



HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, One Constitution Plaza, 2nd Floor, Hartford, CT 06103

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

GENERAL INFORMATION

Building Name (Common) Donald Grant Mitchell Memorial Library
 Building Name (Historic) Donald Grant Mitchell Memorial Library
 Street Address or Location 37 Harrison Street
 Town/City New Haven Village Westville County New Haven
 Owner(s) City of New Haven Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Public Library
 Historic Use: Public Library

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes No
 Interior accessible? Yes No If yes, explain During library hours
 Style of building Modernist - Brutalist Date of Construction 1966

Material(s) (Indicate use or location when appropriate):

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Brick | <input type="checkbox"/> Wood Shingle | <input type="checkbox"/> Asphalt Siding |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldstone | <input type="checkbox"/> Board & Batten | <input type="checkbox"/> Stucco | <input type="checkbox"/> Cobblestone | <input type="checkbox"/> Aluminum Siding |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type <u>cast-in-place</u>) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type _____) | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ | | |

Structural System

- Wood Frame Post & Beam Balloon Load bearing masonry Structural iron or steel
 Other Reinforced Concrete

Roof (Type)

- Gable Flat Mansard Monitor Sawtooth
 Gambrel Shed Hip Round Other _____

(Material)

- Wood Shingle Roll Asphalt Tin Slate Asphalt Shingle
 Built up Tile Other Rubber membrane

Number of Stories: 1 and 2 Approximate Dimensions 45' x 142' & 45' x 52'

Structural Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Exterior Condition: Excellent Good Fair Deteriorated

Location Integrity: On original site Moved When? _____

Alterations? Yes No If yes, explain: Renovated in 2003; small addition to match original.

FOR OFFICE USE: Town # _____ Site # _____ UTM _____

District: S NR If NR, Specify: Actual Potential

PROPERTY INFORMATION (CONT'D)

Related outbuildings or landscape features:

Barn Shed Garage Carriage House Shop Garden

Other landscape features or buildings: City park with lawns, landscaping, outdoor sculpture, asphalt parking lot

Surrounding Environment:

Open land Woodland Residential Commercial Industrial Rural

High building density Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The site is a 2-acre park at the top of a hill overlooking historic Westville Village and facing toward West Rock Ridge, a 400-foot mountain with a sheer volcanic basalt cliff face. The surrounding neighborhood is a mix of 19th-century single- and multi-family homes with religious and civic buildings and some 20th-century apartment buildings and condominiums.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and/or Exterior*)

The building plan is a T-shape. A long 1-story rectangle parallel to Harrison Street, contains the entrance, administrative space, a community meeting room, and children's area. A perpendicular wing projecting eastward at the rear, with its floor level a half flight below, contains a high-ceilinged reading room and book stacks below a mezzanine. Indirect light is brought into the reading areas by clerestory windows. These are expressed on the exterior in the ribbed concrete cornice and raised monitors that surround the building above a base of red brick walls. The cornice forms a series of crenellations which animate the exterior mass while responding to the strong color of the nearby mountain. The reading room also has large windows looking east toward the lawn and mountain beyond. Renovations in 2003 added an elevator for access to the level changes and a glass skylight porch roof.

Architect Gilbert Switzer & Associates Builder W. Pearce Construction Company

• Historical or Architectural importance: This building replaced a library that had been established in 1910 in a rambling turreted Victorian mansion at a time when Westville had not yet become part of New Haven. In the 1960s, construction of a new library in the most current style epitomized the mid-20th-century Modern period much as the downtown library building had represented the City Beautiful movement in 1908. The Mitchell Library and the Beth El Keser Israel Synagogue (1960) together form a rather monumental Modernist gateway flanking Whalley Avenue, the main through route toward the north.

Architect: Gilbert Switzer (1912-1976) was a native of Knoxville, Tennessee who studied to be a sculptor at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. During World War II he served in the Corps of Engineers before earning an architecture degree at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in 1960. By 1963 he had moved to New Haven and established an office at 315 Whitney Avenue. Switzer's work was dominated by multi-family residential work, much of it in a Brutalist mode using concrete or ribbed concrete block masonry (see Inventory form for 480 Ferry Street). Several projects involved adaptive reuse of historic buildings, including 15 Edwards Street (see form) where he and his partner John A. Matthews moved the office in the early 1970s.

• Sources:

Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*, Yale U Press, New Haven, 1976, 228 pp, F 22.
Carley, Rachel D., *Tomorrow is Here: New Haven and the Modern Movement* (Privately printed by the New Haven Preservation Trust, New Haven CT) June, 2008.
Dedication plaques in building vestibule.
See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 2/04/2010

View Multiple Views Negative on File NHPT

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 4/21/2010

Organization The New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 934 State Street, P.O. Box 1671, New Haven, CT 06507

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Threats to the building or site:

None known Highways Vandalism Developers Renewal Private

Deterioration Zoning Other _____ Explanation _____

• Sources (*continuation*):

New Haven Tax Assessor's Record: Map/Block/Parcel: 388/ 1140/ 00100.

Westville Village: Historic Walking Tour, October 5, 2003, Westville Village Renaissance Alliance & New Haven Preservation Trust.

"Readability," *Progressive Architecture*, July 1966, p. 58.



1. West view of the Harrison Street facade with entry at right, camera facing northeast. The glass roof is an addition in the 2003 renovation..



2. Northeast view from Beecher Park, camera facing west. At left is the adult reading room; at right the children's wing.



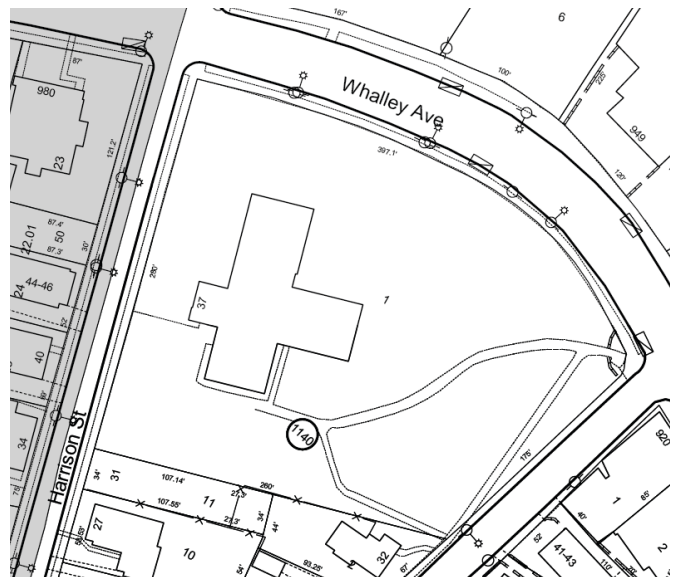
3. Interior of children's wing showing clerestory lighting.



4. Interior of adult reading room, camera facing east.



5. West aerial view from Bing Maps
<http://www.bing.com/maps/> accessed 11/10/2010.



6. Site Plan – detail from City of New Haven Tax Map
388/1140/00100, not to scale, North ↑.