

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) Trade Union Plaza

Building Name (Historic) Trade Union Plaza

Street Address or Location 450 George Street aka 65 Dwight Street

Town/City New Haven Village _____ County New Haven

Owner(s) 65 Dwight Street LLC, 65 Dwight St., New Haven, CT 06511 Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: DOMESTIC: Multiple dwellings

Historic Use: DOMESTIC: Multiple dwellings

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 1968

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>Custom masonry units</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 Precast prestressed concrete plank

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 _____

Number of Stories: 3 Approximate Dimensions multiple buildings - see continuation sheet

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: Window replacement, garage doors at carports, fencing, painting

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: Retaining walls, iron & chain link fencing, paved driveways

Surrounding Environment:

- Open land Woodland Residential Commercial Industrial Rural
- High building density Scattered buildings visible from site

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

The 2.32-acre site is the entire block bounded by George St. on the north, Howe St. on the east, Frontage Rd. (Route 34) on the south, and Dwight St. on the west. To the west, north, and east is the Dwight Street Historic District, a predominantly residential neighborhood of the 19th and early 20th centuries. Route 34, known as the Oak Street Connector, abuts the south edge.

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

This complex consists of nine rectangular 3-story buildings. Six buildings of various lengths are placed around the perimeter enclosing an interior garden. These have parking bays below the 3 residential floors (duplexes above flats); the cars reach the parking from sunken drives around the perimeter, partially shielded from street view by low walls and landscaping. Three shorter buildings are placed in the interior, dividing the garden into two areas. The complex is built of custom cast concrete block masonry with a shingle-like surface pattern. The facades originally had casement windows, small cantilevered concrete balconies, and open car ports at the basement level. In the mid-1980s, the car ports were fitted with garage doors while landscaping and fencing established a more secure boundary for the interior courtyard areas. The rental complex includes 45 flats and 42 duplex apartments. Flats are entered at grade from the interior garden courts. Duplexes above are reached by a second-level walkway overlooking the gardens. See continuation sheet.

Architect Victor Christ-Janer & Davis Cochran & Miller Builder Ocone Construction Company

• 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.
Lee, Sandra. 1979. Dwight St. HD study. Item no. 353. Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation.
Map/block/lot: 298/0176/00600.
See continuation sheet.

Photographer Charlotte Hitchcock Date 8/22/2016

View Multiple Views Negative on File NHPT

Name Charlotte Hitchcock Date 11/15/2016

Organization New Haven Preservation Trust

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

• Subsequent field evaluations:

Latitude, Longitude: 41.307743, -72.937843

Threats to the building or site:

- None known Highways Vandalism Developers Renewal Private
- Deterioration Zoning Other _____ Explanation _____

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

Data table – list of buildings with dimensions and number of Dwelling Units (DU). See Figure 3.

1. 30' x 73' 8 DU finished basement
2. 30' x 107' 9 DU B: 10 carports
3. 30' x 107' 9 DU B: 10 carports
4. 30' x 40' 3 DU finished basement
5. 30' x 40' 3 DU B: 3 carports
6. 30' x 100' 9 DU B: 9 carports
7. 30' x 94' 12 DU finished basement
8. 30' x 213' 18 DU B: 20 carports
9. 30' x 66' 6 DU B: 6 carports

Historical or Architectural importance (*continued*):

This is one several projects built during the Redevelopment Era, where there was an attempt to establish a new ownership model — sponsorship by a non-profit such as a religious, labor, or community group along with a co-op ownership structure providing opportunities for first-time home owners. A sizeable parcel of cleared land was assembled through the redevelopment process, and the planning of new homes aimed to create an attractive development that would be competitive with suburban development in nearby towns. Here the design balances urban density with amenities like covered parking and green interior open spaces. Although smaller in scale, the layout of interior courts and a sunken parking level, bears a close resemblance to Church Street South as well as to others like Columbus Mall (Wooster Street). At Trade Union Plaza, the use of a custom concrete block textured somewhat like wood shakes, gives the complex a more substantial ambience than the standard block at Church Street South.

The structural system consists of custom-designed concrete block masonry bearing walls with floors made of pre-stressed concrete block planks known as Dox Plank (Nicholes interview; Dolhon 2008). Steel cables threaded through voids in the blocks allowed the concrete blocks to be tensioned and to form structural floor and roof beams. A common thread of experimentation in the construction projects of the 1960s in New Haven, was the innovative use of concrete masonry and various types of pre-cast structural concrete beams and slabs. For Christ-Janer, these investigations dovetailed with his concern to provide disaster-resistant forms of construction.

