



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) Bethesda Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Building Name (Historic) Bethesda Evangelical Lutheran Church
 Street Address or Location 305 Saint Ronan Street (aka 450 Whitney Avenue)
 Town/City New Haven Village St. Ronan-Edgehill County New Haven
 Owner(s) Bethesda Lutheran Church Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: Religious
 Historic Use: Religious

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes No
 Interior accessible? Yes No If yes, explain For church services; otherwise by application to the office.
 Style of building Modernist Date of Construction 1955-1958

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 type="checkbox"/> Concrete (Type _____) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Cut Stone (Type <u>Limestone</u>) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <u>Wood (Trim)</u> | | |

Structural System

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

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: 2 Approximate Dimensions Education wing 45' x 80'; sanctuary 60' x 80'

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: See building description on continuation sheet.

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: Walter Malley house, 305 Saint Ronan Street, with garage and gardens
(see separate inventory form)

Surrounding Environment:

Open land Woodland Residential Commercial Industrial Rural

High building density Scattered buildings visible from site

- Interrelationship of building and surroundings:

Located in mid-block between Saint Ronan Street and Whitney Avenue. Both are primarily residential neighborhoods dating from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, with a mix of single-family houses and low-rise apartment buildings. Across Saint Ronan Street to the west are the grounds of the Yale Divinity School. See continuation sheet.

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

See continuation sheet.

Architect Office of Douglas Orr, H. Dillingham Palmer Builder Dwight Buidling Company - 1955 Parish House addition
Cusano & OCone - 1958 Sanctuary

- 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, p.145.
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.
New Haven Tax Assessor's Record: Map/Block/Parcel: 220/410/009, Building Department permit files.
See continuation sheet.

Photographer Christopher Wigren Date 11/25/2010

View Multiple views Negative on File NHPT

Name Christopher Wigren Date 12/23/2010

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 _____

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings (*continuation*):

Bethesda Lutheran Church was constructed as an addition to the Walter Malley House, 305 Saint Ronan Street (see separate inventory form). It consists of two principal parts: the education wing, which extends eastward from the northeast corner of the house, and the sanctuary, which extends south from the eastern end of the education wing. These two wings, along with the original house, establish a C-shaped plan. Elements of the Malley House gardens, including brick and earthen terraces and a pergola, along with related plantings, remain around the buildings. A terraced parking lot fills the slope eastward between the sanctuary wing and Whitney Avenue; a brick pier signpost marks the entrance to the parking lot from Whitney Avenue. From Saint Ronan Street, the modern portions of the complex are mostly hidden from view by the Malley House.

• Other notable features of building or site (*Interior and exterior*):

The education wing is a 2-story masonry structure with a flat roof. The exterior walls are of brick, with steel-sash casement windows with muntins in a custom pattern. A later elevator tower, of brick with a standing-seam metal roof, punctuates the junction of this wing and the sanctuary. The interior is laid out in corridors with rooms on either side. Interior walls are of concrete block, and floors of vinyl tile.

The sanctuary wing is also of brick, with a steep pitched roof covered in slate. An aluminum fleche—an abstracted version of a feature found on medieval cathedrals—rises from the peak of the roof near its northern end. This wing also is two stories tall, with casement windows on the lower level and ribbon windows on the upper level; glazing patterns match those on the education wing. There are two entries. One is located on the lower level of the east side, facing the parking lot. Here, a timber-frame entry porch was added in 1997, replacing an earlier canopy that was a flat slab supported on pipe columns. The other entry, on the upper level on the western side, is located in a small projecting pavilion, with a cut-stone door surround and a flat roof topped by a cross made of I-beams. This entrance is reached by a bridge from the terraced garden behind the Malley House.

The interior of the sanctuary wing contains a kitchen, a large hall, and a stage on the lower level; a narthex, a sacristy, and the main sanctuary on the upper level. Interior walls are concrete block on the lower level, and brick on the upper level. Precast concrete piers clad in laminated wood support the roof in the sanctuary; the ceiling is sheathed with tongue-and-groove boards. Fittings, including pews, pulpit and lectern, and altar rail, are of pickled wood; and the altar is dark green granite from Sweden. In the narthex is a painting of Jesus' rescue of Peter from the raging sea, painted by Swedish-American artist Herman Söderström. It was brought from the previous church, on State Street, where it had been installed above the altar and dedicated in 1890.

