

*50 Years in the West End –
The First 10 years: 1973-1983
Saving a Neighborhood*

Carolyn West, for Porchfest
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Welcome to my home at 65 Kenyon Street in Hartford. This year, my husband David Getomer and I celebrate 50 years of owning this fabulous home. This story hour is my way of celebrating this half century here. These are my recollections – I believe them to be true, but I'm probably getting some details wrong – with apologies for any errors. Please let me know any so I can make corrections. We didn't take a lot of pictures in the 70s, so some of these illustrate the point, but were taken later. Photos that aren't mine or friends' are from news sources or stock photos on the internet. Thank you to Porchfest for allowing me this venue. What perfect timing.



Figure 1- 65 Kenyon Street, Hartford, CT

First Blocks - First Settled

I am going to be focusing most on the people and homes of the first blocks north of Farmington Avenue: Kenyon, Whitney, Girard, and Sherman streets – where the West End was first settled, and where the homes were oldest and most at risk in 1970. I call these the “First Blocks” - where the rubber meets the road.

1869

Here's the 1869 map of the West End – a covered wooden bridge over the Park River, nothing but farmland with an unbroken white fence flanking the dirt road that goes to Farmington. No trees, just fields of wheat as far as the eye can see, and a few stately homes along the road. Underneath is the city water supply fed from Reservoir #1 in West Hartford.



Figure 2 -West End of Hartford 1869. Kenyon's farm from Prospect to the Park River

NOTE: some of these exhibits appear in large format at the end of the paper.
Many are on the Kenyon website in large scale to download:
https://www.angelfire.com/planet/kenyon/map_historical.html

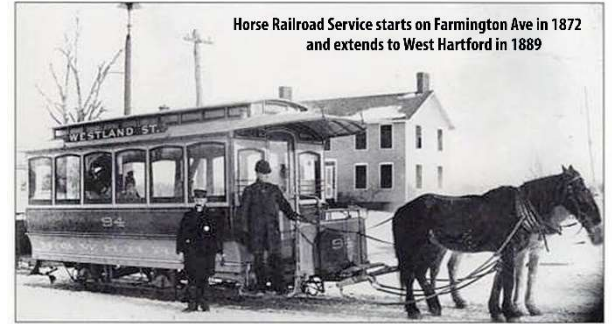
Additional photos for the slide show are at: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1-zaU5xdlnBAmqfuQMHyB5n0jNBm2ia3E?usp=sharing>

There's a ½ mile racetrack on Prospect south of Farmington Ave. It's just 4 years after the Civil War. Figure 2 above shows the location of Eugene Kenyon's house on the Avenue. I believe he owns all



Figure 3- 96 Kenyon St. Kenyon's original farmhouse 1871 - now greatly embellished

the farmland you can see. He is planning the first housing development west of the Park River. In 1871 he creates a path and builds his farmhouse (the now fabulously embellished 96 Kenyon). The path will be known as Kenyon Street. Horse trolley tracks are laid, and service begins out Farmington Ave. 95 Kenyon and 3 at the beginning of



Horse Railroad Service starts on Farmington Ave in 1872 and extends to West Hartford in 1889

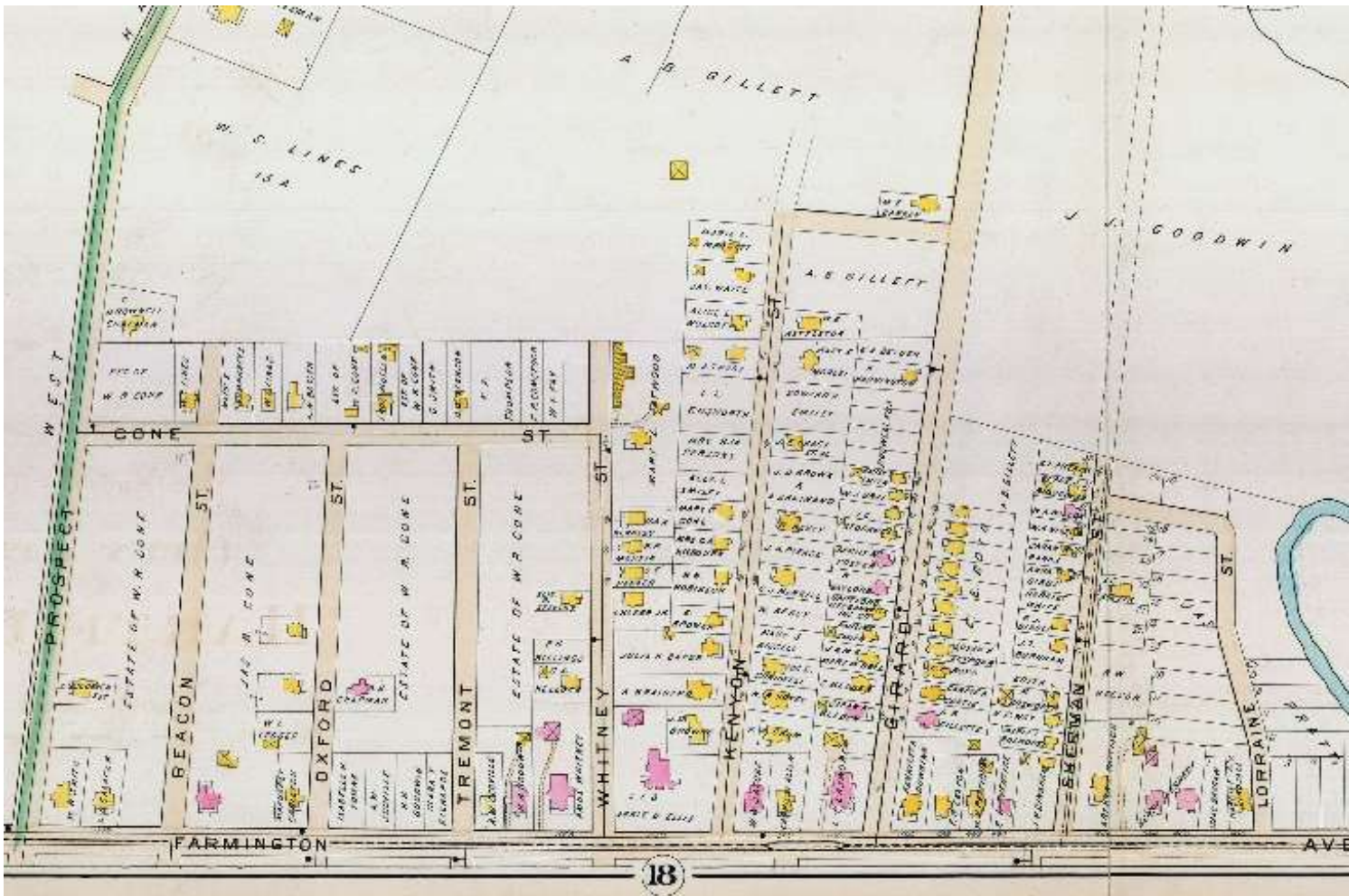
Fig 4- Horse Trolleys went out Farmington Ave in 1872.

Sherman go up a few years later. But with the panic of 1873 and depression, home-building is stalled for 17 years.

The oldest house in the West End is 1234 Prospect, which dates to 1828, an inn along the Albany Turnpike (Wadsworth Tavern). The Butler-McCook, 1782, on Main is the City's oldest existing house.

1896

Figure 5 - 1896, twenty-seven years later from Farmington Ave. to just above the stub that will become Fern Street, See pg.38



Here's the map 27 years later in 1896. The only blocks that are built up are the first 4: Sherman, Girard, Kenyon and Whitney, plus Cone. Only they have water service. You can see that all the land north of Cone is undeveloped. There are now 95 houses, all but the first five built in just 6 years.

On the detail below you can see the lots sold and some of the houses that have been built. On Kenyon's one block half are built, half are still lots owned by people, mostly as investments. Almost half that are built are owned by women. Married women in Connecticut only got the right to own property 19 years before this map, thanks to Isabella Beecher Hooker (her house, see fig. 2). The pink denotes brick homes, and the yellow are shingle. The 'X' marks a barn, carriage house or shed.

The solid line down the middle of the street is the water line, and the dots represent fire hydrants. The only water service so far north of Farmington: these 4 blocks, Cone St. and out Prospect. Sewers have just begun to be put in, partially out Farmington – but only Serman St homes are benefiting from sewers at the moment (dotted line). These can be up to six or seven-bedroom homes, built with just

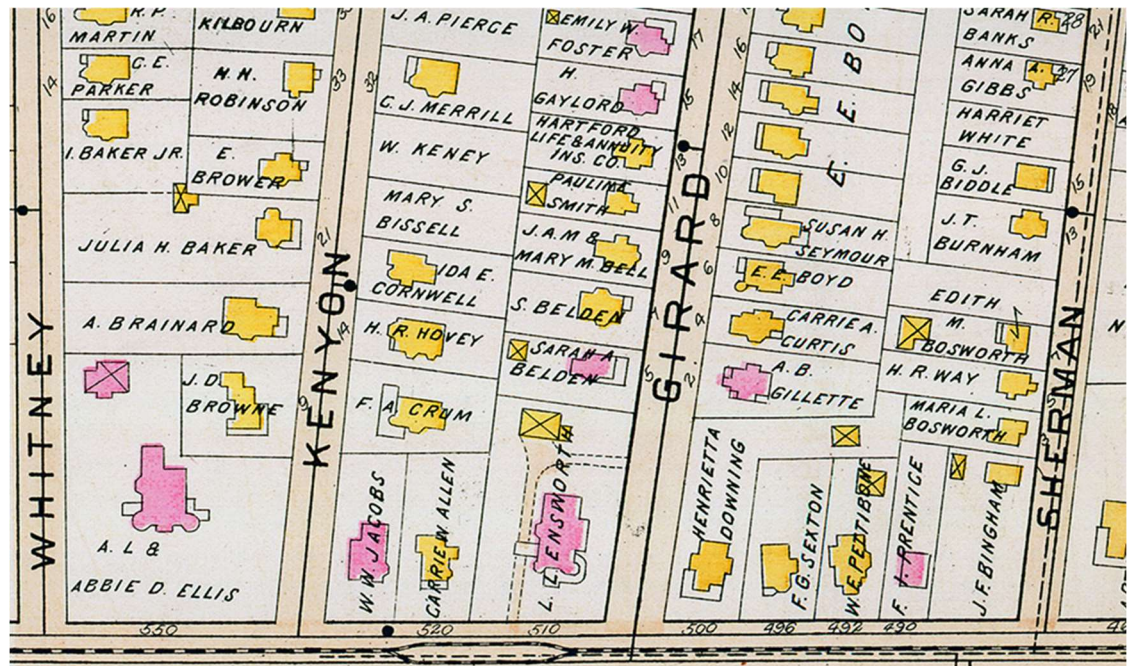


Figure 6- Detail of 1896 map: Beginning of First Blocks: Sherman Girard, Kenyon, and Whitney. See page 39.

one bath: an indoor pull-chain toilet and a claw foot tub, but often have multiple marble sinks in closets throughout. All the rest have only outhouses out back.

City maps do not show gas lines. The Hartford City Gaslight Company's charter of 1848 authorized it to lay 6" gas pipes under city streets. Since Mark Twain had gas lighting in his 1874 home ¾ of a mile away, I presume that as soon as side streets were built, gas pipes were laid and all these early homes were built with gas lighting. The maps don't show electric service either. Thirty-five years after gas was introduced for lighting, the Hartford Electric Light Company started with 6 customers downtown (1883). My home, built in 1900, had dual gas-electric fixtures with gas piped through the walls *and* knob and tube wiring. Electric was unreliable at the time. Ours had a cast iron wood stove to cook.

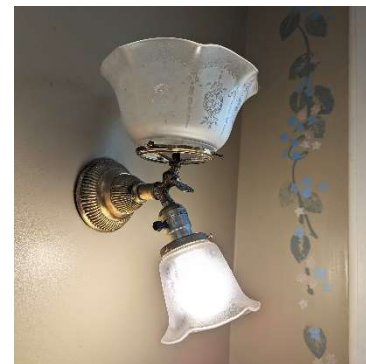


Figure 6a- Dual Gas-Electric fixture 1900, stenciling, 1980. 65 Kenyon.

If you look at the actual homes on this 1896 map, nearly all have two chimneys (each with from 2-4 flues), indicating they relied more on fireplaces for their heat (wood or coal). Nearly every house built *after* this map has only one chimney. Clearly, they've become more comfortable relying on central heat, perhaps not wanting to look old-fashioned coming into the next century, plus 2 chimneys costs more. Coal was dumped in massive basement bins and hand-stoked. Steam radiators heated a house fastest but were less efficient than hot water. Oil fuel didn't become common until the 1930s.

On Farmington Ave. between Kenyon and Girard there is a bypass for the horse trolley that goes all the way to West Hartford by now. You can see the footprint of Eugene Kenyon's original brick house on this fig 6 detail (now owned by the Ellis's). By 1900 Kenyon St. is known as Kenyon Heights and it is considered one of the most fashionable in the city- note how many names we recognize still. In 1901 Noah Webster School will be built. By 1909, most of the streets are built here (pg. 40). Westerly Terrace is the last: 1926–1956. By 1910, the entire city transport will be by electrified trolley.

Hartford is the most wealthy city in the nation due to its innovations in shipping, manufacturing, publishing and insurance. And between 1927 and 1944, it's the most innovative art scene in the nation, thanks to Chick Austin at the Wadsworth Atheneum. Thanks to Pratt and Whitney, it became a critical location for the war effort during World War II.

Kenyon Then and Now- Gloriously Eclectic

Nearly each of the 32 homes on this block was a wreck 50 years ago when David and I found our house. A few had been maintained on the outside – usually these were the brick homes, still occupied by original family members (there were 5 original families still on the block in 1973). But inside 50 years ago, all the mechanicals were still from the century before. Whether it was 1 or 10 successive owners, each owner (with one tragic exception) did their part to lovingly preserve and restore their homes



Figure 7 - Beautiful homes on Kenyon - 2007

bit by bit so that today on this block, all are beautiful and updated. To me, it's a sin to sell, then take original detail with you. (See pages 52-55 for house photos, date built, awards, architect & who was here in the 70s.)

If you want spectacular, look here on this block of Kenyon because when this was developed, it was the first west of the Park River, the height of luxury, each original owner stamping their personality on their new home. Most blocks have a certain uniformity of style and resident – not this one – it's gloriously eclectic – not just in architectural style and topography (we sit on 3 rolling hills), but size and use and the people that call this home.

