

## HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY - BUILDING AND STRUCTURES

Please send completed form to: National Register and State Register Coordinator,  
State Historic Preservation Office, Department of Economic and Community Development,  
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) Grant, Helene W., School  
 Building Name (Historic) Grant, Helene W., School  
 Street Address or Location 185 Goffe Street  
 Town/City New Haven Village \_\_\_\_\_ County New Haven  
 Owner(s) City of New Haven  Public  Private

### PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: EDUCATION: Elementary School  
 Historic Use: EDUCATION: Elementary School

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road?  Yes  No  
 Interior accessible?  Yes  No If yes, explain \_\_\_\_\_  
 Style of building MODERN MOVEMENT Date of Construction 1964

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

- |   |   |                                      |                                       |  |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clapboard  | <input type="checkbox"/> Asbestos Siding        | <input 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>block masonry</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 Concrete frame, precast beams

### Roof (Type)

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

### (Material)

- Wood Shingle  Roll Asphalt  Tin  Slate  Asphalt Shingle  
 Built up  Tile  Other \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Stories: 1 Approximate Dimensions 195' x 170'

Structural Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Exterior Condition:  Excellent  Good  Fair  Deteriorated

Location Integrity:  On original site  Moved When? Demolished 2014

Alterations?  Yes  No If yes, explain: \_\_\_\_\_

**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: Courtyards adjacent to classrooms, asphalt-paved parking and drive, playground, athletic field

**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 parcel of 4.57 acres on the northeast side of Goffe Street between Webster and County Streets. The surrounding area is a mix of early- and mid-twentieth-century residential structures with some institutional buildings. The school and surrounding Florence Virtue Homes were urban renewal projects in the 1960s as part of the Dixwell Redevelopment Plan. The original landscape included pedestrian walks between the Florence Virtue Homes and the school.

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

See continuation sheet.

Architect John M. Johansen Design Consultant      Builder R.A. Civitello Company  
Caproni Associates, Architect of Record

• Historical or Architectural importance:

See continuation sheet.

• Sources:

Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture and Urban Design*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1976.  
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.

Loether, Paul. 1983. HRI 3412. *New Haven Architectural Survey Phase IV. Map/block/lot: 294/ 0345/ 002.*  
See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock      Date 6/26/2009

View Multiple Views      Negative on File NHPT

Name Charlotte Hitchcock      Date 10/31/2016

Organization New Haven Preservation Trust

Address 922 State Street, P.O. Box 8968, New Haven, CT 06532

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Latitude, Longitude: 41.317332, -72.936627

**Threats to the building or site:**

None known     Highways     Vandalism     Developers     Renewal     Private

Deterioration     Zoning     Other Demolition 2014     Explanation Replacement

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Other notable features of building or site (*continued*):

The building is composed of a grid of discrete rectangular spaces which are expressed visually by varied roof heights and are connected by a circulation system with a lower ceiling height and roof line. The majority of these spaces are the classrooms – each has a clear span roof structure built of precast concrete girders spanning front to rear (perpendicular to Goffe Street) and supported at the ends by concrete masonry piers. A horizontal band of concrete across the heads of the piers provides a frame tying the structure together and a bearing surface for the girders. The classroom south walls have entry doors, a wall of cabinets with a sink, and high clerestory windows between the girders. The north walls have full-height glass between the structural piers, with views out to a private walled courtyard at each classroom. There are two rows of these, totaling 12 classrooms, with corridors fitted between every pair in the southern row, leading through to a pair of rooms in the outer row. Between pairs of outer classrooms there are open-air paths connecting the inner southern rooms to the playfields to the north. The outer row formerly had walled courts, but the walls were removed, leaving concrete paved areas to indicate the extent of the courts. Two larger classrooms for kindergarten and a block of shared spaces form the southwestern row of spaces in the building, and have taller rooflines with precast concrete roof girders oriented side to side (parallel to Goffe Street).