ADDITIONS/ALTERATIONS:

1997, Gregg and Wies Architects: east entry porch added, narthex redecorated.

2001, Gregg and Wies Architects: elevator added.

Changes were minor, in keeping with original design.

• Historical or Architectural importance:

History: Bethesda Lutheran Church was founded in 1882 by Swedish immigrants. Many worked in New Haven factories. The congregation occupied buildings on Humphrey, Saint John, and State streets before acquiring the Malley property from Quinnipiac College in 1953. This purchase was seen as a sign of the congregation's successful transformation from working-class immigrants to middle-class status; some of its members had earlier worked as domestics in upper-class homes on Saint Ronan Street.

Architecture: When built, the design of the church was considered Scandinavian in flavor, a choice that was popular at the time and particularly appropriate given the ethnic origin of the congregation. This influence is seen in such elements as the brick and stained wood elements — softer than the hard edges of much Modern architecture — as well as the stylized classical design of the balcony railing and the pulpit and lectern, which reach back to stylized neo-Baroque design popular in Sweden during the 1920s and 1930s, and also seen in New Haven at Saint Thomas More

Chapel (260 Park Street; 1938, Office of Douglas Orr). A final element of Scandinavian influence is seen in the stone altar, which was imported from Sweden. The education wing was constructed in 1955-56, the sanctuary in 1958.

William A. Wiedersheim considers Bethesda "...one of Orr's most attractive designs." He explains, "...the window muntins play a role in the decorative scheme of the interior and exterior, and the building's siting and proportions are pleasing" ("Douglas Orr's New Haven," page 15). Part of the siting that Wiedersheim found pleasing was, no doubt, the remnants of the Malley gardens that form an approach to the church from Saint Ronan Street. Surviving garden elements include brick terraces, a pergola, and remnants of planting beds.

Architect: The office of Douglas Orr was New Haven's largest architectural firm in the middle years of the 20th century, producing a wide range of buildings throughout the city and the region, as well as serving as architect of record for out of town architects brought in to design buildings for the city's massive redevelopment effort and for Yale's active postwar construction program. After World War II, Orr himself did very little design, concentrating instead on client relations and professional activities.

Church history identifies H. Dillingham Palmer as the principal architect for the Bethesda buildings, which is confirmed by the initials H.D.P. appearing on some of the drawings. Wiedersheim identifies Palmer as a "senior associate" in Orr's office (pages 6, 7). Palmer is not listed in AIA Directories for 1956, 1962 or 1970 (available online); an internet search turns up only two references. First, he was a member of the Yale men's hockey team for 1921-1922, which is interesting since Herbert Emanuelson, later a prominent member of Bethesda, is listed as a teammate—perhaps that connection was the source of the Bethesda commission. Palmer is also credited as an "other designer" of the Yale Art Gallery. The Orr firm acted as architects of record, so it seems reasonable to assume that Palmer was the senior associate in charge.

• Sources (*continuation*):

Ahlstrom, Sidney A. "Bethesda – House of Grace: An Historical Portrait." Booklet, 1959. Text available online at <http://www.bethesdanewhaven.com/about/ahlstrom.html> (accessed 1 December 2010).

Bethesda Lutheran Church. Papers, including original architectural drawings. Located at the church.

DOCOMOMO-US. "Yale University Art Gallery." Online documentation, http://www.docomomo-us.org/register/fiche/yale_university_art_gallery (accessed 24 November 2010).

Fanbase.com. "H. Dillingham Palmer." <http://www.fanbase.com/H-Dillingham-Palmer> (accessed 24 November 2010).

Wiedersheim, William A. "Douglas Orr's New Haven." *Journal of the New Haven Colony Historical Society* 26/3 (Summer 1979): 2-22, especially page 15.