Perhaps most significant for this development, the scale here was an advantage as the small project was more manageable. When co-op ownership by low-income residents proved financially problematic, the complex was foreclosed by HUD (Department of Housing and Urban Development). It was purchased in the mid-1980s by a partnership, Union Plaza 85 Associates (managing partner Ron Nicholes), who managed it under the terms of its original HUD rent subsidy program. Through attentiveness to tenant relations, modifications to improve security, restoration of the landscaping, and careful building maintenance, the management was able to retain both the quality of life and Modernist appearance, enhanced by a cheerful paint color and accent awnings.

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In recent years, with the expiration of the subsidized financing period, the complex has been sold again and has moved into a market rate management. It stands as an enduring example of the aspiration of Modernist design to provide a successful environment for urban life. It remains the only example of Christ-Janer's work in New Haven, and illustrates his concerns with innovative structural systems and the provision of durable construction resistant to natural disasters.

Architect:

Victor F. Christ-Janer (1915 – 2008) was an architect who helped define the Modernist architectural movement in New Canaan, Connecticut. He was also an educator, artist and inventor.

Victor Christ-Janer grew up in Minnesota. He trained in liberal arts, sculpting, painting, and architecture at St. Olaf College from 1933–1935. From 1937 to 1939, he served along with his friend, the late Adolf Dehn (water colorist, lithographer) as director of a summer art school. From 1941 to 1942, he was the chief graphic designer for Nelson Rockefeller, who served as the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, a government office for promoting international economic cooperation in the Americas. Christ-Janer continued his education at Yale University, where he received a Bachelor of Fine Arts with honors in 1940. His studies were interrupted by service in World War II. Christ-Janer was a pacifist who applied for and secured a conscientious objector status after being drafted in November 1941. He served in the European theater as a camouflage artist and also in intelligence for the Army's Department of Engineers and Military Intelligence. His wartime experiences made a deep and lasting impression and the theme of non-violence followed Christ-Janer throughout his life. He later kept in his office photographs of the devastation and suffering he had encountered in Europe. After the war, Christ-Janer returned to Yale University where he received a Bachelor of Architecture in 1947.

Christ-Janer designed and built his own home in New Canaan, Connecticut in 1949 and lived there until his death in 2008. In 1955, he founded the Victor Christ-Janer and Associates architectural firm in New Canaan. Christ-Janer's love of Pop Art led to his opening a gallery within the office, showing work including Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, Jasper Johns and Roy Lichtenstein. Christ-Janer's career included his architectural practice, best known for a number of Modernist homes in the New Canaan area, and teaching at Columbia University and other schools. Later in his career Christ-Janer also worked on developing building materials resistant to natural disasters.

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Sources (continued):

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- Christ-Janer, Victor, biography. Project Gutenberg. Accessed 11/20/2016 at http://www.gutenberg.us/articles/victor_christ-janer .
- City of New Haven Tax Assessor's Records and Geographic Information System. Accessed 11/10/2016 at: <http://gis.vgsi.com/newhavenct/Search.aspx>
- Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. 1980. Historical and Architectural Survey of the Dwight Street Area. Connecticut Historical Commission.
Historic Resource Inventory Item 353. Trade Union Plaza.450 George Street.
- Dolhon, Anthony M., P.E., Wiss, Janney Elstner Associates, Inc. "Performance Evaluation of Dox Plank." *AEI 2008: Building Integration Solutions*. Edited by Mohammed Ettouney, Ph.D., P.E. Presented at Architectural Engineering Conference (AEI) 2008. Architectural Engineering Institute, American Society of Civil Engineers.
- Fitch, James Marston. 1973. *American Building: the Historical Forces That Shaped It, Second Edition*. New York: Shocken Books.
- Maps and aerial views:
Bing Maps accessed at: <https://www.bing.com/mapspreview>
Google Maps accessed at: <https://www.google.com/maps/>
- Metz, Don and Yuji Noga. 1966. *New Architecture in New Haven*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- New Canaan Mid-Century Modern Houses survey. 2008. Accessed 11/15/2016 at: <http://theglasshouse.org/learn/modern-homes-survey/>
- New Haven Modern web site. New Haven Preservation Trust. Accessed at: <http://newhavenmodern.org/>
- Nicholes, Ron, former owner of Trade Union Plaza. Interview 8/30/2016 at his home in New Haven, by C. Hitchcock.
- Pogrebin, Robin. 5/08/2008. "Victor Chris-Janer, Modernist Architect, Dies at 92." *New York Times*.
- Rae, Douglas W. 2003. *City: Urbanism and its End*. Pp. 382-3. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Whiffen, Marcus and Frederick Koeper. 1981. *American Architecture: 1607-1976*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