The main entrance has a recessed set of three glazed doors set between piers which support cantilevered beams carrying a boldly projecting canopy. The doors lead to a vestibule, and on axis with the vestibule the original building had an open court, fully glazed on all sides, containing the symbolic bell tower which was a free-standing sculptural object rising high above the roof elevation. The glass walls provided light to the Library to the northwest, a corridor to the northeast, and the Multipurpose Room to the southeast. This court was later roofed over and walled off to create a kitchen and enlarge the library, eliminating a source of natural light to the building interior.

Several round domed skylights also bring light into the corridors. On the roof there are butterfly-roofed enclosures for air intakes which are sculptural in effect. The exterior walls of scored concrete block masonry provide infill to the structural frame, and are tinted a warm pinkish tone similar to brick. The interior surfaces are exposed concrete block masonry. The entire building has its floor elevation at grade, so that it was accessible to wheelchairs and strollers at a time before ADA (Americans with Disability Act) requirements.

Historical or Architectural importance (*continued*):

Prior to the urban renewal period of the 1960s the Dixwell neighborhood had been densely developed with small single-family homes and multi-family triple decker apartment houses for workers at local industries such as the Winchester Repeating Arms factory. African-Americans had moved from the South, joining other ethnic groups as factory workers. By 1960, industrial activity was decreasing, leaving under-employed workers living in crowded conditions.

The Dixwell Redevelopment plan cleared away blocks of small close-packed houses along Goffe Street, Dixwell Avenue, and an entire block of Foote Street. The planners had an explicit goal of creating a racially integrated community complete with homes, schools, churches, and shopping. Ford Foundation funding provided for innovations in education to address the social problems of poverty. The Dixwell Community House, the Congregational Church and several others would ensure the provision of community spaces (Borosan report; maps and clipping files). The ensemble was intended to compete with suburban settings for which white families were increasingly leaving New Haven.

Helene W. Grant School occupied a central place in the redevelopment scheme. Both as a physical object and as a key community facility for early childhood education, the design of the school represented progressive

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ideas about education. The brightly-lit classrooms with outdoor courtyards provided a setting for implementing these ideas. The school was named for Helene Williams Grant (1919-1961) an African-American teacher and community activist who championed the concept of the Community School.

Architecturally, the Dixwell neighborhood became something of a showcase of the design work of architect John M. Johansen, with three diverse projects for the Helene Grant School, Dixwell Congregational Church, and Florence Virtue co-op homes. He and his cooperating architect Leo Caproni made use of signature Modernist design elements – custom scored concrete block masonry, precast concrete frame members, walls of glass, and a California style of planning where inside and outside flowed together. The design as a collection of discrete pavilion-like spaces with individual outdoor courts is California-inspired, but here they are clustered more closely and connected by indoor corridors as an adaptation to a colder climate. This design created an intimate environment with ample natural light even while using hard materials like concrete block and precast concrete structural members. The sculptural (non-functional) bell tower in the interior courtyard represents a former fire warning bell on a tower which stood at the apex of a narrow esplanade formed by a widened section of Goffe Street (Streuli & Puckhafer 1911). This tower was removed as part of the redevelopment program.

The building design is notable for its innovative use of new technology. With the goal of a durable fire-resistant structure, it incorporates precast concrete girders for the roof structure. This technology also appeared at the same time in parking garages, industrial structures, and other building types (see 426 East Street, 824 Woodward Avenue, 323 Temple Street, 87 Webster Street, 213 Crown Street).

The use of scored concrete block masonry represents a popular building material of the time. It provided a durable and economical masonry product which was engineered with a higher strength than traditional cinder block and with special finish treatments. The scored or split-faced surfaces emulated the appearance of more expensive materials such as solid cast concrete or ashlar masonry. In contrast to some other projects, Johansen's design with its generous glass window walls provides a light and intimate treatment which is allied with the style known as California contemporary.

**Architects:**

**John M. Johansen** (1916-2012) studied with Marcel Breuer and Walter Gropius at Harvard University (and married Gropius's daughter), He subsequently lived and practiced in New Canaan into the 1970s. He was a member of the group known as the "Harvard Five." He later moved to Cape Cod where he lived for the remainder of his life. He served as an adjunct professor of architecture at Yale University between 1955 and 1960, but never designed a building for the campus. His work in New Haven consisted of his Dixwell redevelopment projects: the Florence Virtue Homes, the adjacent Helene W. Grant Elementary School, and Dixwell Congregational Church (Carley, 49).