1. Southwest view of sanctuary, camera facing northeast.



2. South view of education wing, camera facing north.



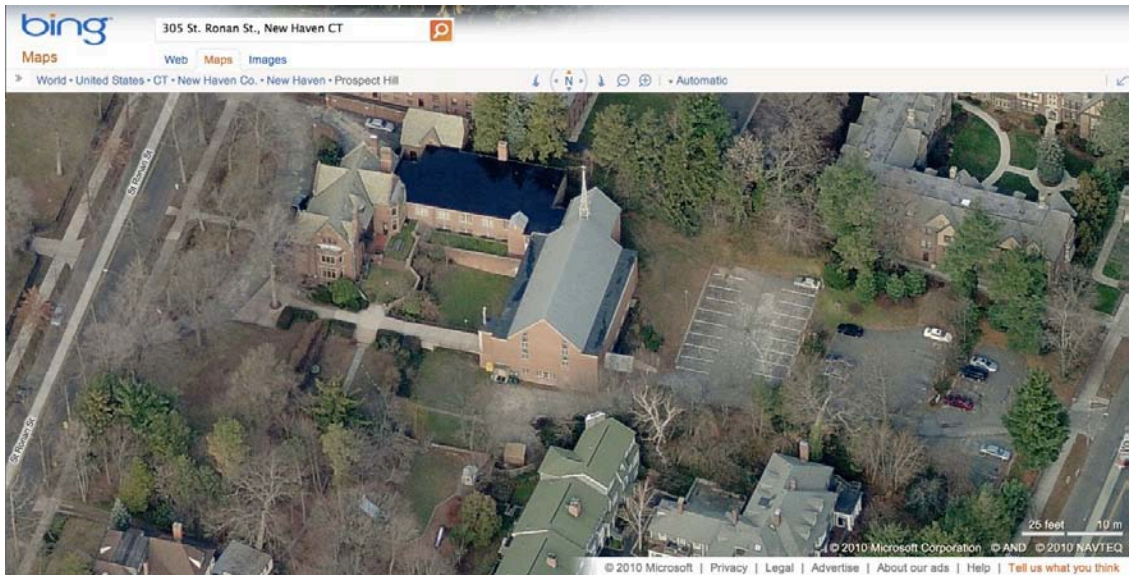
3. East view of sanctuary wing, camera facing west.



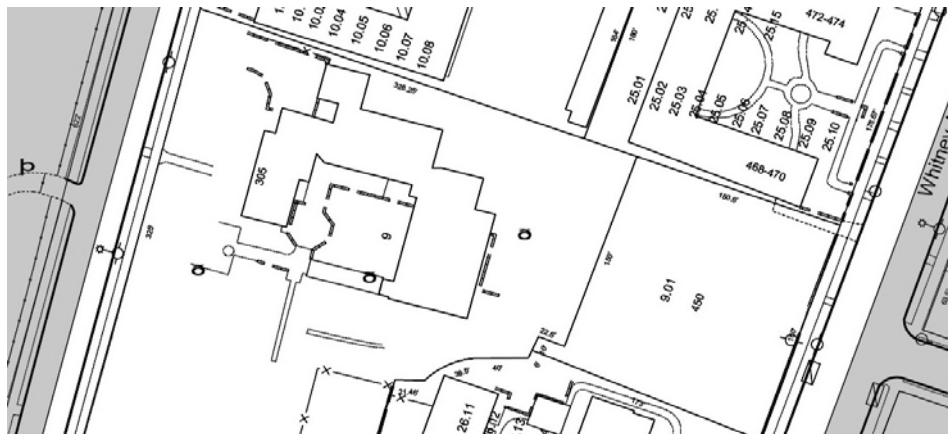
4. Sanctuary interior, chancel, camera facing north.



5. Sanctuary interior, loft, camera facing south.



7. Aerial view from Bing Maps <http://www.bing.com/maps> accessed 12/23/2010.



8. Site plan – detail from City of New Haven Tax Map 220/ 0410/ 00900, not to scale, North ↑.