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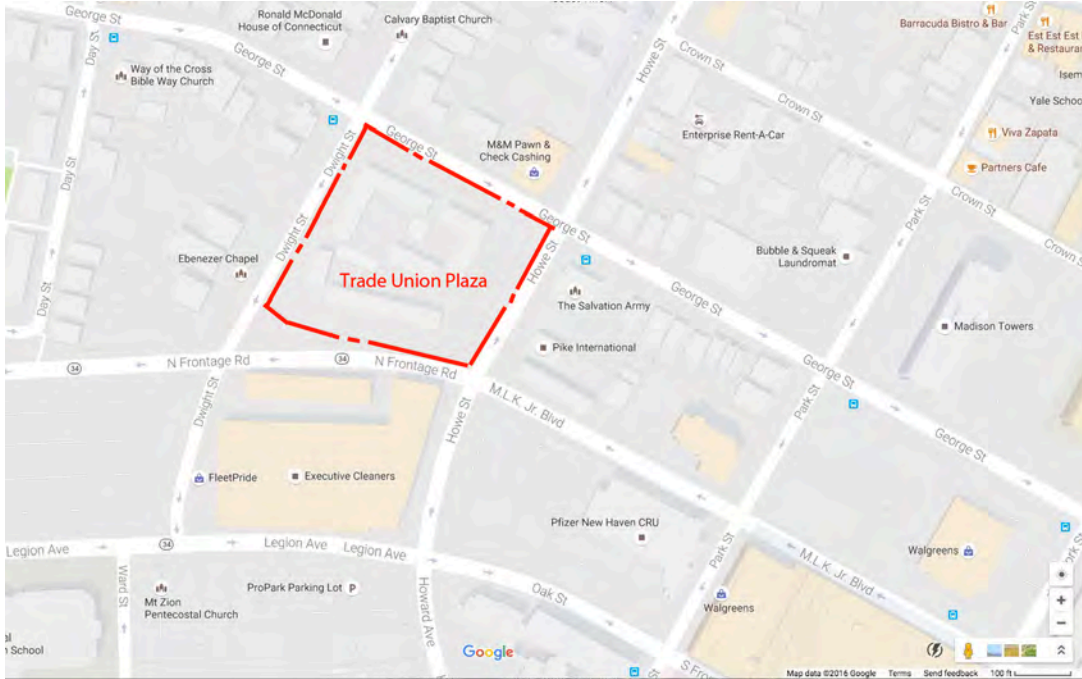


Figure 1. Location map of Trade Union Plaza. Image from Google Maps accessed 10/27/2016, with annotation to indicate the extent of the site.

