



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) Harry A. Conte / West Hills Magnet School
 Building Name (Historic) Harry A. Conte Elementary School and Community Center
 Street Address or Location 511 Chapel Street / 15 Wooster Place
 Town/City New Haven Village Wooster Square County New Haven
 Owner(s) City of New Haven Public Private

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Present Use: School - public school / park
 Historic Use: School - public school / park

Accessibility to public: Exterior visible from public road? Yes No
 Interior accessible? Yes No If yes, explain During school hours
 Style of building Modernist - Formalist Date of Construction 1962

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>Precast, Poured</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 Rolled Composite

Number of Stories: 2 Approximate Dimensions School: 254' x 254', Auditorium: 74' x 98', Library: 74' x 168'

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: Renovation 2000 - addition at south facing Chapel Street.

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: Lawn, trees, walks and plazas, playgrounds, asphalt parking areas.

Surrounding Environment:

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

• Interrelationship of building and surroundings: The Conte School is located in the residential and commercial neighborhood of Wooster Square, and is bounded on the east by an elevated highway, I-91, and on the west by Wooster Square Park. Historic homes surround the school, many of which date to the mid-late 19th century; the square and surrounding buildings are a Local Historic District. Several other Modernist buildings also exist on Hughes Place, Greene Street, and Wooster Street.

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

This complex is composed of a 3 rectangular pavillions surrounded by precast concrete colonnades. The 2-story main building, located to the east, has an interior garden at its center; the inward-facing facades are lined with full-height window walls. This allows for an immense amount of natural light to enter the classrooms. The colonnade, composed of thin post-and-lintel forms that combine to form squares with curved corners, lends an airiness to a concrete building. The ceiling of the colonnade is coffered, reinforcing the linearity of the structure. A covered concrete plaza is attached to the Board of Education Building facing Wooster Place (formerly a public library), and connects to the school via a concrete pathway surrounded by grassy areas dotted with trees. The auditorium, originally a free-standing structure, is now connected by a 1-story addition to the main school building. The gymnasium, at the north of the main building, and auditorium, occupy the full height, matching 2 stories of classrooms. Additions in the 2000 renovation feature a warm orange brick which leaves the original white structure distinct.

Architect Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (Gordon Bunshaft & Natalie de Blois) with Schilling & Goldbecker Architect in 2000: Herbert S. Newman and Partners PC
 Builder W.J. Megin Inc., Naugatuck, CT

• Historical or Architectural importance:

The Conte Community School was named after Dr. Harry Conte, a physician who practiced on Greene Street in the Wooster Square area. When built on a site cleared under urban renewal plans, the school was meant to serve the entire community, and therefore had an auditorium, senior center, library, recreation room, gymnasium, pool, sports fields, hockey rink, and playground. Elizabeth Mills Brown referred to the building as having "a restrained design that manages to capture in concrete something of the classical spirit of the square, with its cool arcades and serene courts."

Architects: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) was established in 1936 in Chicago; in 1937 their New York City office opened. SOM is currently one of the largest architecture firms in the world and has designed such buildings as Lever House, Willis (Sears) Tower, John Hancock Center, and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University (see Inventory form). Partner Gordon Bunshaft and Senior Designer Natalie de Blois worked on this project. De Blois began working at SOM in 1944 and was the first woman to become a senior designer at the firm.

• Sources: Brown, Elizabeth Mills; *New Haven: A Guide to Architecture & Urban Design*, Yale U. Press, New Haven, 1976, p.186. 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.

City of New Haven Assessors Record Map/Block/Parcel 208/0551/010, Building Department permit files.

New Haven Public Schools <http://www.nhps.net/SchoolConstruction>, School Construction publication, 2008.

See continuation sheet.

Photographer Julie Rosen Date 2/20/10

View Multiple views Negative on File NHPT

Name Julie Rosen Date 2/20/10

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*):

Mullen, Sharon L., "Wooster Square in the Context of the Italian Renaissance," Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, 1986, <http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/1986/3/86.03.05.x.html> .

"Natalie de Blois: Mid-Century Masters." *The Architectural League of New York*. October 1987, web: <http://archleague.org/2009/07/mid-century-masters-natalie-de-blois/>.

Skidmore Owings & Merrill web site, Timeline of Projects, Natalie de Blois, 2005, web: http://www.som.com/content.cfm/natalie_de_blois_interview_9



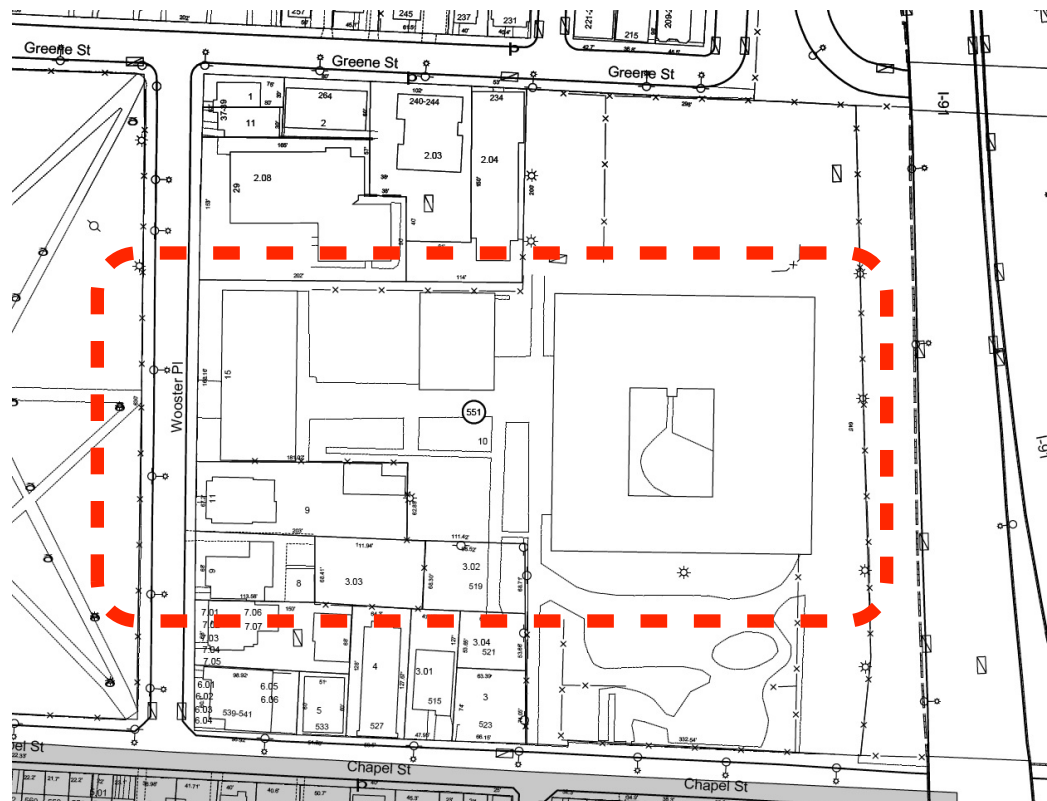
1. South view from Chapel Street, camera facing north.



2. Southeast view from front parking, camera facing northwest.



3. Aerial view from Google Maps <http://maps.google.com/> accessed 2/20/2010.



4. Site plan detail from City of New Haven Tax Map 208/0551/010.