**Leo Francis Caproni** (1888-1970) was born in Boston, attended Dartmouth College, and practiced architecture in New Haven. He was one of the older practitioners in the circle of Modernist designers of the post-World War II period. He designed numerous industrial and commercial buildings during the redevelopment period, including 464 Congress Avenue, 1060 State Street, and 150 and 178 Wallace Street. Caproni was associated with John Johansen in the design of Helene Grant School.

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### Sources (*continued*):

AIA Historical Directory of American Architects,

<http://public.aia.org/sites/hdoaa/wiki/Wiki%20Pages/What's%20here.aspx>

### Maps and aerial views:

Bing Maps accessed at: <https://www.bing.com/mapspreview>

Google Maps accessed at: <https://www.google.com/maps/>

Streuli & Puckhafer. 1911. Atlas of New Haven, Plate 2. Boston & Bridgeport: Walker Lithograph & Publishing Company.

John M. Johansen web site. Accessed 10/31/2016 at: [http://www.johnmjohansen.com/John\\_M\\_Johansen/John-M-Johansen-Official-Website.html](http://www.johnmjohansen.com/John_M_Johansen/John-M-Johansen-Official-Website.html)

Kenneth Boroson Architects. 2013. *Helene Grant School Historic Report*. City of New Haven: New Haven School Construction Program.

Fitch, James Marston. 1973. *American Building: the Historical Forces That Shaped It, Second Edition*. New York: Shocken Books.

Homann, Mary. 1966, July/August. "Symbolic Bells in Dixwell." *The Architectural Forum*, pp. 55-58.

Metz, Don and Yuji Noga. 1966. *New Architecture in New Haven*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

New Haven Modern web site. New Haven Preservation Trust. Accessed at: <http://newhavenmodern.org/>



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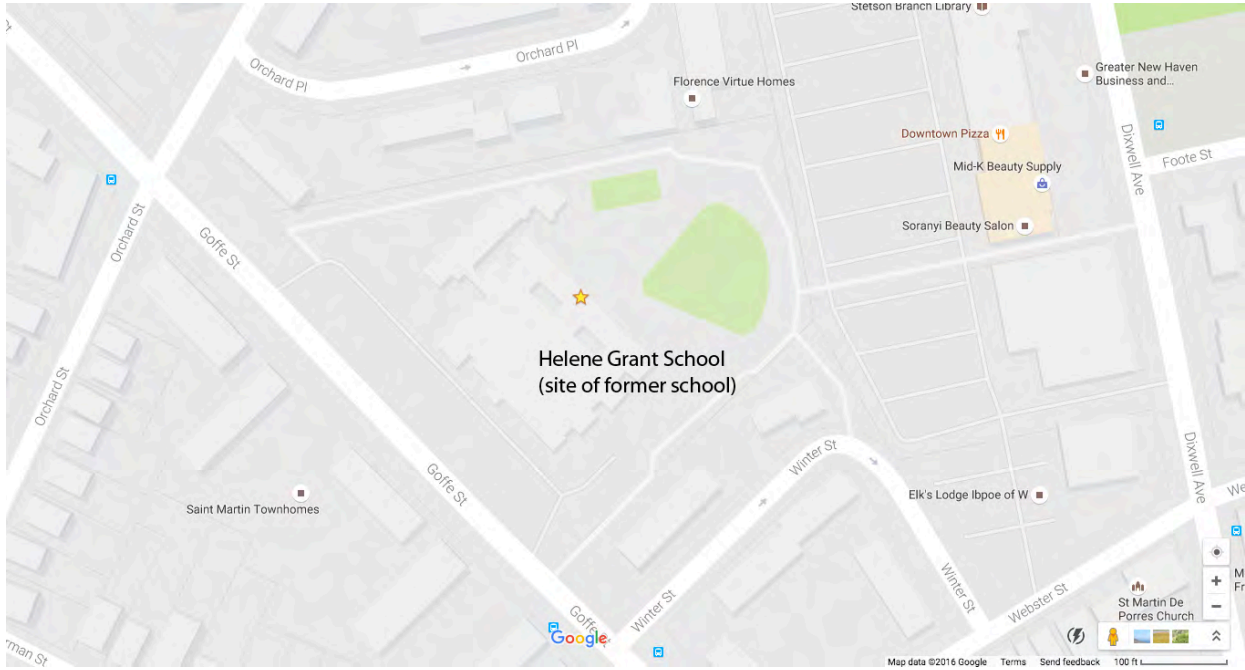