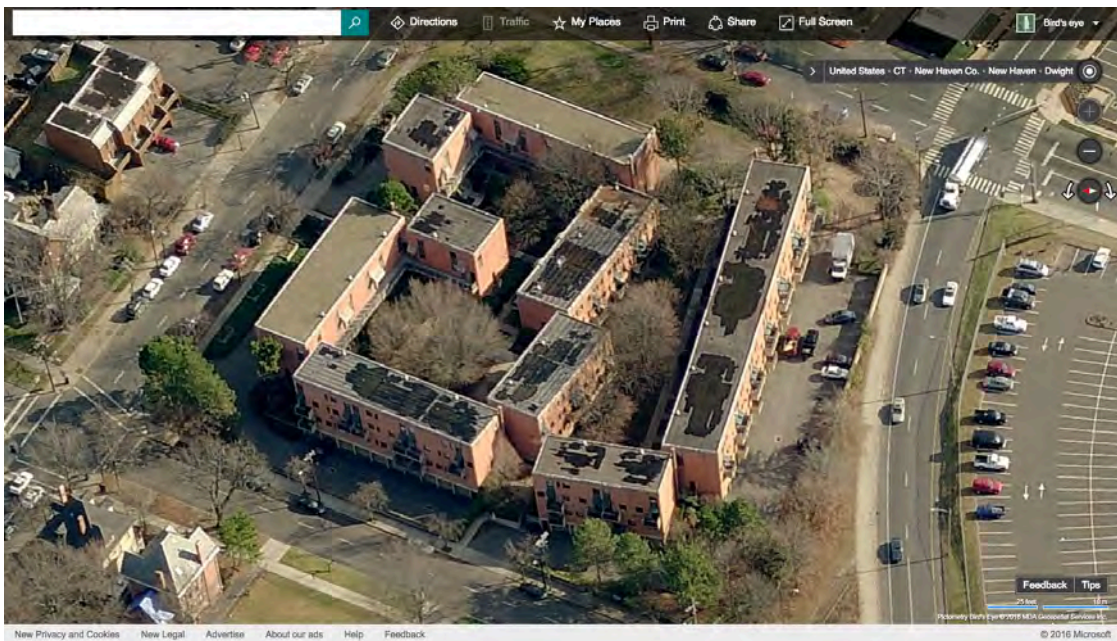


Figure 2. West aerial view of Trade Union Plaza. Image from Bing Maps accessed 10/27/2016.

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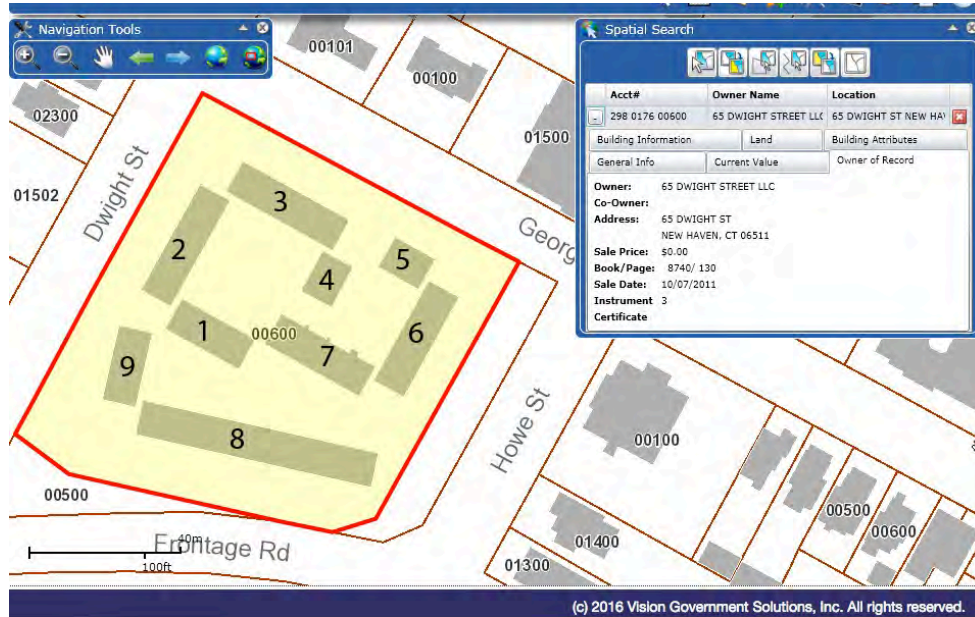


Figure 3. Site plan of Trade Union Plaza. Image from New Haven GIS mapping, accessed 10/27/2016. Note the surrounding smaller lots reflecting the development patterns of the historic Dwight neighborhood. Annotation indicates building identification for Data Table.



Photo 4. North elevation view of the George Street side of Trade Union Plaza, camera facing east. In the distance at rear is the 1965 Crawford Manor senior housing tower designed by Paul Rudolph.

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Photo 5. North elevation view of the George Street side of Trade Union Plaza, camera facing southwest. Note the pedestrian entry to the interior garden court, at left, and the sunken parking level below the homes, screened from street view by landscaping and the low elevation.



Photo 6. North elevation view of the George Street side of Trade Union Plaza, camera facing east.

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Photo 7. West elevation view of the Dwight Street side of Trade Union Plaza, camera facing north. The perimeter wall consists of the same custom block masonry as the building walls.

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Photo 8. West elevation view of the Dwight Street side of Trade Union Plaza, camera facing south, including detail view of the perimeter landscape wall.