There are 23 single-family homes (some enormous, some cottage style, some with large lots, some with barely 25 feet between buildings, some high on a hill, some on a very flat lot). There are 3 two-family homes, 1 three-family home, 2 multi-dwelling homes with ADU's, the last legal rooming house in a single-family zone, two brick box apartment buildings, a vacant lot and two commercial buildings. On Kenyon and Farmington there are restaurants, a food store, a FedEx, dental practice and a bank just at the end of the block. Three bus lines are within 2 blocks. People of all walks of life live and pass through here because of our beauty and unique location (we sit next to one of the few north-south connections in the city and also link to suburbs). For such a small block, an incredible number of people live and used to live on Kenyon Street. For diversity, come to the first block of Kenyon St.

We are old, young, rich, poor, gay, straight.

Single, couples, kids, grown kids, no kids.

White collar, blue collar, no collar, owner, renter.

Student, artist, entrepreneur, executive, educator, laborer, motivator, activist, bureaucrat.

Black, White, Asian, Latino....

...and we all live together on this one block in Hartford.

It was and has become chic again to live on Kenyon Heights. How did that happen?

[The Kenyon Street website gives the PR version of how we got here](#)

Twenty-five years ago I designed an illustrated map of the city, including the West End (pg. 44). It has everything I love about my neighborhood. Seventeen years ago, I wrote this short introduction about the 1970s in the West End. It's on the website I created to celebrate my block: the 'First Block of Kenyon Street' (<https://www.angelfire.com/planet/kenyon/about>).



Figure 8 - The Kenyon Street website

I started the site to keep the neighbors up to date about block happenings. We were a very active 32 households on this block, getting together nearly every month. We have maintained a full contact list of everyone on the block for about 30 years (thanks, Doug Unfried). I kept the site up to date until 2013 when my dad died and it became too much to maintain. The site won an award from the Hartford Preservation Alliance in 2007 for Community Activism. The site is still live, has more history and maps and you can peruse it, but it hasn't been updated since 2013 – 10 years ago.

This is my breezy four-minute Intro to the 1970s in the West End from the website – pure PR and not a lot of detail to the events. Then I'll give you the rest of the story.

From the Website -The 1970's in the West End (with a few additions)



Figure 10- Working on homes

In the early 1970s, a handful of young couples - "urban pioneers" bucking suburban sprawl bought neglected Victorians at bargain prices and taught each other how to renovate "your Victorian house in the city". It was the very beginning of a movement. The Old House Journal was the renovator's bible. Everyone was stripping old paint from oak woodwork, polishing blackened brass, stripping wallpaper, painting walls, and replacing window ropes - themselves. In those days, the only contractors we used were plumbers and electricians. The first time we painted the outside of this house David did it. Most houses hadn't been touched since the 1930s.

Activists at heart, they knew the tools of organizing. Nearly everyone had a story of having to insist that real estate agents show them property in the city. Lenders and insurers were accused of red lining the city by refusing to make loans or insure



Figure 9- Old House Journal, 1974

property. The West End Civic Association (WECA) got a reputation for knowing the nuances of the zoning code and turning out votes. Our president, Clyde Fisher was a mastermind. Back then, it met in the basement of United Method Church.

There were living room concerts, the West End players, a craft group that specialized in jug wine, a monthly neighborhood newspaper, The Westender, and great parties at the drop of a hat. Everyone sent their preschoolers to Knight Hall at the Seminary (this was before the Law School moved there in 1978) and to Noah Webster School. The neighborhood moms published 'Fun Spots - A Book of Day Excursions for the Kids'. The book group and craft group are still going strong.



WENDCO incorporated as a non-profit organization and began planning to save the Colonial Theater. Federal funds were found to landscape and plant trees on Farmington Avenue. "At Home in Hartford" buses brought about a thousand suburbanites on house tours all over the city for years. (Parenthetically, I was one of dozens of those tour guides,

and co-founded a city-funded, short-lived organization called the Housing Market to promote city living. As such, the City sent me to New York to show housing options to hundreds of American Airlines employees when they relocated their reservations call center to Hartford.)

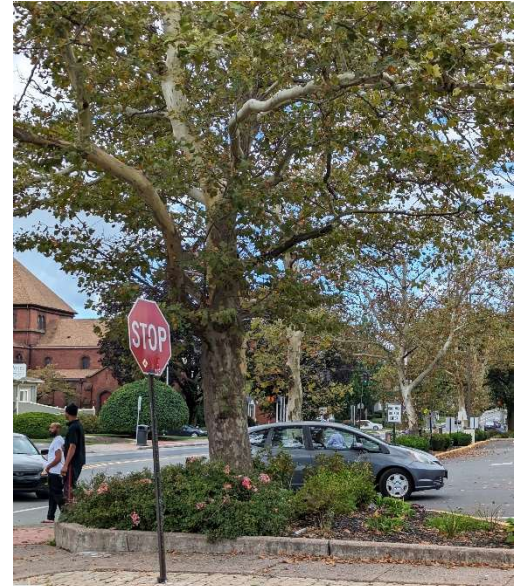


Figure 11- Farmington Ave. landscaping - 45 years later. Our end of Farmington Ave. is about to be redone again. This sycamore on Kenyon is definitely worth saving.



Figure 12- House tours similar to this showcased city homes.

Here in the West End, at first, it was one house per block bought by a renovator, then two, then three. Each paint job was celebrated, and each young couple was added to the party list. Moms bonded through play groups. The West End Bookgroup held its first meeting. And a friend's four-year-old became a plaintiff in Sheff v O'Neil, Connecticut's landmark school desegregation case.

By the early 1980's the West End had "turned around". Housing prices jumped - the West End was hot. Suddenly, there were neighbors here you had never met. This activism is the legacy of today's West End.

That's the breezy, 'PR' part. But it took 10 long years – 1973-1983. That's a long time to be holding your breath, hoping all this would work. Even after 1983 there was an important Part 2 that unfolded over the next 30 years – that was the school system.

Hartford in 1973

It was recession, high unemployment, high mortgage rates (soon to hit 10%, with a peak fixed rate of 18.63% in October of 1981). The economic boom brought on by WWII had played out. The suburbs had been built. Over half the baby boom was out of school and on their own. The government had blown its funds, borrowing to build



Vietnam War protests at the Capitol, May 12, 1972. Hartford Courant

highways, start new programs like Medicare and Head Start, paying for the space race to land on the moon and, most of all, paying for 20 years of war in Vietnam – which wouldn't end for another 2 years. And of course, there was Watergate and Nixon's resignation, closely followed by the first Arab oil embargo with its hours-long lines at the gas station. It was also the resurgence of the Feminist Movement (Gloria Steinem had started MS Magazine just 2 years before), the beginning of the Gay Rights Movement (Stonewall had been three years prior), the beginning of the Environmental Movement (the massive oil spill in Santa Barbara spurred the first Earth Day three years prior), and the beginning of decline in membership for the Black Panther Party which would be active another 9 years. A time of sea-change.

Race Riots

Just 4 years earlier, in 1969 there were [race riots in the North End](#) of Hartford triggered by police use of tear gas to break up a fight.



Core and others working to make things better. Hartford 1969. H Times



After the 1969 riots in Hartford's Northend. H Times

It's one thing to live in LA, like I did in 1965 when Watts blew, LA is huge, and Watts very far away. It's another thing to be White and Jewish in Blue Hills in 1969 – maybe your family survived the holocaust. In 1969 100 buildings burned in Hartford, including a library and supermarket. If you live in Blue Hills and 100 buildings have burned right over there, you move, and they did. Whole city neighborhoods

rapidly went from White to Black. By 1969 75% of Hartford's population was Black.

Not the West End. Geography made the difference – Farmington Ave. a straight shot to West Hartford and downtown, and the significant barrier of the Park River and the railroad tracks made the violence just far enough away. Many families with means and alternatives moved away, but most stayed. There wasn't massive white flight, but nobody was spending money to keep up their very large old homes.

[Blue Hills](#)

Following the riots, a handful of families, White professional liberals, had moved into Blue Hills. Their minority neighbors were Black middle class who could now buy in a beautiful suburban-style neighborhood. Their dream was a stable mixed-race community. It was important to prove it could be done. But it wasn't to be then and not there. All but 2 or 3 of these White families would end up moving to the West End. Don Noel, an award-winning journalist and writer and his wife, Brad stayed in Blue Hills in the City's Northend for over 40 years and didn't leave until 2016 when they moved to a retirement community. I recommend his short stories that speak to his experience there. A recurring theme seems to be: "Get to know your neighbors, become involved". His stories are powerful.



Figure 16- Blue Hills home on Canterbury St.

[How come neighborhood efforts like Blue Hills didn't work, but it worked here?](#)

In two words 'luck' and 'people': 1) The luck was geography, which I already explained, but that's not enough to make it happen. 2) The second? A handful of special people.



Figure 17- West End party

These were not baby boomers; they were kids during WWII. These were from the generation of freedom riders and people who volunteered for the Peace Corps. They knew the magic formula: Sure, you have to organize, but mostly, it has to be fun. So much fun you make your colleagues at work jealous they don't have your guts. So much fun it would hurt to leave. Did people leave? – all the time, but the fun kept others coming - and of course, these spectacular homes and soon-our strong community.

[How did David and I get here?](#)

We were 22 and didn't think much about what had to get done – we just wanted to save an old wreck. We weren't thinking about the City at all – that's just where the house of our dreams happened to be. It was those special people I mentioned that showed us that in order to save the house, we had to save the neighborhood.



Figure 18- Carolyn West and David Getomer- 1972

When we graduated, we were all advised to look for jobs as far away from Boston as we could get. First the baby boom was graduating, second, all the men who had gone to college to get a student deferment from the draft were graduating, and third, nearly everyone in the city of Boston was a student.

David was a New Yorker, savvy in real estate – he was the first to get a job – in commercial property management in Hartford. We were 22, but we knew we wanted to buy a house right away. NY, LA, Boston? Coming from those places, real estate was like gold – and here, compared to those places, it was cheap. We weren't looking to set up a beachfront in the City. We were looking to save an old Victorian wreck from the wrecking ball. The community didn't matter.

We spent weekends for the next three months looking at beat up property to save, mostly old Victorian houses that needed rescuing. We even looked at a 1700s farm in Granby on 10 acres, a railroad bridge over a brook, a grist mill stone and a 100-year-old patch of asparagus. It was 10 feet from the highway, had been vacant for 30 years or more – no remaining paint, no glass in the windows. It was so tilted with rot, a marble careened down the floorboards. We almost bought it.



I had begun volunteering at Children's Village at a school for autistic kids and loved to drive the streets of Hartford, looking at houses. One Sunday in early March we were heading out to Collinsville to look at a long-vacated solitary wreck perched high on a hill, when I said I couldn't stand the commute. Being from LA, I had seen my parents commute 2 hours in each direction at one time or another. I wasn't having it. So, we turned around. I said, "Let me show you my favorite block in Hartford", and we drove down Kenyon Street. "Let me show you my favorite house on this block." When I pointed, there was a big 'For Sale' sign planted in front. I believe that our owning this house was meant to be.

65 Kenyon in 1974. The house of our dreams. Every house was all white peeling paint, dried out brown stain or had asphalt siding

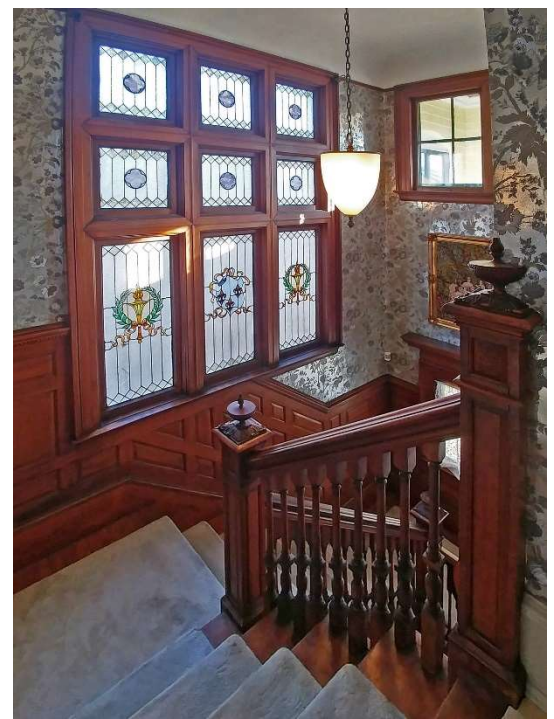
Realtor

We immediately contacted the realtor - who tried to switch us to another house in West Hartford. We had to insist for him to show us this house. The owners were a mixed-race couple with 4 little kids who had owned the house less than a year. He was a contractor who never had time to work on his own house, and his wife was fed up. We made an offer - the price they had paid (\$29,000, with an 8% mortgage), and they accepted. This was half the price of a boring little house just across the line in West Hartford. We were in love with this house.

Our House: A Unique beauty built in 1900

It was full of carved natural paneling of exotic woods, high ceilings, 3 sets of pocket doors, elaborate brass door fixtures, ruby velvet window seats and carved tigers leaping from the full-height fireplace mantle. Every room had 6-foot bay windows, and the winding staircase had a nine-foot-stained glass window. The garage was magnificent. The elaborate roof was slate with Yankee gutters. It hadn't been gutted. The woodwork hadn't been painted.

It was built by Charles Atkins, a lumber dealer who was running for governor as a Republican candidate. In those days Victorian house parts were ordered through lumber yards. He built this house starting in about 1900, finishing the last bit, the third-floor plaster, three years later.



65 Kenyon, stained glass and main staircase.

Sure, many of the walls were painted a flat Kaopectate pink over turquoise – they smelled of dust and you could see the brushstrokes. The main rooms had cream on cream flocked wallpaper separating from stained walls. It had 29-amp electric service, so there was only one outlet per room and none in the dining room – which did have, however, a servant's buzzer on the floor. There were few wall switches or fixtures in any of the main rooms, except in the kitchen which still had the original brass dual light fixtures, a gas jet on top and electric below (pg.3). In 1900, electric service was unreliable.

The large kitchen had two walls of windows and 5 doors- zero wall space. There was a tiny sink on cabriole iron legs with a 5' porcelain drain board, a kitchen table in the center and an electric stove (the original wood cook stove that vented to the chimney stack had just been replaced with electric only months ago.

