

CT Trust Resource ID: 2145

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): Portland High School; Brownstone Intermediate School

Other Name(s) (Historic): /Portland High School; Brownstone Intermediate School

Street Address or Location: 314 Main Street, Portland

Town/City: Portland

Village:

County: Middlesex

Designation(s):

Owner(s): Portland Public Schools

Public/Private: Public

Latitude: 41.5771 Longitude: -72.6382

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Education: Intermediate school

Historic Use: Education: High school

Accessibility to public: No Exterior visible from public road? Yes

Interior accessible? If yes, explain: By appointment

Style of building: Tudor Revival Date of Construction: 1932

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

Structural Systems(s): Structural iron or steel. Load bearing masonry

Roof(Type): Flat, Gable (Material): Built up, Slate

Number of Stories: 2 Approximate Dimensions: 170' x 150'

Structural Condition: Excellent

Exterior Condition: Excellent

Locational Integrity: On original site Moved, When: NA

Alterations?: Yes If yes, explain: Additions

Related outbuildings or landscape features: Athletic fields, parking, Barn

Surrounding Environment: Residential

Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The property is a 3.18-acre level site (Parcel ID 029/0001) on the west side of Main Street north of the intersection with Route 17, at the southwest corner of Middlesex Avenue. The building is set behind a lawn area. Parking is located to the south and additions to the complex extend westward. Main Street is lined with a mix of commercial and residential buildings including the 1940 Post Office immediately north of Middlesex Avenue, and the former Jonathan Fuller House/Town Hall at 261-5 Main Street (1852, 1894) to the south across the street.

Other notable features of building or site:

The building is Arts and Crafts or Craftsman style with Tudor Revival characteristics, 2 1/2 stories, with a slate gable roof with cross gable at the north entry pavilion and square crenellated turret at the auditorium entry toward the south end. The auditorium is a gable-roofed block perpendicular to the main structure. Walls are brick with brownstone trim and half-timbered wood trim in the gables. Modern additions extend to the west.

Two murals by artist Harold Barbour sponsored by the Works Progress Administration Federal Art Project (WPA FAP) are installed in the auditorium. One scene represents the Gildersleeve shipyard, on the east bank of the Connecticut River, during the Colonial period. The other shows work in the brownstone quarries as the quarrying was done in the nineteenth century using oxen, before the conversion to steam engine power. The paintings are approximately 6 x 10 feet in size, painted on canvas and installed over the plaster wall surface. They were painted in 1937-38.

Architect: Towner and Sellew Associates, Inc. Builder/Maker: Sellew, Thomas H., Builder, Cromwell CT

Historical or Architectural importance:

The 1932 Portland High School building is a blend of the Craftsman and Tudor Revival styles. The building incorporates local Portland brownstone from the adjacent quarry. The building was built as a modern steel-framed facility, and designed for the current philosophy of education with specialized classrooms. The concept of the school as a community resource led to the auditorium's configuration for use by the town. The architects were Towner and Sellew Associates, Inc. The firm had just completed the new Woodrow Wilson High School in

Middletown (Cunningham 1986).

The mural paintings in the school auditorium are significant in the social history of Portland. They are among Harold Barbour's best-known works and appear to be his only large murals. The murals exemplify the goals of the Federal Art Project, for local artists to portray subjects with great significance to the community's history and identity.

Harold S. Barbour (1889-1961) was born in Newtonville, Massachusetts. He studied at the Evening Art School in Boston in 1905-06, and later at the Art Students League in New York. Barbour then worked in Boston, doing illustration and cartoons for magazines and books (Connecticut State Library WPA Art Project). In about 1932 Barbour and his wife moved to the village of Higganum in Haddam. In addition to commercial art, Barbour painted, and also wrote fiction and non-fiction. He painted in a Regionalist style. Barbour was a founder of the Central Connecticut Art Center, a summer art school in Marlborough during the 1930s. He was also active in the Brainerd Memorial Library of Higganum, and he was a member of the Haddam Historical Society, to which he donated his archives. During the 1930s, Barbour worked for New Deal programs, the Public Works of Art Project and the Federal Arts Project (FAP). He painted the two murals in 1937-38. A series of smaller paintings on tobacco farming were given to the Portland Board of Education; some of these are now at the Portland Historical Society. At present one of his FAP watercolor paintings, House Among the Trees, is on display in the School along with several other WPA artworks (author field work 2015).

Sources:

Interview by C. Hitchcock with Principal, Mrs. Laurie Boskie, 11/05/2014; with Facilities Director, Paul Bengston, 5/19/2015, at the site.
 Town of Portland Assessor's Records. <http://portland.univers-ct.com/> Parcel ID: 029/0001 .
 Centennial Celebration Committee. 1941. Centennial Celebration of Portland, Connecticut,: 1841-1941. Portland CT.
 Connecticut State Library: WPA Art Inventory Project. Barbour, Harold. Accessed at <http://ctstatelibrary.org/barbour-harold/> .
 Cunningham, Jan. 1986. Woodrow Wilson High School National Register Nomination No. 86002270. National Park Service.
 Harold Barbour Collection, archives at the Haddam Historical Society, Haddam, CT 'Portland's Brownstone and Ships Recalled in WPA Project.' May 22, 1938. Waterbury Republican. Photograph collections including Barbour's WPA work, artist's home.
 Hartford Courant archives: Mural Panels by Harold Barbour of Higganum for Portland High School Auditorium, May 29, 1938.
 Historical aerial photography and maps accessed at UConn MAGIC: http://magic.lib.uconn.edu/mash_up/1934.html .
 McDougall, Robert W. 2004. Images of America: Portland. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing.
 Middletown Russell Library, Local History collections. Portland anniversary publications, 1941, 1966, 1976.
 New Deal Art Along the River. 2015. Exhibit at the Connecticut River Museum. Essex: Connecticut River Museum.
 Portland Board of Education. 1931. Construction drawing blueprint set for Portland High School. Archived by Paul Bengston, Facilities Director.
 Portland Historical Society. 1976. The History of Portland, Connecticut. Published as part of the National Bicentennial Program.
 Portland Public Library Local History Collection. Town Annual Reports; school clipping files.

Photographer: Charlotte Hitchcock Date: 11/05/2014

View: Northeast view

Form completed by: Charlotte Hitchcock Printed On: May 24, 2016

Organization: Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation

Address: 940 Whitney Avenue, Hamden CT 06517-4002

Threats: None known

Subsequent field evaluations:



East view of former Portland High School, now Brownstone Intermediate

FOR OFFICE USE:

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