Figure 1. Location map – site of former Helene Grant School, 185 Goffe Street. Image from Google Maps accessed 10/27/2016.



Figure 2. South aerial view of former Helene Grant School. Image from Bing Maps accessed 10/27/2016. Note: temporary classrooms to the north are non-original.

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Figure 3. West aerial view of Helene Grant School and Florence Virtue Homes in early 1960s, camera facing northeast (Metz, 24). Note the classrooms with private walled outdoor courts, the clerestory windows between the structural roof girders, and the open court containing the bell tower.



Photo 4. South view of Helene Grant School, camera facing north. The entrance canopy is at left.



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Photo 5. Southwest view of the entrance with its cantilevered canopy; camera facing north. Note the exterior wall material consisting of scored concrete masonry. The upper frieze of smooth concrete forms a unifying course around the building, with blocks of higher roofline with clerestory windows above the frieze, as visible at the left rear.



Photo 6. Southeast view showing the bell tower; camera facing northwest.



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Photo 7. Northeast view, camera facing west. The paved area outside the classroom windows indicates the original courtyard extent. Clerestory windows have been fill in with white panels.



Photo 8. Interior view of the Multi-purpose Room; camera facing southeast. Note structural system of piers supporting concrete girders with clerestory windows.

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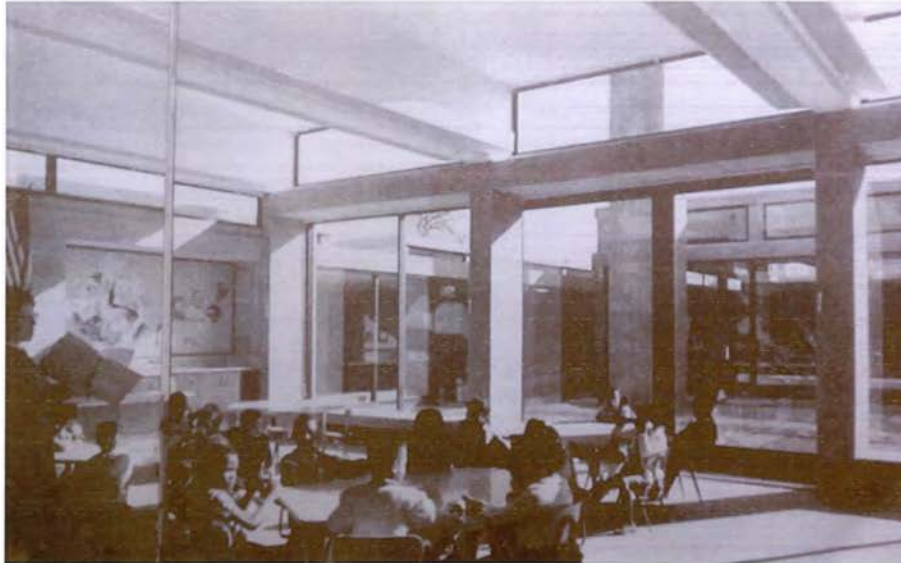


Figure 9. Interior view of Library looking east toward the courtyard with bell tower in 1965. Photo from Homann courtesy of Kenneth Boroson Architects.



Photo 10. Interior view of typical classroom south wall; camera facing south.