All of the mechanicals were from the last century. In the basement, the boiler was the original coal furnace with 3 huge coal bunkers and vestiges of failed prior heating attempts. (We still have 1 pipe steam throughout.) There was still some knob and tube wiring visible in the basement, plus gas pipes for lighting in all the walls.

The driveway was steep, with two curved concrete troughs with a grass strip up the middle. The front yard



The garage and copper beech tree at 65 Kenyon, pic by Chip Benson

had a weed tree and moth-eaten pine shrub, and a post for a business sign (which had indicated a lady's hat business). The lower back yard was all gravel – for extra parking – there was a 12-foot-wide forsythia shrub, and the upper yard was filled by an enormous copper beech tree, with a 5' diameter trunk. It was covered with hearts and initials from Noah Webster school kids that had spread 8" across. That tree covered our yard and half of each of our neighbors'. When we signed the papers to close, they handed us a skeleton key to the back door.

We would later discover an oak, wall-mounted pull-chain toilet in the basement, the ice door in the cold pantry wall for deliveries from the driveway, a speaking tube from the kitchen to the third floor, a soapstone laundry sink with three deep tubs, and a connector and push-button switch on the 2nd-floor hall that had operated a central vacuum system that had been located in the basement.

We were to learn how lucky we were – so many of our friends spent years stripping paint, tearing down walls to partitioned rooms, looking for replacement doors, and scavenging for period fixtures.

[Welcome to the West End](#)

The very next weekend, still in our apartment, we got a call from a woman we didn't recognize. "Welcome to the West End. I'm Beverly Heegaard".

We were immediately invited to the first of many parties and told to join the civic association. It didn't take me long to recognize what a miracle worker Beverly was.

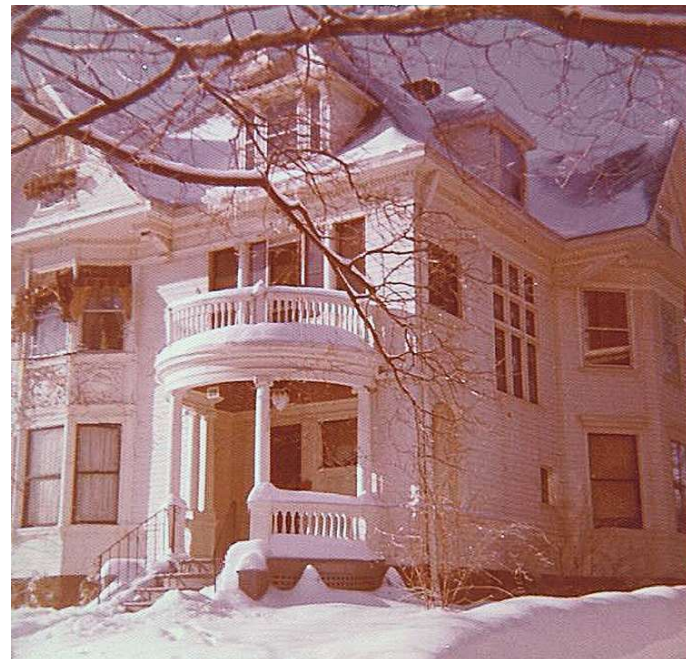
[What was it like here?](#)

You could look down most blocks and 90% of the houses were all a dingy peeling white: the body, the windows, the trim - not a painted lady in the bunch. There were a few with brown stain and curling shingles and at least three had colored siding of asphalt shingle, laced with asbestos that looked like lizard skin. Asbestos wasn't banned in Connecticut until 1989. Most houses hadn't seen any upgrade since the 1920s or 1930s.

White peeling paint on the outside, and 29-amp electric service on the inside. For those who don't know what that implies, it means only 1 plug per room if you were lucky. The picture above is as we bought our house in 1973 – all white, with canvass awnings. The rest of the armature for the awnings and a full set of shutters for every window are still in the garage attic. I adored the slate sidewalks and tall trees (and the city rolled your garbage out on trash day!).



81 Fern St. Beverly Heegaard's base of operations



Like most of the others, our house was all white



Dick Kyle & cousin Mary Waxenberg who lived at 65 in WWII as kids

When we moved here, there weren't any backyard fences – all the yards were open. We hosted Dick Kyle and his cousin Mary at a block party. Mary had found the website and contacted us. They had both been kids living in our house during WWII with their grandmother and aunt while their parents were in the War. He said, in winters you could sled from the top of our yard, between the houses, across Kenyon, continue through the next set of yards and cross Girard. It was just one big backyard to chase around, with woods in the back. Those woods were the orchard planted by Mary Atwood whose home spread across four lots on Whitney. We were the first to put up a backyard fence. We had a dog we wanted to be able to play in the yard. According to Mary,



Garage peak-the chauffeur slept here

each cousin in turn thought they had discovered the tiny attic room above the garage. When we bought, the garage attic had a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling, a metal cot, and a 1950s playboy centerfold on the wall (all still there). Mary held seances using a Ouija board there with all her friends.



Susan and Mae Bennett & family at 65 Kenyon in the 40s

Dick said the only stove for cooking was the big original wood stove in the kitchen that his grandmother and aunt used right up until they sold in 1972. He mentioned how exhausting and relentless it was to shovel the coal into the furnace all day. I asked how they managed when he was in school. "Oh, Joe did it." Who was Joe? "He lived in the basement". Joe never showed up on the census, nor did anyone who slept on the cot in the garage attic.

Just the maids. For the first 30 years on Kenyon, every owner had a live-in maid – mostly born in Ireland, Poland or Sweden, except 96 Kenyon which had 2 maids. By the 40s they worked in defense plants.

By 1973 most of the people were retired or near retired and renting to roomers to get by. There were some very large families with teenage kids who lived in the neighborhood, but not on our block. In the first 2 blocks, the City permitted, and still does permit, up to 2 roomers per house, and certain businesses can be legally operated from these homes.



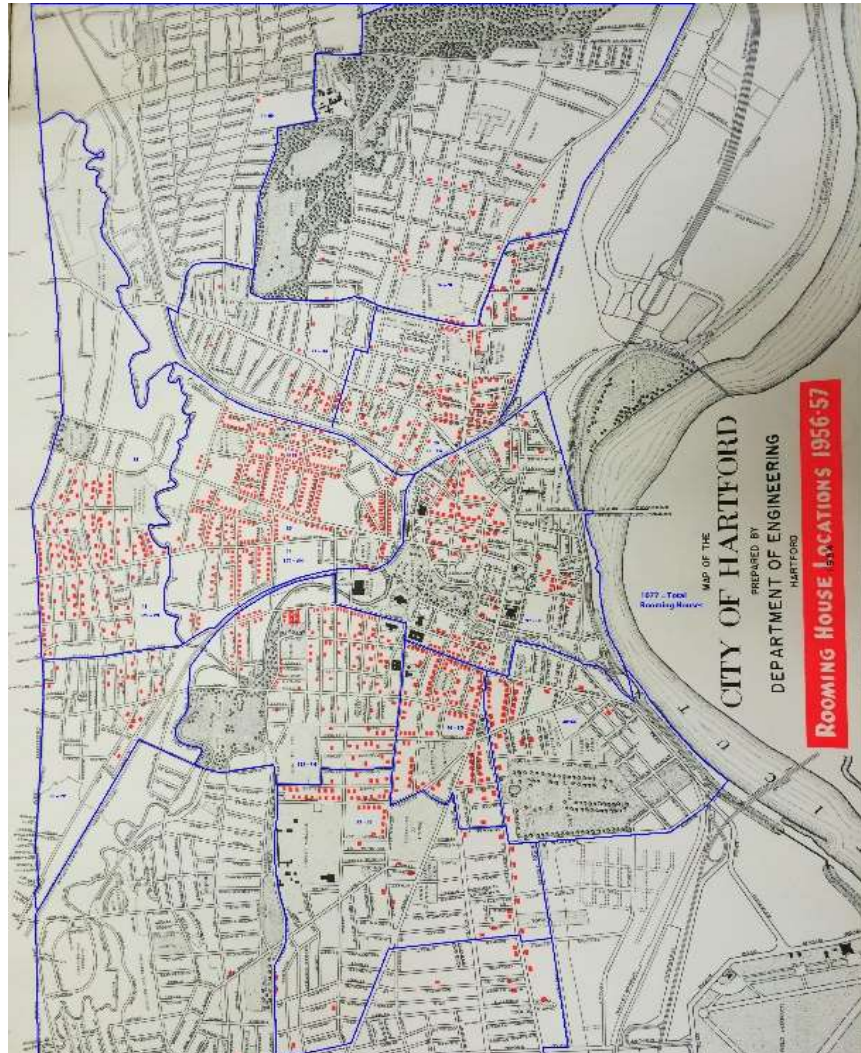
1950s -Dick's Cousin Everett on our staircase

Mae Bennett – a Milliner

Our house was one of those. The owner before our seller had been a milliner operating out of the house. Mae Bennett had been the hat-maker for Beatrice Auerbach's G Fox & Company in the 1930s and then opened her own shop on La Salle Road. She was widely regarded as the best around here. When she retired, she maintained the business in this house – her pink salon was in her bedroom and dressing room. She too rented to two roomers on the second floor who worked at Aetna. Her grandkids were on the third.

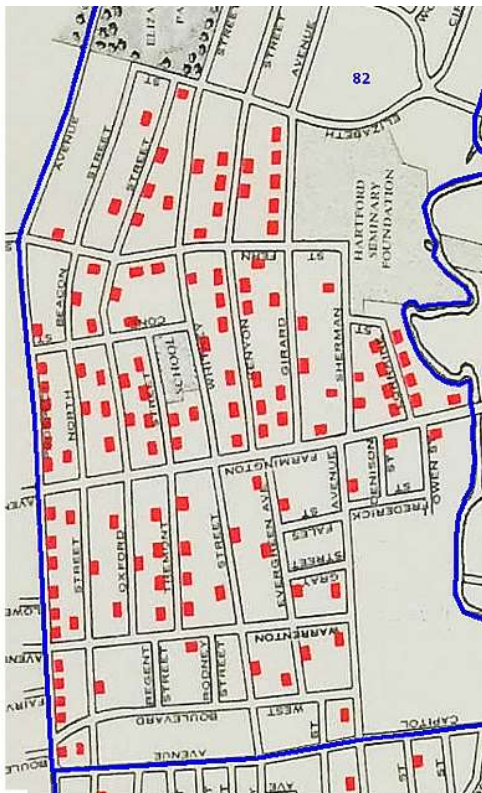
Rooming Houses

Here's the City's rooming house map in 1957. There were over 1,000 rooming houses in the City – a legacy of big old homes and the housing shortage around Hartford. Before and during World War II – young engineers lived in converted rooming houses at the end of Kenyon and a company shuttle from Pratt and Whitney picked them up to take them to East Hartford. In Asylum Hill, nearly every house was a rooming house.



The City had 1,011 rooming houses in 1957. See pg. 45 for larger map.

125 Rooming Houses in the West End in 1957. 1,011 in Hartford



Detail. The West End had 125. Our block, the most with 11.

There were 125 rooming houses in the West End in 1957 – and from what I could see, all were still here, and then some operating illegally in 1973. The City required the owner to live in the rooming house. These were SROs – single room occupants, the bath was shared and down the hall. You had no cooking facilities. You had a sandwich in your room or ate out. Thirty years before, these would have been boarding houses, with communal meals provided in the dining room.

Our block had the most in the West End – 11. The rooming house next door to us was owner occupied. They were a nice old couple - French-Canadians, the

St. Hellaires. It had been a beautiful, architect-designed, brown-stained, shake-shingle house. When they decided to retire, they thought it would sell better if they aluminum sided. Up went baby blue siding which covered all the distinctive features, cutting off the best parts to make siding cheaper. It broke our hearts. All that detail was what sold these old homes to younger people like us.



Aluminum siding of 67 Kenyon in 1975 hid all the detail

Across the street, Mrs. Ziewicz rented to 13 older people who would bring out their folding chairs and sit on the lawn reading. They were lovely. One man I remember distinctly – He had a full white beard and looked like Santa. He was very philosophical – he told me what a great country this was. “Where else could an old Communist like me without a penny, live in such a beautiful place?” These were well run residences, but not being invested in.

I also remember two other rooming houses on the block that were not well run, not owner-occupied and were being run into the ground. 43 Fern had old sinks in many of the rooms and the rooms had been painted black – it was

more or less a flophouse for drug users. Across the street from us, naked kids would party on the roof. It was supposed to be a dorm for the Hartford School of Accounting, but these weren’t students.

By 1973 the City was just beginning to relax its enforcement. The City assumed it would be OK if the owner lived nearby. It wasn’t OK. Now you were at the mercy of an absentee owner – if they didn’t live there, they had no incentive to keep the building from being a nuisance. The City’s only concern – Does it conform to the building code? The owner’s only concern- Is everyone paying the rent? Problem was, once the rooming house across the street was sold to an investor-owner who did not live there, the house went from wonderful neighbors to people whose problems spilled out into the community. Loud honking horns, tenants with girlfriends screaming obscenities, obvious drug exchanges, and regular ambulance visits to treat the latest overdose.

Most of the tenants were a quiet presence, but it only takes one to disturb your quiet enjoyment of your home. And with 8 legal roomers on a week-to-week basis, plus a 3-bedroom apartment, odds are, someone could be making a ruckus. Toni Gold and I headed up an effort to force the city ordinance to take into account disturbances to the community in continuing a rooming house license in a single-family zone. The City Plan no longer permits new rooming houses (SROs) in any but a commercial zone. The rooming house across the street was sold to a new ownership, and whatever they’re doing, we have neighbors who enjoy their home and allow us to enjoy ours in turn.

