post Office is located in downtown New London at the northeast corner of Masonic Street and Union Street. The .99-acre site has 155 feet of frontage on Masonic Street. The site is adjacent to the Downtown New London National Register Historic District. The lobby entrance faces Masonic Street, and the LaFarge murals are on three walls of the lobby.

Other notable features of building or site:

The post office is a three-story building with a brick and stone exterior and steel-frame structure, in a Neo-classical Revival design with Art Deco details, especially in the lobby and entrance areas.

Murals painted by Thomas LaFarge in 1933 and installed in the lobby in 1938 depict scenes typical of early whaling, and are integrated well into the lobby design. The six lobby murals, grouped into three units 'Aloft,' 'Cutting In,' and 'Morning Watch Sunrise' were installed in 1938 (DeCoste, Section 8).

For further description see National Register nomination: <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/86000124.pdf>

Architect: Payne & Keefe Architects, New London Builder/Maker: Unknown

Historical or Architectural importance:

The murals were commissioned as part of the Public Works of Art Program and painted by Thomas Sergeant LaFarge (DeCoste, Section 8). For building significance, see National Register nomination: <http://pdfhost.focus.nps.gov/docs/NRHP/Text/86000124.pdf>

Thomas LaFarge (1904-1942) was the son and grandson of artists, Bancel and John La Farge, respectively. He was a sailor himself, in the Coast Guard during World War II. Thomas LaFarge was well-suited to depict the demanding routines of whaling life. Under the New Deal art project to create public art in the Post Offices and other Federal buildings, artists often portrayed subjects relating to local history. In this case LaFarge identified whaling as a key theme for New London, known as the 'Whaling City.'

The Coast Guard later called him 'an experienced seaman, well qualified to command.' Several years after completing the murals, he traveled, as many New London whalers of yore would have done, to Arctic waters. The cutter he commanded foundered in stormy weather off the

eastern Canadian coast. The Coast Guard lists it in a catalogue of doomed ships: Natsek; 17 December 1942; Lost (Zoe 2012). The murals are considered to be among the greatest of WPA art in Connecticut. While representational, the compositions expressively compress intense action into the horizontal format of the upper wall panels, transcending straightforward realism in a way comparable to Rockwell Kent's 1930 illustrations for 'Moby Dick.'

Sources:

Interview by C. Hitchcock with Barbara Zabel, 3/13/2015, at the Lyman Allyn Museum and other sites in New London. New London Tax Assessors Records & GIS viewer: <http://www.mapgeo.com/SCCOGCT/#> and <http://gis.vgsi.com/NewLondonCT/Parcel.aspx?Pid=6071>
'America @ Work: New Deal Murals in New London and Beyond.' 2012. Connecticut Traveler magazine. Accessed at: <http://cttraveler.com/america-work-new-deal-murals-in-new-london-and-beyond-2678> .
DeCoste, Richard P. 1986. New London Post Office National Register Nomination No. 86000124. National Park Service.
Park, Marlene. 1984. Democratic vistas: Post offices and public art in the New Deal. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Zabel, Barbara, curator. 2012. 'WPA Murals in Connecticut: Art of the New Deal.' Exhibition at the Lyman Allyn Art Museum. Accessed at: <http://www.lymanallyn.org/america-work-new-deal-murals-in-new-london-and-beyond-2/> .
Zoe, Vivian. 2012. 'Milton Bellin and the Federal Arts Project.' The Muse, Fall 2012. Norwich: Slater Memorial Museum.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock **Date:** 3/13/2015

View: Interior

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock **Printed On:** May 16, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



27 Masonic St., New London - Interior view of lobby murals by Thomas LaFarge

FOR OFFICE USE:

Town # _____ **Site#** _____ **UTM** _____

District S NR **If NR, specify:** Actual Potential