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Photo 11. Interior view of typical classroom north wall; camera facing north. Note (blocked by boxes) the full-length windows open to an outdoor courtyard for each classroom.



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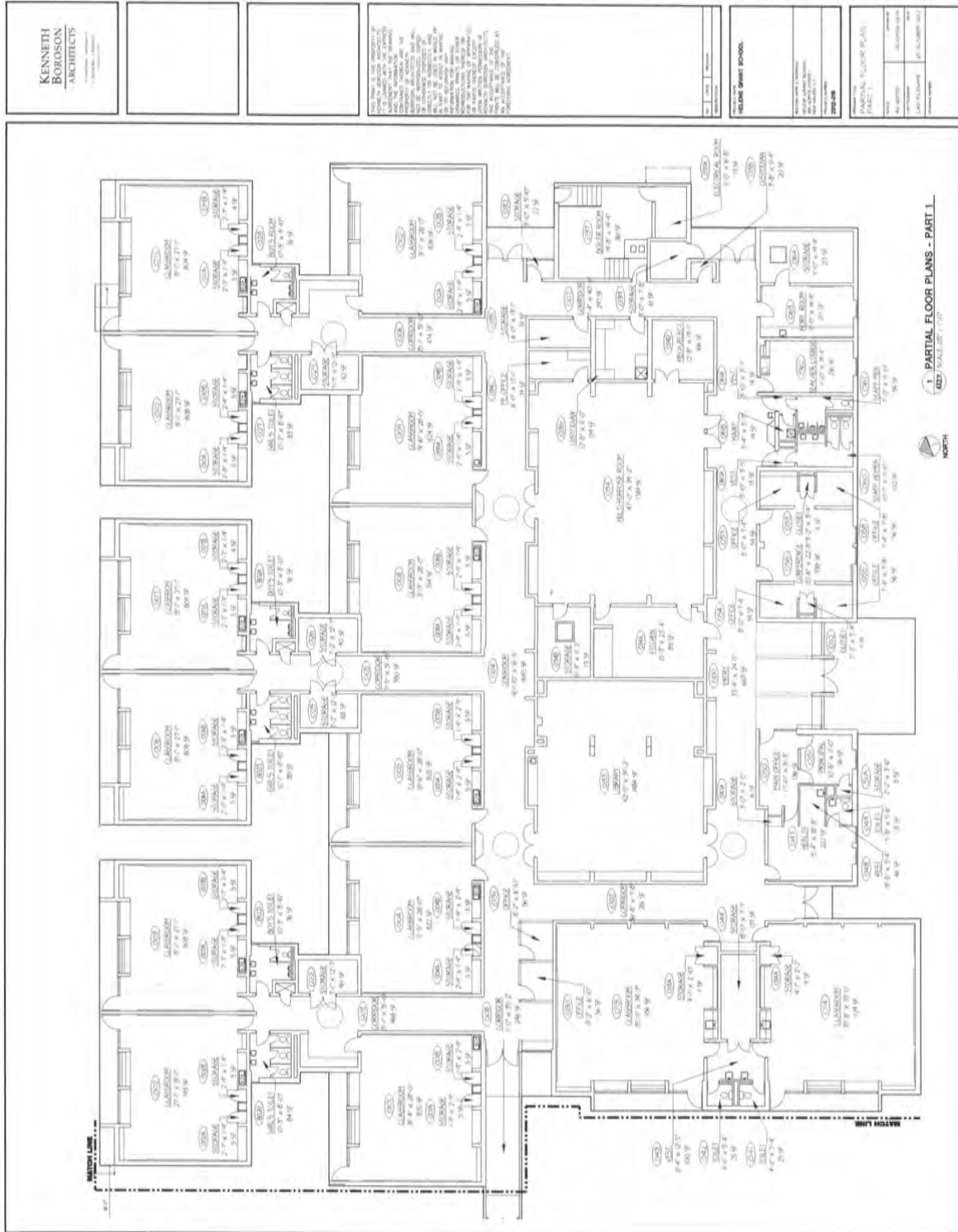


Figure 12. Building plan in 2013, courtesy of Kenneth Boroson Architects.