[Alterations made to Kenyon Homes](#)

It became a trend in the 1970s and early 80s to cover or remove house detail deemed too expensive to maintain. In our time, the owners across the street covered their rooming house in green

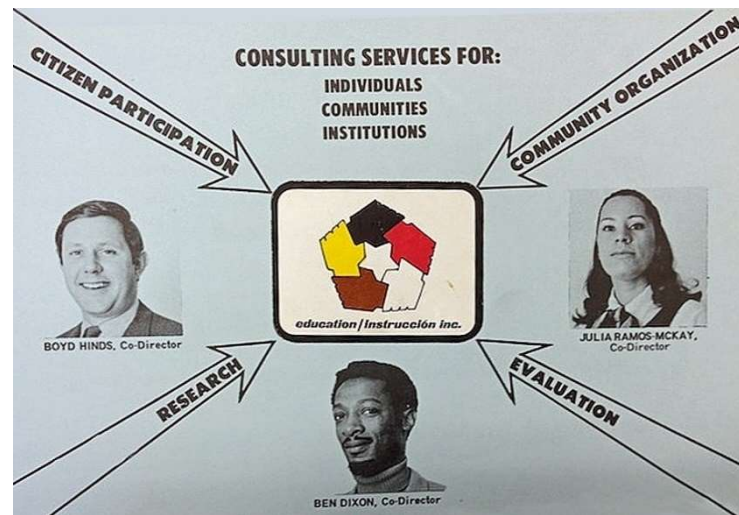
aluminum siding just before they sold, just like the house next door. Much of the distinctive detail was cut out to make it look like a standard house. In 1985 there had been a walk-out second floor to their porch which had raised crenelation detail on each end, like a medieval castle, and a finial cap on top of the flat turret. At about the same time, the house at 44 Kenyon also removed their second story to the porch, which had been dovetailed at angles, creating long diamond shapes to the balustrade – I’ve never seen anything like it. 28 Kenyon would cover detail by siding with vinyl and 63 Kenyon removed its second-floor porch following a devastating fire that gutted the house. I have been told that 80 Kenyon’s porch had been a wrap-around porch with two glass doors that opened out to it. 76 Kenyon had been a four-story house by architects Hapgood and Hapgood. In the 1950s a fire had destroyed the upper floors, and only two stories remain. Most of these are the removals I witnessed here in those first 10 years . By 1983 most owners were retaining and restoring detail.

ADUs – Legal now in Hartford:

Another sort of alteration can enhance an historic home if it is done sensitively and in line with the safety code. ADUs (Accessory Dwelling Units) allow an owner to apply to carve out a dwelling unit (with full bath, kitchen, and adequate access) if they conform to the requirements and get a permit. Like the ability to rent to 2 roomers and operate a business out of your home, this provides flexibility and income to maintain these large homes that are expensive to maintain. Toni Gold worked for 5 years to make this a part of the building code (~2016). It allowed her to save the original carriage house behind 96 Kenyon.

Redlining, 1970s

I remember attending meetings in Boyd Hind’s home in the North End in 1974– they were like teach-ins. They were recruiting couples to pose as homebuyers in a series of test cases for a lawsuit against real estate agents for redlining, steering and using blockbusting techniques. He, his wife and kids moved from Simsbury and bought in the North End. They were denied a mortgage solely because of the location of their home.



Education/Instrucción , Inc. flyer. 1970s. Hartford History Center

He co-founded Education/Instrucción and they began sending out couples matched in every way including their housing requirements. On the phone they got quoted similar listings, but when they went out, the White couples were shown areas like West Hartford, and the Black couples were shown Blue Hills. Six citizens, 15 community organizations, the Connecticut Coalition for Open Suburbs, and Education/Instrucción filed a suit against the Connecticut Real Estate Commission in New Haven Federal District Court. Many of the major corporations settled out of court. The Justice Department got involved and charged 7 of the 8 largest realty firms with violating the Fair Housing Act of 1968. They all signed consent decrees agreeing to abide by the act in future activity. Several of my good friends had stood as testers and trainers for E/I’s work.

[HOLC Redlining - 1937](#)

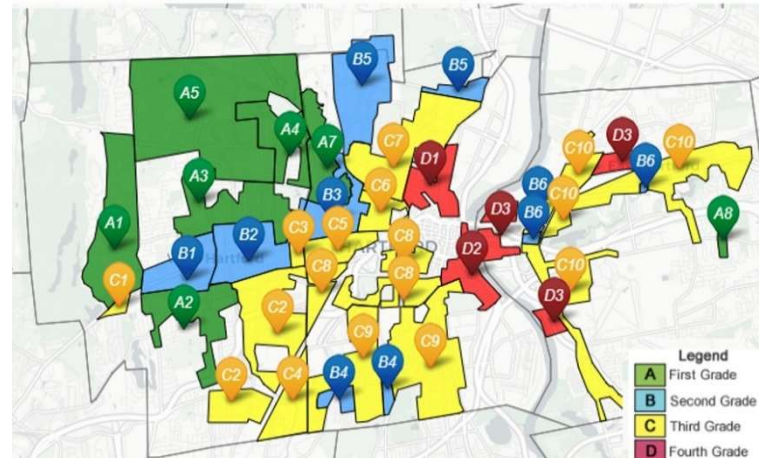
Redlining goes back at least to the Depression in the 1930s when house prices rapidly plummeted 33%, and didn't recover- at least on the first blocks until the late 1970's, 40 years later. In 1937, the Federal government wanted to jump-start home-buying through the FHA and other programs. They published reports rating neighborhoods as first, second, third or fourth grade. Here's how reports covering 1929 to 1937 rated our area:

- North of Farmington Ave to Elizabeth St: Grade 2 (blue), stating, "Formerly one of Hartford's finest residential sections, but age of structure detracts from desirability" (pg. 46).
- North of Elizabeth: Grade 1 (green), "Palatial. Although lenders appreciate the stability of owners, they acknowledge the impossibility of either selling or renting such properties on a satisfactory basis."
- South of Farmington Ave.: Grade 3 (yellow), stating, "There are still a number of fine old houses still maintained by first families, but with their passing they are gradually giving way to apartment houses. Because of this trend, caution is advised in making loans".
- Blue Hills: Grade 2 (blue), "...It is largely given over to the Hebrew race, although the better class Italians are also moving there... the area as a whole rates a low blue".

From A recent book in progress, by Jack Dougherty titled "On The Line: How Schooling, Housing, and Civil Rights Shaped Hartford and its Suburbs" (1/22/2023) <https://ontheline.trincoll.edu/lending.html>

Explore the Map: Federal HOLC "Redlining" in Hartford Area, CT, 1937

Click on color-coded areas to view neighborhood ratings



How 1937 HOLC reports rated Hartford-West Hartford

[How bad off was the City? – Bulldoze Elizabeth Park Rose Garden? !!!](#)



Elizabeth Park Rose Garden

The City considered bulldozing the Rose garden but wrapped it in burlap instead – late 1970s.

In the 1970s, the City was broke, broke, broke and paying for the Elizabeth Park rose garden was seen as too much of a burden. They considered bulldozing it. For one season, the city wrapped the whole perimeter of the garden in burlap to keep non-residents out. It was the ugliest thing you ever saw. Who would want to go in there? They couldn't even afford to pay someone at the entrance to let city residents in to see it. I went once or twice and couldn't get in.

But it got people's attention. Primarily the owners of the homes in West Hartford surrounding the Park. At the time, the head of Parks and Recreation was a man named Vic Jarm. Since I worked for the Knox

Foundation on the revitalization of Downtown Hartford, I knew Vic pretty well. Those neighbors, mostly women, as I recall, and Vic formed The Friends of Elizabeth Park to save the rose garden. Eventually The Ethel Donaghue Trust provided secure funding. That end of the park may be in West Hartford, but they funded none of it.

[Big Plans for the City and the State - The Era of Mother Aetna](#)

Greater Hartford Process: Disinvestment in Hartford was obvious, and Hartford's powerful corporate leaders believed they could change the tide. It was spearheaded by the Greater Hartford Chamber of Commerce and Art Lumsden, its president. Greater Hartford Process was their non-profit arm that released a report in 1972 with ambitious and sweeping changes, identifying regional solutions, including an attempt to create an integrated community in the town of Coventry, next to UConn. I remember attending several large community meetings headed by Bob Patracelli to explain the scope and purpose. Many in the community were heated. It was not what I'd call a civil debate. Some improvements to the North End were accomplished, but not the big vision. I think change works best when it is home grown, like here in the West End. [See articles by Tom Condon & the Trinity Tripod](#)

Knox Foundation: Downtown: In 1974, architect Jack Dollard convinced the Knox Foundation to make a million dollar, two-year effort to revitalize Downtown Hartford. He, Stan Schultz from the Downtown Council (an arm of the Chamber) and Nick Carbone – Deputy Mayor and head of the City Council were the triumvirate that spearheaded the plan. Jack was the planner, idea man and charismatic leader. I was his assistant, organizing his creative chaos. He drew a plan creating a corridor from Union Station to the Riverfront: Renovate the railroad station, pass the coliseum (currently under construction), and walk through the Civic Center shops, create a pedestrian mall down Pratt Street, through the Cheney block or a plaza around the Old State House, which would lead through to Constitution Plaza to a redeveloped Riverfront. All that came to be. The riverfront boathouse and rowing program followed later. Bushnell Park was another focus: the Arch was restored and opened to visitors, the Pump House renovated as a gallery, and he funded Peace Train fiddle contests in the park.



Bushnell Park Carousel – restored by the Knox Foundation in 1974

And he funded Tracey Cameron's idea to bring an antique carousel to the park: a 1914 Stein & Goldstein beauty- 48 hand-carved horses, complete with Wurlitzer band organ from Canton Ohio – one of only 3 left in the country (p 50). She directed its complete restoration with mechanical help from Lake Compounce's owner Dick Norton. She also designed 96 panels of stained glass circling the building showing four seasons in the park. Jerry Alexander crafted them. Jack was convinced they were so beautiful they didn't need plexiglass protection, added later. Even the twisted brass stanchions were custom-made. She insisted the horse tails be real. She had brass tokens struck for the inaugural ride. Tracey went on to restore other carousels, including LA's Santa Monica Pier. Jack wanted rides to be affordable for all kids, so the price was 5 cents a ride. Jack Dollard



My original brass token for the Carousel

designed the building inspired by a round firehouse he found in Ponce, Puerto Rico (pg 50). The beautiful party-room came later.

Jack hired about 40 young people, many artists with their own vision of how to make Downtown fun. [And it was](#). The Hartford Architecture Conservancy, Riverfront Re-capture, Bushnell Park Conservancy, and the Carousel were all spin-offs after the Knox Foundation's two-year effort. I was added to the Board and to the City Planning Commission, but in the end my focus was closer to home. Jack thought you needed a critical mass of people living downtown to make this kind of change stick. Then the only residential was Bushnell Plaza I and II. Now, there's more of a critical mass living downtown. Knox is known for its community gardens – the first at Keney Park in 1972. The first here was at the law school in the late 80s, then Evergreen St. We owe many street trees to Knox, including on this block which we neighbors organized to plant in 2006. A truly visionary board.

[Farmington Avenue](#)



1966 on the Avenue, east of Girard. By 1973 Neiditz had moved to New Britain Ave. Melnick's and the Colonial theater were still here.

Keeping healthy retail is tough, especially in a city. In 1973, the area and the Avenue were filled with shops and businesses that had almost everything you needed, except almost all seemed run-down and a little bit sad.



FINAST supermarket languished at 550 Farmington Ave. through about 1980

There was: a full supermarket (Finast) – that whole building at the end of this block, but it kept its canned hams under lock and key, and it wasn't exactly what you'd call clean. There was a local drug store with a lunch counter at Whitney (Dougherty's) with pastry, bagels, national newspapers and a fully operational post office sub-station. Every Sunday you walked to get the New York Times and bagels. [Concord Drug](#) at Prospect was legend and another was at Sisson. There were churches and a bank (CT Bank & Trust). There were liquor stores, men's clothing stores (Udolf's, Melnick's, Tuxedo rentals), coin-op laundry and dry cleaners, a shoe repair shop, a

hairdresser, florists, doctors and dentists, restaurants: Ollie's Steak House, The Farm Shop, a malt shop – all the ice cream flavors, and grilled cheese and burgers, too. Little kids on the block felt very important walking down by themselves to get something at the counter. There was a diner, take out chicken (now Tisane's), Chinese, several pizza places, 4 gas stations, car repair, bowling alley and a movie theater.

There was even the Bartending School of Mixology if you needed a trade. There was the Stereo Shop for audiophiles. There was a natural food co-op on Sisson (Cheese & Stuff). It looked like something out of the old West from the 1800s: creaking wood floors where there were barrels of oats and rice and organic veggies – definitely the post-hippie crowd. There was a fabulous paint and wallpaper store in an old carriage house (Schulman's – we still have all the wallpaper we bought there. He was a great guy), the ballet school (Albano's opened in 1974), funeral parlor and a Judaica store on Whitney. There was everything you needed here but a hardware store. For that, you went to Pfau's in the Center. It was about another 10 years before Home Depot and Lowes came on the scene. The city had 2 regular stops for the Library's Bookmobile, two right on our block - they'd bring whatever you requested.



Cheese & Stuff took up all 3 buildings here through 1985, though the front door faced Sisson.

Every year, another business would close. The steakhouse closed, the supermarket closed, the theater went to Kung Fou movies, then porn, flanked by dive bars, it closed in '84. Both drugstores closed. Barry Lubin's article about Dougherty's closing is poignant (page 49). The efforts to stem that tide are well known, and in the end, most not successful (see below). Every closing was painful and fought against by the neighborhood. Often fabulous businesses would open, have a great run and close as well. Case in point: the bagel store- at age 7, James made the bagel run every Sunday.

The businesses that remain basically the same today are the duck-pin bowling (now Ducks on the Avenue, the Stereo Shop, the Wash Tub, Mobil gas station, the tuxedo store (JT Ghamo's later moved to Sisson), Albano Ballet, Farmington Ave. Liquor, Mo's Midtown (different name), the bank (now Bank of America) and Whitney Pizza.

[Neighbors get Involved with Retailing](#)

There were five memorable neighborhood efforts at retailing that I recall: [Sonia Wetstone's Books and Cheese](#) opened across from Kenyon for a couple of years to be replaced by The Reader's Feast bookstore, and Lou Lista's Reader's Feast restaurant, which closed when he committed to the Pond House in Elizabeth Park. That's a chain of retailing that stretches 40 years. The Pond House remains one of the loveliest venues in the city. Sonia just passed away in 2021. It was a respite that filled you with joy.



Mo's Midtown

Mo's Midtown has always seemed to be a lunch counter – famed as a hangout for local pols. At one point John Gale bought the place. It, too, continues to be a West End institution.

Duckpin Bowling has been here for maybe 75 years. At one point, neighbors sold shares of ownership to keep it going. They sold to Ducks on the Avenue which is still with us and a great spot to take the kids. It shared space with the main tenant, CVS, which closed this location just 4 months ago. That is a major loss for many here who depend on the variety of goods a major drug store chain offers.



Neighbors bought shares to keep duck pin bowling alive until Ducks on the Alley bought it.

Cheese & Stuff began as a hippie natural food co-op on Sisson, which was operating there in 1973. It was at the bottom of the highway off-ramp on Sisson in a series of old wooden buildings right out of



Cheese & Stuff's 2nd location at 550 Farmington Ave.

the old West. The creaky wooden floors held barrels of oats and dried beans and rice. I believe you were expected to work in the store as part of your membership in the co-op. Wheat germ comes to mind when I think of that original store. In 1985, it moved into the Kenyon Street side of 550 Farmington Ave in part of the space vacated by FINAST, quadrupling the size of the original store. In 1994 it was bought by a chain that operated it there until 2000 when Wild Oats bought it.

Wild Oats had promised the neighborhood it would maintain a natural food store at that location but reneged on the promise and moved Cheese & Stuff to West Hartford. It continued to hold the lease on the property but kept it vacant, and in 2003 sublet the space to a Dollar Store. In 2010 it became E-Mart, an Asian grocery owned by the Ichiban people, in 2012 it became Central Supermarket. In 2014, Tangiers International Middle Eastern market opened here when its West Hartford location on Farmington and Prospect (the former Concord Drug) was torn down for the new Walgreens. Tangiers has become a vital place and regular lunch spot for many in our community.



Tangiers offers international foods and an awesome lunch counter.

The West End Farmers' Market brought fresh local produce here, but not until 2003 (June-October, Tuesdays in late afternoon). It began on the side lawn of United Methodist Church on Whitney, now at 385 Farmington. These things don't just happen, it takes the efforts of many.

The Colonial Theater had been a fully operating vaudeville stage from 1926, complete with a full scenery loft, a concert organ and red velvet seating in the balcony. Warners took it over as a movie house in 1933. In 1961 it was converted to Cinerama, a spectacular movie format that couldn't sustain itself. By 1973 it was showing Kung Fou movies and barely getting by. It closed in 1984.



The Colonial Theater in 1926



The Colonial in the late 70s.

WENDCO (West End Neighborhood Development Corp) was incorporated as a non-profit to try to keep the Colonial open as a theater, perhaps for a small theater production company. David was briefly on the board and suffered prolonged theoretical discussions among the group before he respectfully resigned. Various neighbors over 20 years attempted to find a way to retain the idea of a theater. In 2000, the Colonial Revitalization Corporation found they could save the façade by

repurposing it as a Brazilian restaurant, which opened as Braza in 2004. As the owner of the restaurant's health failed, the restaurant could not be sustained, and it closed in 2012. The building remains vacant today. The city is currently offering it for sale.

Westenders have always believed they could accomplish anything with enough effort. And sometimes, we do. For now, the façade of the Colonial still stands. It still needs a viable use.



Colonial's facade repurposed as Braza in 2004 which closed in 2012

In 1973, West Farms Mall wouldn't be built for another year, so the G. Fox and Sage Allen department stores downtown were fabulous – all 11 floors. Lord and Taylor was at Bishop's Corner – a full two floors. It was most known for its fine clothing lines, but we also bought our 6-piece set of white living room furniture there. It closed in 1982. Retail is tough and more in flux than ever.

[Who Was Living Here? The People](#)

Of course, the wealthier parts had some people of experience, talent and commitment that made a great difference. Clyde Fisher was the president of the Civic Association. He was a bulwark - a quiet, dignified force to be reckoned with when it came to dealing with the City on Zoning issues.

Here on this block, there were still 5 elderly women who had grown up in their homes from when this was THE most fashionable block in the City. Eight houses were rooming houses (~13-15 roomers), 17 older people renting a few rooms, and just 2 young couples, the beginning of a movement. A group of 3 original older women living on Kenyon made a huge impression on me when I was 22. Mrs. Bush, age 90, was a serious gardener (I am as well- I have her garden notes). She was still active on boards and committees of venerable institutions. Alice Lionhart was a stockbroker who took the bus to work downtown daily and maintained her home meticulously. Doris Kashmann had been instrumental in Charter Oak Temple and was a force of nature.



34 Kenyon, Alice Lionheart's House



95 Kenyon, Mrs. Bush's house



104 Kenyon, Doris Kashmann's

Two of them told me about a previous owner of my home in the 1920s who was a handsome doctor – He had a Pierce-Arrow with a rumble seat in the back. They made a point of telling me that his wife was a cripple. You could see the sparkle of old hopes in their eyes. He was the one who tore down the little garage and built this grand one with the heat, the grease pit and 2 attic areas. I just realized, that must have



1926 Pierce Arrow, like Mr. Cooke's auto



The garage Mr. Cooke built for his auto

been the same man (James Cooke, owner 1909-1932) who had the private (I assume) speakeasy in the basement (12' bar, brass foot rail, sink and wide oval mirror). It was still there when we bought the house. We moved the bar up to the front living room and bought a pool table to fill the place up – we didn't have any furniture (we moved in with a bed, bureau, couch and kitchen table). I knew how special this place had been through these women's eyes and experiences. And they set the example for me that you could live a lifetime in

these homes, as I have so far. Will I be able to live my whole adult life here as they did? I'm not sure, but I'd like to try. This is one of the few places you might still be able to pull that off.

[Unique Personalities](#)

The Westend has always attracted the ones who march to a different drummer. In the early years a family lived at the end of the block. Their grown kids lived in the garage, which was a living space with a geodesic dome. Every once in a while, Gerard would take to dressing in a full bug costume and cycle down the center of the street in a contraption of his own invention, complete with geodesic dome. He varied the bug costume – sometimes it was a butterfly. His kids, I believe Rainbow and Sunshine loved to careen their hot wheels down my cement driveway, the steepest on the block.



Then there was Sambeaux, a young man who *ran* down the blocks carrying a full garbage bag of deposit cans and bottles. He wasn't homeless exactly; he was a street person with a prominent family in the suburbs. Recycling was his thing. Sambeaux found residence in various people's garages or basements for years at a time, helping out - in some cases, an extended part of the family for a time. He'd always ask about your kids (and *always* tell you if a bad item was in your recycling) – a gentle soul. I haven't seen him in years but I hear he continues to be out and about.

There was a young man who had cerebral palsy who was wheelchair bound. I noticed he became able to walk moving with two crutches. The last I saw him, he had mastered walking with one cane, grown a beard and became a very cool dresser. John Gale also reminded me of Peter Stone, the candy man, who sold candy from his wagon – grew up on Fern. He also had cerebral palsy and loved chatting you up – once you could follow his speech. He really loved Bourbon St. East. The 'ladies' of the local dive bar sort of adopted him. He was a wild man in that wheelchair, taking the downhill at a clip.

For a time, there were some homeless folks who would move into the playground lookout tower (which had a tarp-style roof) late at night, and each morning by dawn, carefully remove all evidence they had been there, in a way, sharing the equipment with the school children. We didn't evict them.

[A History of Social Justice Here - UConn Graduate School of International Studies](#)

The UConn Graduate School of International Studies was at 1380 Asylum Avenue – on the corner of Scarborough next to the old Goodwin Estate that was also used by UConn. Between the Graduate School and the Hartford Seminary there were a sprinkling of international scholars in the neighborhood, some of whom were experienced activists (the Law school was still in West Hartford in those days). There was a history of social justice here.



The State of Connecticut owned 1380 Asylum Avenue from about 1947 until 1996 when it was sold as a private residence. In 1973 it was an international studies branch of the UConn graduate School. Several of its professors lived in the West End.

In 1973, UConn International Studies Program, 1380 Asylum at Scarborough, now a private residence

Historically, Trinity College students and faculty, and students at the Hartford Seminary had been White activists working with CORE and other historically Black groups working for racial justice well before the riots. But before that, it was known in the neighborhood that Martin Luther King had had a pivotal early experience in Hartford. In 1944, when he was just 15 years old (and a freshman at Morehouse College!), Martin Luther King traveled north with other students to join the Puerto Rican workforce and minority and White local kids for the high-paying summer jobs in Connecticut's tobacco fields. While here, he was asked by fellow students to lead them in worship. Until then he hadn't considered becoming a minister. He experienced his first real sense of freedom in Hartford. We talked about Martin Luther King's Hartford experience in this neighborhood in the 70s. King's words:

"I never thought that a person of my race could eat anywhere but we ate in one of the finest restaurants in Hartford," King wrote. "And we went to the largest shows there." He also wrote: "After that summer in Connecticut, it was a bitter feeling going back to segregation. It was hard to understand why I could ride wherever I pleased on the train from New York to Washington and then had to change to a Jim Crow car at the nation's capital in order to continue the trip to Atlanta. The first time that I was seated behind a curtain in a dining car, I felt as if the curtain had been dropped on my selfhood. I could never adjust to the separate waiting rooms, separate eating places, separate rest rooms, partly because the separate was always unequal, and partly because the very idea of separation did something to my sense of dignity and self-respect."

Even earlier, when the West End was first settled, some of the most famous progressives in the US lived at Nook Farm, just across the Park River bridge. Isabella Beecher Hooker and her husband wrote and got the CT bill passed that let married women own property (1877) and she co-founded the Connecticut Women's Suffrage Association, lecturing nationwide. After 36 years, she handed the presidency to Katherine Houghton Hepburn (Kate's mom) who also lived at Nook Farm. To me, you can't underestimate the importance of place in shaping character.

Beverly Heegaard. The neighbor who called us before we closed on our house was Beverly Heegaard, soon to be a good friend. (Her husband was from Sweden and taught at the international school). She was a singularly powerful presence, in a most unassuming package – tall and lanky, cut-off torn jean shorts and a very wide crooked grin. They had two adopted Black kids and 2 older at Noah Webster. Then, a number of families here had adopted Black kids. Beverly had been with the Peace Corps for 2 years in Nepal in the most primitive of circumstances, working on bringing water to a village.



Kenyon Progressive Dinner, 2012

She knew how to organize a neighborhood. The formula:

*Meet everybody,
invite them to a party,
ask them to do something,
spread the word, and
make it fun.*



~1969, Beverly Heegaard and Sarah

I believe she nearly single-handedly saved the West End in its early, most vulnerable years of rebirth. I've rarely learned so much from anybody.

Joan Davidson and her husband. He specialized in dental care of little people. Joan went on to work for the mega-developer, the Rouse Company, with a pivotal role in developing Baltimore's Harborplace festival marketplace, which opened in 1980, and was celebrated as a formula for urban success for the next 30 years.

Joe Ornato and John Calandrillo. They lived on Whitney. They were the go-to guys for paint and wallpaper. Joe had graduated law school and had written a children's textbook that sold well year after year. Both were artists, but they worked on people's interiors for a living. There wasn't anything John couldn't do if you described what you wanted. He decorated the tops of my kitchen walls with hand-painted vine and potato print flowers (fig 6a).

It has been loved and lasted 45 years so far. I told him I wanted a soft sculpture on my living room wall, arching over my bureau like a Japanese branch. I had pictured sepia, but he hand-water-colored this fantastic art, and I love it. They all lift off and are just suspended by tiny nails in the wall. The sweetest man, and a friend.



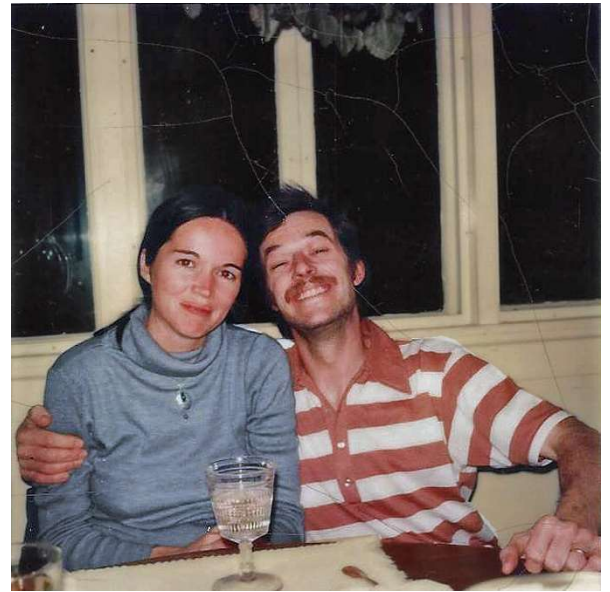
*My soft sculpture in the front living room,
created by John Calandrillo*



John Calandrillo in the Easter Bunny costume he made.

By about 1985 the 5 playgroup moms began to throw an annual Easter Egg hunt in Elizabeth Park as a celebration of Spring. The Easter Egg Hunt was huge and well publicized. Families came from both in and out of the neighborhood for the annual event for years – such fun. We threw thousands of foil-wrapped chocolate eggs – right in the open for the little kids' area, and harder to find for the older kids. Everybody got a basket, and John came as the Easter bunny in a costume he hand-made himself. I remember one dad from the North End holding his little daughter's hand thanked me, saying how much it meant that they could come to this celebration. Each mom had a job. But we all were on clean-up-the-park duty – before the event, sweeping away the vestiges of winter for a new season.

Barbara and Chip Benson. In 1972, Barbara and Chip Benson had recently bought across the street (80 Kenyon). He was a gifted photograph printmaker and photographer, and she was a musician. They had two adopted Black kids – an infant and a toddler and would soon have 2 more biological kids. They would become life-long friends. Before they bought, their house had been a place of scandal: an infamous drug house, featured in the news and on TV. The realtors assumed the Bensons had no idea before they bought the house – in fact, B and Chip always knew and just laughed. They got it for a very good price. They had been one of Education/Instrucción’s testers and held training sessions in their home for other neighbors to become testers for the effort.



Barbara & Chip Benson ~1976

Extraordinary? Suffice it to say that after moving on from their Kenyon house, he was a MacArthur Fellow (awarded one of the genius grants), became Dean of the Yale School of Arts (without finishing even 1 year of college) and had one of the best obits I’ve read in the New York Times. But Barbara was the center of that complicated family – she was the one who made it all work.

A Place for All Sorts.

Because these homes were large, often extended family, friends or acquaintances would live with you for a time – each adding a kind of spice to the neighborhood, variety and sometimes drama. Often, they were young people struggling to figure out life. I remember the Bensons had Darcy for a time – a cello student who would come in and out of our lives as her fortunes changed. We once rented to a family of four who had been burned out of their home in Simsbury – friends of a friend. We didn’t need the rent. We did it because we could. Whenever you have one or two roomers, your life touches another’s who is living very differently than you. You learn something and if you’re smart, you grow.

It seems to me there was more spontaneity and chaos going on in those early days. Nobody had much money. Stability has brought reassurance and beauty to most of the neighborhood, but it seems that there’s less crazy variety here.

Our lives are lived more inside now as well - a more subtle form of isolation. Our homes are more climate controlled than in the 70s, so there’s less hanging out on porches. Post-Covid, we lost the habit of mingling, and more jobs are demanding longer hours, and more people are willing to spend many more hours working – inside their homes, not in a workplace. For good mental health, brain specialists and psychologists cite the importance of personal eye-to-eye contact, conversation, and a smile. Even momentary contact with strangers at a cash register, or someone you pass on the street counts. So, I’m out more, smiling and engaging more. We all should be – it makes you feel better. I vote for a return to more porch life. It’s healthier.

Craftgroup, Bookgroup and Playgroup– A lot of Neighborhood Groups

Craftgroup 1974:

The original Craftgroup started in 1974. If you were female and living in the neighborhood, you were invited. It was the era of macrame' plant hangers, making slab pots from clay, and terrariums in a fishbowl. Whoever hosted had a project and materials for everyone to do. At one early group at my house, I had cut squares of material and one for a backing – We were going to sew patchwork placemats. I think we had 3 sewing machines set up. This was a project you really needed to finish at home – not a great idea for craftgroup. It seemed mostly about getting together and the jug wine. I got sidetracked and dropped out pretty early on. That craft group ultimately developed into a group of women who have met for 45 years. The group is still hanging in there.

Bookgroup 1984:

It started in 1984 with about 9 members. I was consumed by career, and activity with the school system, and was invited to join in 1996. There are a lot of book groups in the neighborhood, but this one will celebrate 40 continuous years next year. Of the 9 of us, there are still three original members. It's as much a chance to catch up and find out what



Bookgroup in 2008

everybody's up to as it is about the book. In our heyday, we traveled as a group to New York City, and upstate New York, the Berkshires, to London and one memorable trip to Paris. There is pressure to pick something both meaningful and with great writing - sometimes hard to find. A sort of spinoff is the hiking group, hiking Camino de Santiago, the most famous Spanish walking route, 500 miles long.

Playgroup 1983.

We got together first when our kids were 9 months old and met religiously every Wednesday from 1:00-3:30 for the next 6 years – until they started full day school in first grade (the moms in Connecticut still get together). There were 5 of us in the neighborhood who had kids born within 3 months of each other in late 1982 and early 1983, three



Very 1st playgroup. 1983



Michael was the first to get married, 2009

of us had older kids, and for two of us, this was our first.

We had to decide how our new playgroup was going to work. One mom thought we might use the time to drop off our kid at the designated house in rotation to get some errands done.

(Remember, some in our generation were still living in communes, and communal work was a serious concept). I thought the opposite – I had not been raised by a mom with natural mom skills – I needed a community to get advice and see how it's done. We decided all of us – kids and moms alike would spend the time all together. We shared everything – worries, triumphs, kids growing up.

All were Working Moms

We all had professions, and almost all had jobs, but with flexibility. I had just negotiated the first permanent part-time job in Connecticut state government, at OPM (the State Office of Policy and Management). I had heard of one other woman in the community college system who was permanent part time, and that gave me the leverage I needed, plus a boss who was a traditional old guy, but he supported me. Ten years of feminism gave me the idea that change was necessary and possible. I was young – I don't think I have that kind of hutzpah now. Many others heard about me and did the same. Childcare availability for young kids was much worse than it is now, and much less reliable. For babies, it was mostly a handful of individuals licensed for at-home day care or individuals you hired (I paid social security for mine, a rarity). Within the first three years, four young women quit to move on with their lives, and one at-home daycare family moved out of state. At the time, there was no agony like suddenly having no childcare coverage.



I put on the first home energy show in the state - at the Hartford Civic Center, 1978

Being part-time did cost me, both in money and advancement. At a critical juncture, my career got sidetracked - ineligible for promotion, twice, and it dictated the type of work I could take on – staff, not line. (Line jobs are where you get promoted). Among other jobs (energy programs, planning and federal budgets), I became a specialist in special projects – sent in by the agency to figure out problem areas or programs that have an issue. If I had to choose all over again, I'd make the same choice. I got what I wanted – a unique and challenging career *and* more time with my kid. In a better world, we wouldn't have to choose.

Other Groups:

There's a relatively new West End group that started in 2019 that periodically lunch at Gather 55 on Bartholomew Street - a unique Hartford experiment running a restaurant for and using the talent of Hartford's homeless. There are blocks and young families that get together, musicians that get together, a dance group, a poker group, a mahjong group and rituals like this Porchfest and Civic Association events that bring community together. Rafe Podolsky has been putting on an annual summer Bar-B-Que at this home for 32 years, and then there are the Derby Day parties. We three old-timers on the block get together for lunch regularly. We support each other in need, for moral support and advice, but mostly for the fun of it. If you don't have anyone like this in your life, invite someone for a museum day, to help out or just for coffee. That's how it starts. Social media like Westend Living make it easier, and at the same time, harder to leave your couch.

What about the men? The guys have a long-running book group – a lot of world histories, Napoleon, and books about sailing, I imagine. They also had a basement beer-making ritual, among other traditions. There’s John Gale’s bike group. They still ride today – 4 days a week. Covid has messed up a lot of traditions, but some are getting picked up again. Dine Around (resumed in 2022) and Happy Hour (2023) have re-started. How many neighborhoods nurture that kind of community? If you want to be in a group with common interests, start one. This is a good place for it.

Sports teams have always been a fixture, back then, at least soccer and baseball. There was ice skating on the pond at Elizabeth Park, and hot dogs and pinball machines in the Pond House- anybody could book the community room. The sledding hill has always been legend. Halloween – then as now, always a big deal here – kids come here from all over the city (have lots of goodies!).

[Why Did this Place Work Against All Odds?](#)

At a certain critical point in the neighborhood’s rebirth, we needed a cheerleader to make it happen. In my opinion, Beverly Heegaard was the glue that bound this handful of activist families together – and understood how to make it work. She walked every block every day pushing a pram with her two infants – the 2 older kids were at Noah Webster. “Did you see? So-and-



Beverly Heegaard and her youngest, Tara

so just painted their house.” “Come tonight at 5 PM we’re saying good-bye to the Christmas tree.” She made up a tradition for the first snowfall after New Years – everyone brought candles, planted them in the snow and sang carols as a farewell to the tree.



Juan Fuentes

“Everyone” comprised about 20 families – just about all the residents under age 65. We all went to civic association meetings and got exercised about the latest issue, we all knew each other. In 1974, she and Elaine Lubin started the first Westender community newspaper (page 49). Juan Fuentes, editor of La Prensa Grafica and several other neighborhood papers printed it and was a treasured advisor. Beverly roped me into selling the advertising. Every month I walked the Avenue in my hippie sandals soliciting the shop owners. I knew I was dedicated – I never despised a job more. The library’s History Center got my original Westenders.



Modern version of The Westender with my 1973 hippie sandals, custom made on Union Place next to Mad Murphys.

[West End Players](#)

David and I had a party and for some reason, everyone was putting my mother-in-law’s Broadway musical albums on the stereo. There was a lot of drinking at parties in those days, “Let’s do a play!” Just like an old Judy Garland movie. We did. The West End Players’ first effort was ‘Guys and Dolls’. It was quite credible – music, singing, dancing,



Let’s put on a show!

sets, a cast of thousands. Did we perform on the stage at Asylum Hill Congregational Church for that first play? I'm not sure. There were some really good singers in the neighborhood. Barbara Benson played piano. I only had a walk-on part in the intro as a hooker. I remember the director grouching about the money it was going to cost to buy real merry widows for each of the 'Hot Box' girls as they disrobed to "Take back your mink". He thought they'd be OK to just end up in their underwear. It was a revolt, and they won.

There were a lot of parties surrounding the play, and I recall some notable hooking up happening around the edges. A flurry of divorces followed soon after. Living here could be a test of your relationship. It was the 70s after all. We found time for all this renovating, parsing of issues and playing because those were the days when you got one hour for lunch, our workweek ended at 5 PM on Friday and no one texted to check in. You didn't think about work again until Monday morning.

[Hartford Historic Preservation – You have to start somewhere](#)

In 1973, Toni Gold and I worked at the Knox Foundation Downtown Revitalization effort for Jack Dollard. She was living in Blue Hills with her son and husband, and she was vitally interested in historic preservation. I noticed that a really fabulous house on my block had gone on the market and told Toni she really shouldn't miss looking at it. It was 96 Kenyon Street, the oldest, and to me the most historic house in the neighborhood (see pg. 2). She bought it and became a friend and one of the foundational people on the block, living here for 45 years.

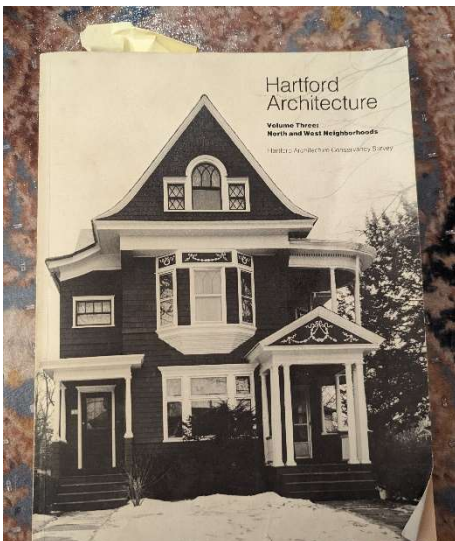


Old YMCA in Hartford, built 1873, demolished 1974

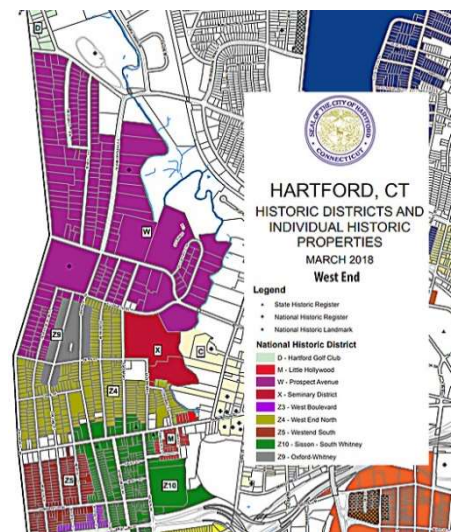
In 1974, preservationists lost a major battle when the old Hartford YMCA was demolished. It was built in 1873 and housed the first indoor pool in the city. It stood across from Bushnell Park near the soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch. Toni and architect Tyler Smith were moved to create the Hartford Architecture Conservancy (HAC) to try to stem the tide of losses to Hartford's historic past.

She left Knox and it became her full-time effort for a number of years.

One of HAC's enduring legacies was the Hartford Survey: A methodical documentation of historic properties all over Hartford to register on the National Register of Historic Places. The West End North district was the first to be



My dogeared copy of HAC's survey, V3 North and West Neighborhoods_1980



West End's 9 Historic Districts, 2018

catalogued. As part of its registry, HAC published its work in volumes covering sections of the city that include a description of the history and character of each neighborhood, notable buildings, photographs and recommendations. It lists each property by street, including the date built, the architect or builder and the first owner if known.

The West End is included in Volume Three of HAC's publications. As a result, all of the West End (9 districts, now), and nearly all eligible in the City of Hartford are now on the National Register of Historic Places (buildings must be at least 50 years old). Revering our historic heritage is one of the things that binds us together here. The Hartford Preservation Alliance took over the effort in 1997. In 2005, the City of Hartford passed the Historic Preservation Ordinance which requires the approval of the Historic Preservation Commission to make any alterations to the parts of an historic building that are visible from the street. An historic plaque identifying your home as being on the National Register is like a badge of honor – almost all the buildings here are eligible. If you don't have one, get one!

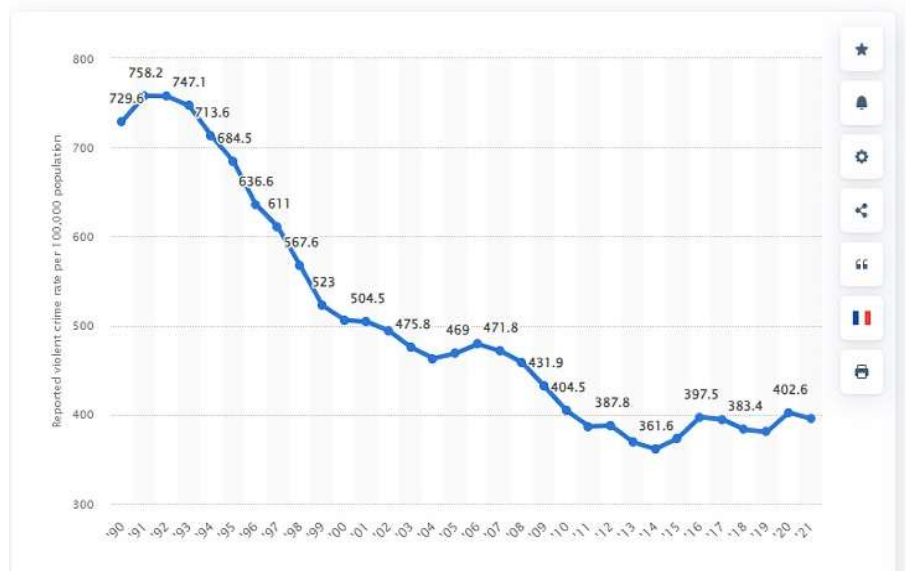
Crime

I have always felt safe in my home and walking in the West End. But I have always locked everything: car and house as a matter of habit. Then, as now, if you leave stuff visible in your car and park it overnight, odds are, it will be taken. Same is true today: *Don't* leave valuable stuff where a smash and grab is all it takes!

No one got deliveries to their porch, so we didn't have that theft problem, but if you heard that a neighbor's porch furniture had been taken, you might chain yours together to discourage casual theft. Same is true of expensive antique cast iron urns used as planters – I know that some did bolt them in place. Back then, crime rates were nearly double what they are now everywhere. Early on most people did not have alarm systems, which were expensive and involved hard wiring. Electronic security grew as technology made it easier.

In those years, anyone who left their back door unlocked risked losing the TV and anything else of value. Every once in a while, I would hear of someone who had had a break-in where the whole house was tossed. Entry was usually in the rear of the house by breaking the back door glass or raising a window that wasn't locked. In 50 years, I have had one friend physically harmed. He was

Reported violent crime rate in the United States from 1990 to 2021
(per 100,000 of the population)



US violent crime stats - plummeted since 1990 – Half of what it was.

shoveling snow when there was no one around (either very early or very late). A man hit him and took his watch and wallet. (A note: He wasn't seriously harmed – it was around the mid-1980s).

We did organize a Blockwatch in the 1980s. We invited neighbors in to hear advice from a police officer about how best to protect your home. (Remember the skeleton key we were given?).

Windows didn't lock, and if the wood was rotten, sometimes you could just shove a locked door with your hip to get in. No citizens patrolled or anything, but we were told: "Get locks for your windows



Stock pic of kid w/ BB gun

and get deadbolts for your doors" (as opposed to the kind a credit card can open). Try to notice how someone is dressed if they're in the backyard (so we could give a description when calling 911). The police came right away.

In the 70s, I once heard shots in the church parking lot behind our house. I called, and by the time I hung up, it was clear I was hearing a B-B gun. (A few of our windows in the garage had BB holes when we bought the house). I met the officers on my porch and told them it was a kid playing with a BB gun. They lectured the kid about how dangerous it was to shoot stuff. Outsiders have always made assumptions about how dangerous it is to live in the city. In my experience over 50 years? Here? Not really.

1980s: The Schools

If battle # 1 was housing, battle # 2 was the schools. In almost all cities your kids went to the neighborhood school, and there was great strength in that – it was an extension of community. But there was no choice unless you paid for private education. When this neighborhood was built up 1890-1920, *each school district* was a stand-alone entity. You elected board members for your district, hired an architect to build the school (there was competition to have the best), policies and programs were decided by the district, and you were taxed separately for the grammar school. Hartford High School was city-wide and acknowledged as the second publicly funded school in the US and one of the best schools in the nation. Noah Webster School is gorgeous, built in 1901. It took effort over years to keep it that way.

In the early 1980s Noah Webster tracked kids in every grade. There was a gifted and talented classroom and a regular classroom for each grade. Almost all the White kids were in the gifted and talented class along with some minority kids. One of the first struggles I recall in the years before my



Noah Webster School, built 1901.

son attended was integrating all students in the lower grades, while providing pull-outs or special instruction for students for enrichment or for those with other special needs. By the time our son went, there were no specialized classrooms. In the two years before our son was ready for school, I had to satisfy myself that he would be getting a good education. I am a planner by

profession, so I turned to available data. There were two sources I was able to consider: A study comparing achievement of Hartford kids who attended suburban schools under Project Concern to Hartford kids who studied in Hartford schools. The students were matched for various variables. The study found no difference (kids here actually did better in math.)

The State of Connecticut had just begun the Mastery Tests in 1985. They published town-wide results for math and reading. But our Board of Education had school-by-school results they used for planning purposes. I was able to satisfy myself by comparing the results of Noah Webster with the town-wide results for West Hartford. There wasn't a difference. I made a deal with my husband – our son would complete Noah Webster, and then we'd consider private schools.

At the time, White kids comprised about 1/3 of the students at Noah Webster, 2/3 were minority and over half of the kids below the poverty line. We did a comparison of budgets with our sister school in Granby, and discovered Hartford teachers had better pay but the maintenance and operating budgets in Hartford were appalling compared to Granby. Here? No paper, no toilet paper.....

It became another venue for activism for the parents of the neighborhood – lobbying to get State funds to buy a boiler, fundraising to beef up the library collection, also fundraising for playground equipment for both the kindergarten kids and then the older ones. There was a lot of volunteering. Programming PTA events that were fun and programs on serious issues was my honor during the years I was the PTA chair for programming. The book fair, maypole dance, and the May Fair were some of the school's annual traditions I am fond of remembering. I remember each and every teacher my son had.



Our son James posing in front of Noah Webster

In the late 1980s or early 90s, I applied for a position on the Hartford Board of Education, which the Board was going to fill temporarily until the next election. They had someone specific in mind, and I was happy enough to be rejected – Board of Ed is a minefield. But Mayor Carry Saxon Perry ('87-93) invited me to join a broad-based committee to look at ways the Hartford School System could improve. At OPM I had been part of several groups that were using quick techniques to gather data about attitudes from stakeholders. I suggested we do that in every school in the system to gather information about what the stakeholders believed to be the strengths and weaknesses of each of the 30-odd schools in the system. Students, faculty, parents, administrators, businesses, legislators and the neighborhood were invited to participate. It was voting by colored sticky, led by experienced outsiders. It was a massive undertaking to organize, but we did it. I understand the education staff used that data for years to further their efforts to improve the schools. Mayor Perry is credited with being the first Black female mayor of a major American city – a mayor who quieted racial tensions and championed gay, lesbian and transgender rights. Mayor Perry (1931-2018) impressed me.

Our son has gone on to complete a 12-year career at Google and has moved on to private consulting. He credits his time in the neighborhood and at Noah Webster as giving him a world view and

experiences that have given him a leg-up in work and in life compared to most of his friends and colleagues. There still aren't enough places kids can learn and play with people of all colors, backgrounds *and* economic levels. (See Mary LaPorte's letter, page 49.) It can be argued that this is our country's most critical challenge.

[Here and Now Again](#)

The 'First Blocks' are where I believe the rubber meets the road when it comes to the health of the West End. When we moved here, there were about 3 engaged families out of about 100 houses on those four critical blocks (us, the Bensons and the Lubins). We few families investing in our homes and community were the front lines in 1973. Within 7 years, by 1980 twenty of the 32 homes on this block belonged to engaged families renovating their homes. Eventually, that became 32 out of 32.



Spring of 2012, renovations begin at 67 Kenyon Street



Summer of 2012, 67 Kenyon after renovations. [Read about it on the website.](#)

Leaving:

Ultimately, all but three of the 1970s families moved off the block over the 50 years, to be replaced by others who wanted to live here, many who were ready to become involved. Some moved to other states for jobs, family circumstances or retirement, some for what they believed to be better school districts in other towns, some because they couldn't afford to keep up their antique houses, and some to other blocks in the neighborhood. Each time a good friend leaves, it slices a little hole. I feel like I

have experienced this a hundred times. The trick is to keep in touch anyway, hard as it may seem, and to welcome those who replace them. Some of these may become your new best friends. Some new neighbors are second-generation – kids who grew up here and love this special place.

However, back in the 1970s, if enough of us hadn't stuck by our guns, stayed here and continued to invest in bringing back our houses and doing what it takes to forge a community all those years ago, I believe the disinvestment



146 Kenyon, porch failure 2023

would have affected all of the neighborhood by now. In fact, the housing was so below standard, I think a lot of these homes in the first blocks may have been destined for the wrecking ball, affecting the future of the entire neighborhood and impacting the city as a whole.

Divestment Remains:

In 2023, there may be one or two homes on a block that show disinvestment. But many that are in trouble now are a work in progress. However, there are a few blocks that continue to show significant disinvestment – I've noticed parts of Whitney Street and parts of Prospect south of Farmington Avenue in this category. Homes that are this old, this large and this ornate begin to fall apart after 125 years. They require ongoing maintenance that can be specialized and more expensive than you imagine.

Programs like the [State Historic Homes Rehabilitation Tax Credit](#) must be retained, made more efficient and expanded for areas like Hartford where housing affordability is a major issue.



32 Girard in 2023:Mid-project, showing condition of shingles on the 3rd floor and new paint on the front.



*David on our newly rebuilt round porch -1975.
(Rebuilt twice since over 1/2 century!)
Taken by Chip Benson*

This program was originally designed just for 'Priority I' communities like Hartford and was later expanded to apply to the entire state, regardless of the wealth of the community, and expanded to include developers, not just individuals. As of January, 2024, the credit must now be taken off your own state taxes within 4 years of getting the credit. That pushes the benefit of the program out even farther, and many who need the maximum the program offers are unlikely to pay \$30,000 in state income tax over 4 years. This program works best for the wealthiest. Perhaps it's time to re-consider the needs of the original, smaller target group. A 40% tax credit instead of 30%, or relief from or assistance with a lengthy bureaucratic process? Or working with perhaps

CHIF or another to provide bridge funding up front so those without all the ready cash to advance can participate? At the least, an unlimited time to use the credit. I could go on, but I believe the original focus has been lost, and, it's sure true our community needs this program to work for us. So many other programs of this type strip the character of home by the end of the project.

While I'm on a soap box, the city's tax assessments based on how good your landscaping looks outside based on a drive-by, rather than the classic assessment parameters are a disincentive to improvement. Stop that!

[A Few Batty Ideas](#)

Beefed-up Apprenticeship Program

We could use more skilled workers who understand old houses and how to repair and maintain them. How about an apprentice program for kids who want to want to work with their hands? Maybe there is one, but it seems there is still a problem getting skilled labor.

Community Center – Maybe It's Time has Come

I think a community center for kids, seniors, and the community as a whole is timely – this time without the expensive overhead of a historic building, perhaps co-located with a relocated police sub-station or some other institution to provide a regular presence and staffed (mostly or all) with volunteers who have special talents to offer. After all, we are a neighborhood without a library branch or a senior center that usually fulfills some of this function. Often I think the West End can be overlooked for special programming because our image is of wealth, compared to the city as a whole. But if you live here, you know that is hardly true for a lot of our neighbors. I don't know – it's been on my mind for a while now. This is truly the definition of spit-balling...

[Conclusion](#)

It takes a lot of work over a long time to save a neighborhood. I started to write about all the others who have played a pivotal role over the years – but if I did that, this recollection would never end. Over the last 50 years we have been hot one day and denigrated the next, and then it swings back again. I don't think about the neighborhood failing anymore – not in my lifetime. Once my kid entered Noah Webster in 1988, I knew it was good – we were going to be OK. The challenges going forward are for the next generations to tackle.



Carolyn West - Presenting at Porchfest: 2023



Porchfest 2023 - In the rain!

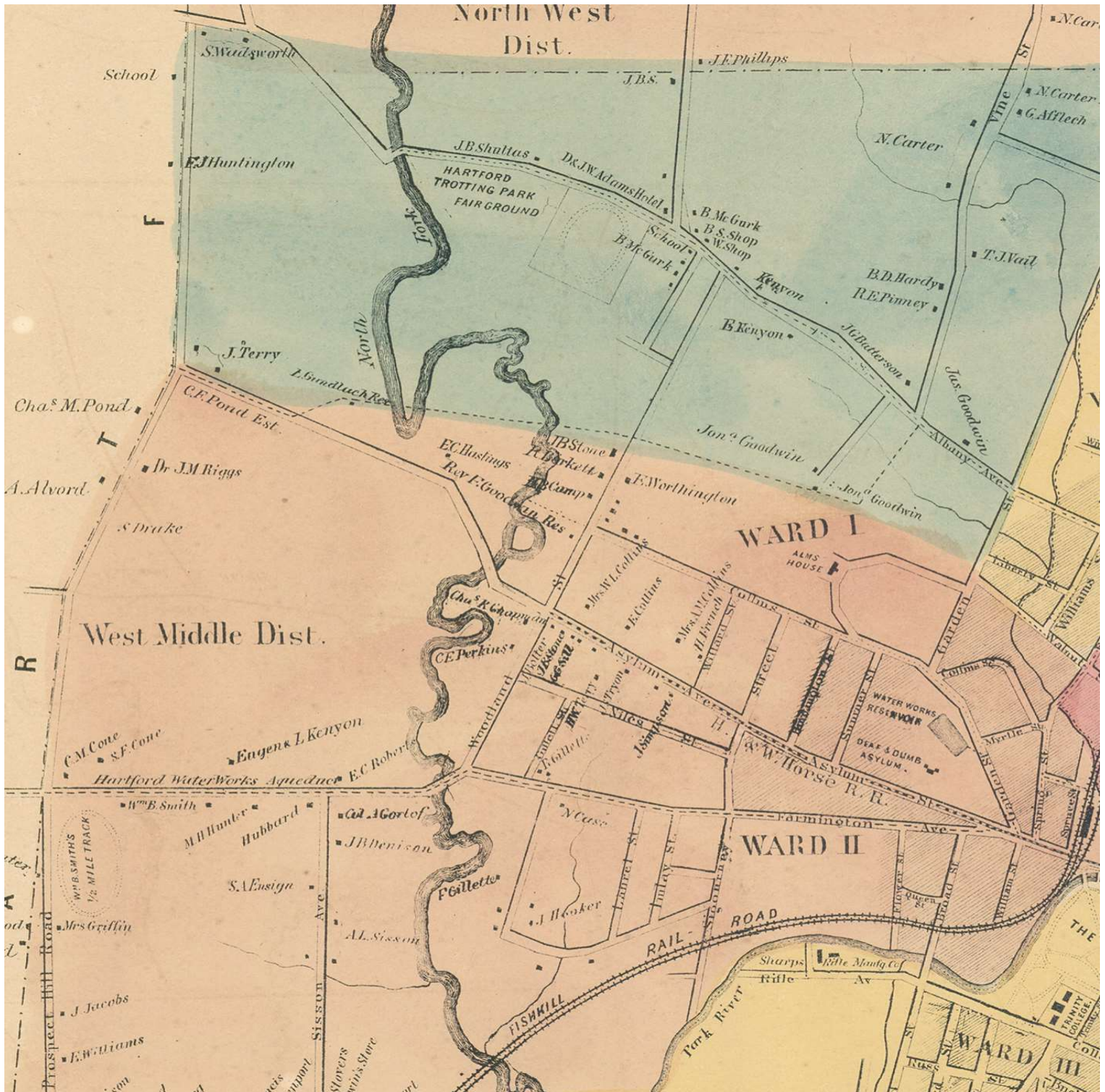
In the meantime, never forget the magic – you gotta keep it fun. especially if it's raining! Events like this Porchfest are a continuation of that legacy.

Congratulations to the organizers. David and I thank you.

EXHIBITS

Download Hartford historical maps from my website at: https://www.angelfire.com/planet/kenyon/map_historical.html

West End 1869



1869 – There are 24 homes the West End, on the only roads here: Prospect, Sisson, Farmington, Asylum & Albany. Two owned by widows. There is water service on the border of the West End on Park, Asylum and Albany, but the water under Farmington isn't available to the homes there. The horse trolley goes out Asylum but stops at Woodland. There is a racetrack on Farmington and a tavern on Albany. The Goodwins have the only nearby store on Sisson & Park.

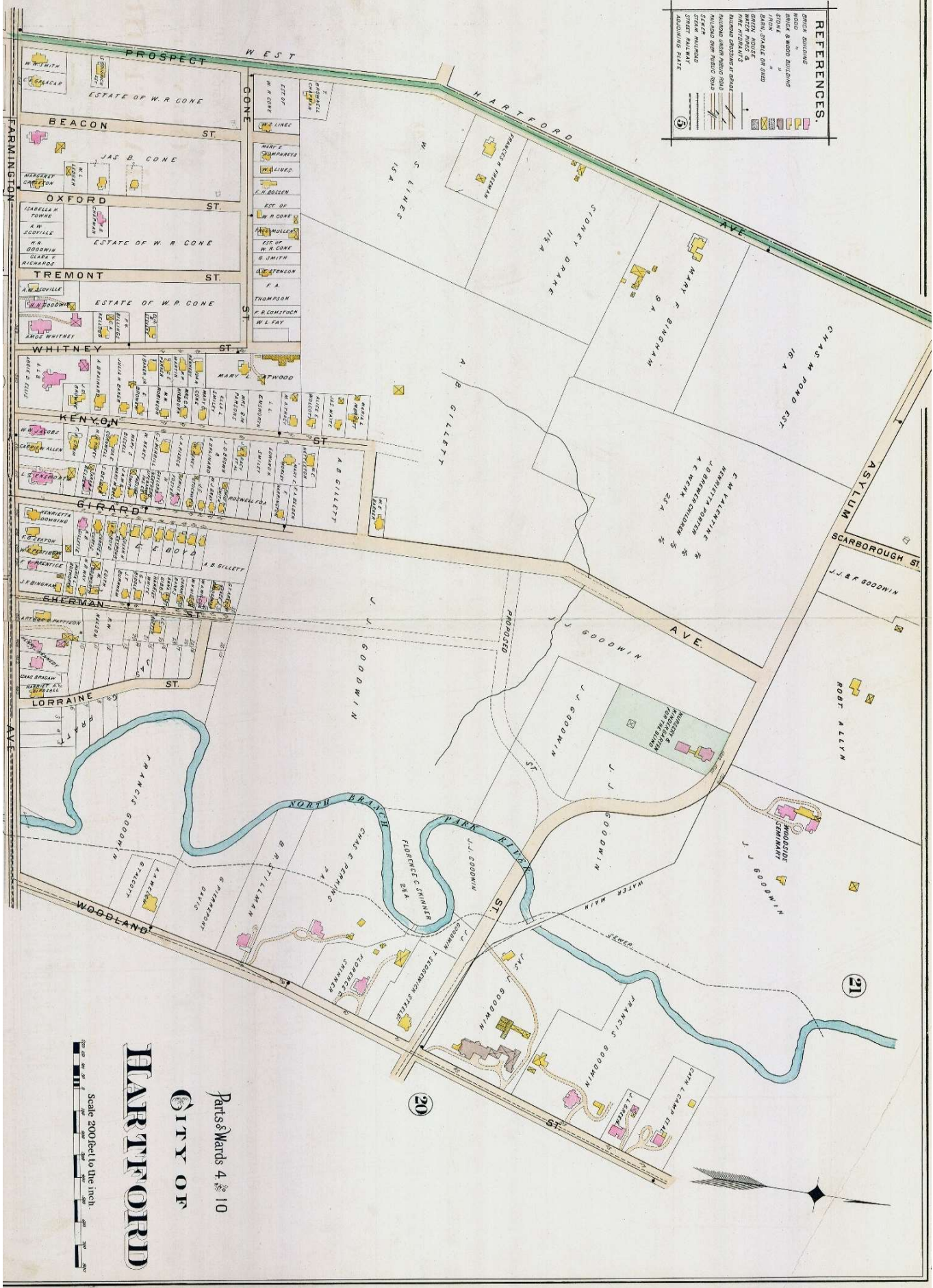
In Upper Albany there is a fairgrounds and trotting racetrack, a school and a hotel. The Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb is on Asylum Hill next to the waterworks reservoir and near the alms house. Trinity College overlooks Bushnell Park (in 10 years they will donate that land for a new state capitol). The first Union Depot has been there for 26 years with rail service to NYC back in 1845. There are 3 manufacturers on Capitol and a brickyard in Parkville. The urbanized edge of the city is at Broad, Flower and Sigourney. It's considered country after that.

The Goodwins on Woodland- the biggest house in Hfd- by 1896 own all the land between Girard & the Park River no. of Lorraine. John & Isabelle Beecher Hooker are on Forest and Hawthorn just across the Park River, the first to build on Nook Farm. Sister Harriet builds in 2 yrs. This year she will found the CT Woman Suffrage Assoc. and act as its president until 1905. 5 years later, her neighbor Katherine Houghton Hepburn (Kate's mom) will take over as president.

West End North - 1896

REFERENCES.

	BRICK BUILDING
	WOOD BUILDING
	STONE BUILDING
	FRAME BUILDING
	WATER TANK
	WELL
	SEWER
	STREET
	RAILROAD
	UTILITY POLE
	TELEPHONE POLE
	FENCE
	TREE
	GARDEN
	LAWN
	SIDEWALK
	DRIVEWAY
	PORCH
	BALCONY
	ROOF
	CHIMNEY
	WELL
	WATER TANK
	SEWER
	STREET
	RAILROAD
	UTILITY POLE
	TELEPHONE POLE
	FENCE
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	LAWN
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	DRIVEWAY
	PORCH
	BALCONY
	ROOF
	CHIMNEY











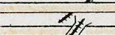
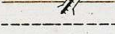
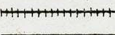

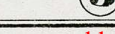


1896-27 years later the only blocks that are built up are the first 4: Sherman, Girard, Kenyon and Whitney, plus Cone. Only they have water service. You can see that all the land north of Cone is undeveloped. It's a boom - there are now 95 houses north of Farmington, all but the first five built in just 6 years. Sewers have just begun to be put in, partially out Farmington - but only Sherman St homes are benefiting from sewers at the moment. On Farmington Ave. between Kenyon and Girard there is a bypass for the horse trolley that goes all the way to West Hartford by now.

The Allyn Estate is built and the Woodside Seminary (on Woodside Circle) and the Nursery and Kindergarten for the Blind (Hartford College for Women site) are here. Fern St. is merely a stub between Kenyon and Girard. Elizabeth, proposed to go from Asylum only as far as Girard.

Parts of Wards 4 & 10
 CITY OF
HARTFORD

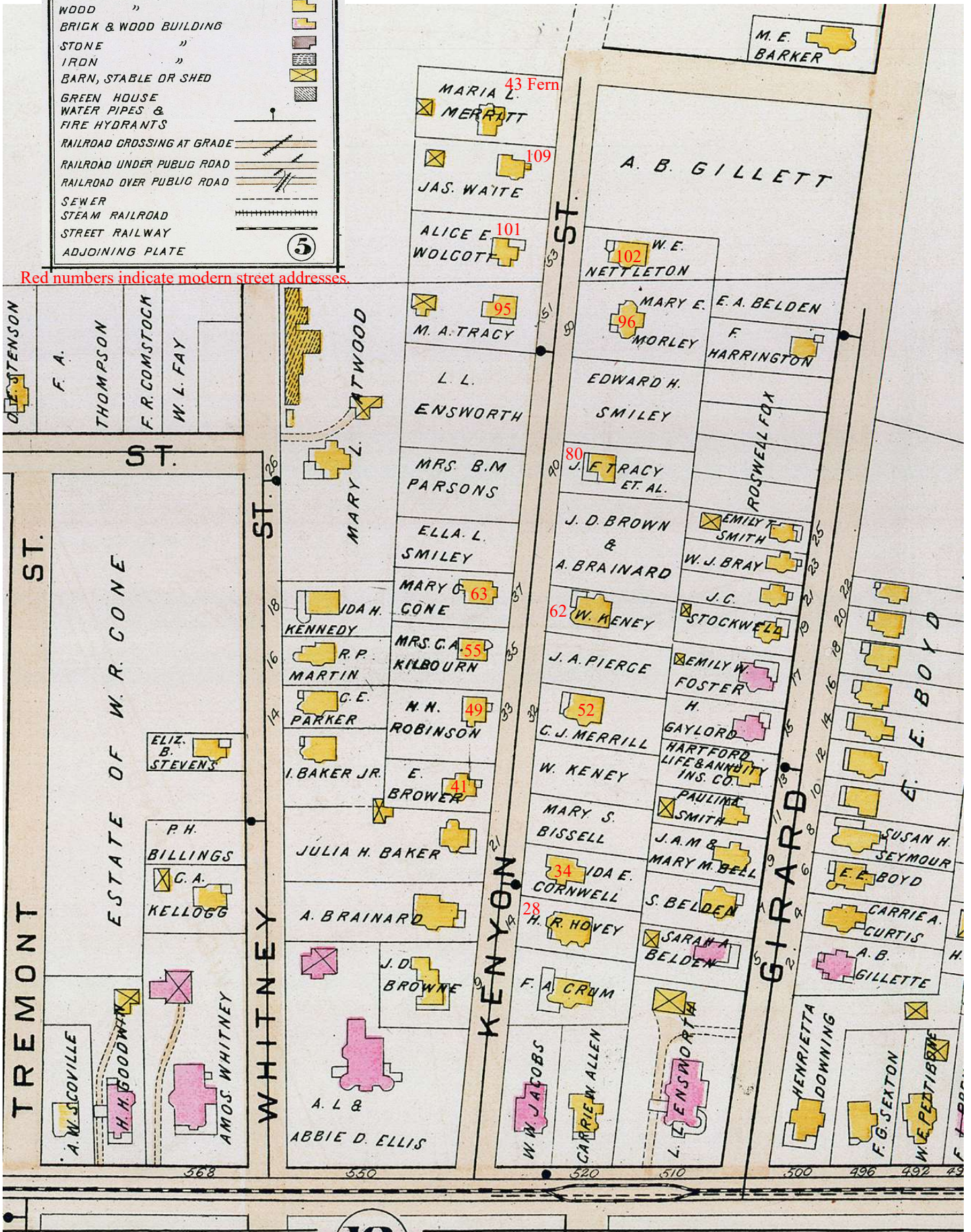
Scale 200 feet to the inch

REFERENCES.

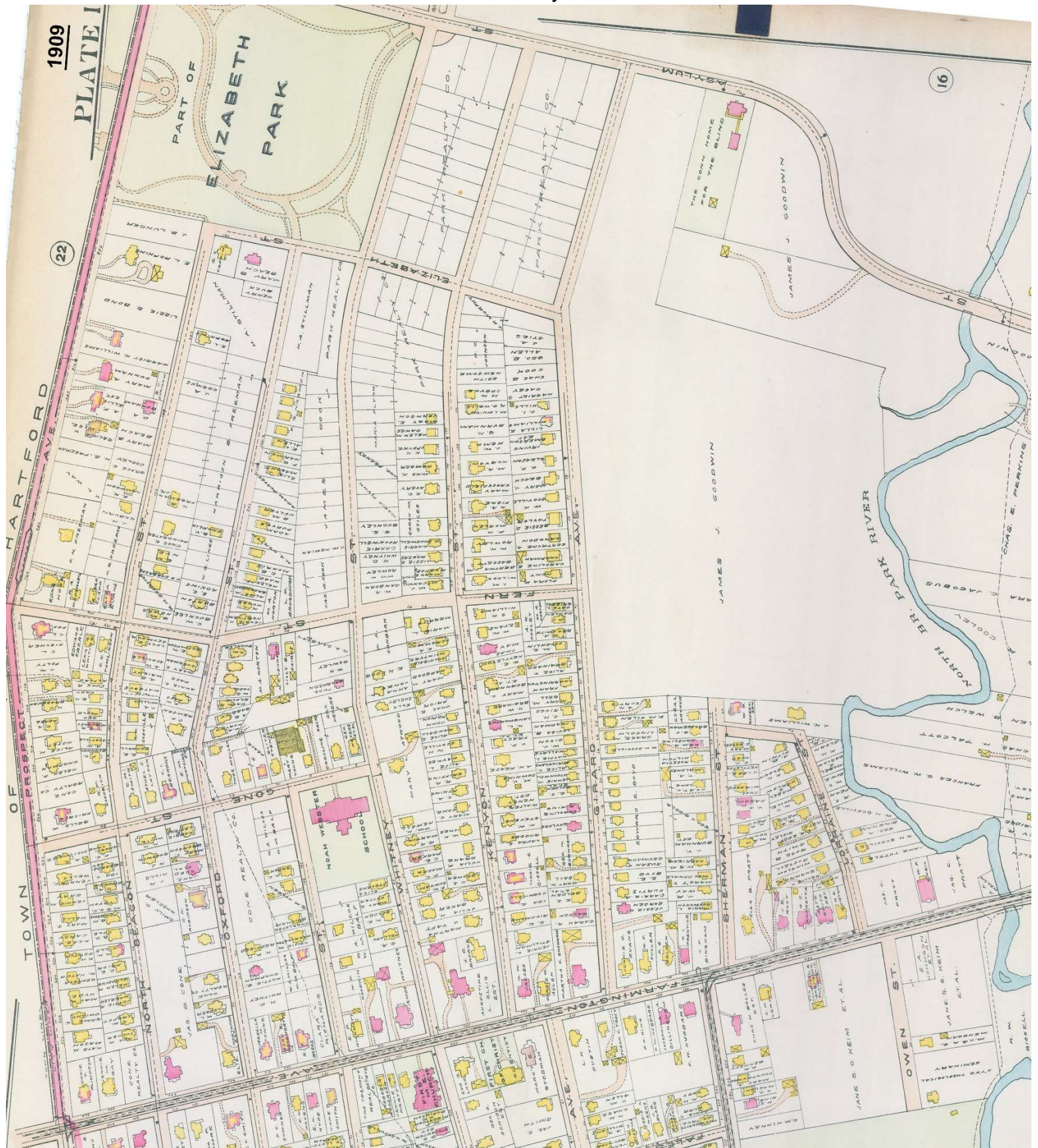
- BRICK BUILDING 
- WOOD " 
- BRICK & WOOD BUILDING 
- STONE " 
- IRON " 
- BARN, STABLE OR SHED 
- GREEN HOUSE 
- WATER PIPES & FIRE HYDRANTS 
- RAILROAD CROSSING AT GRADE 
- RAILROAD UNDER PUBLIC ROAD 
- RAILROAD OVER PUBLIC ROAD 
- SEWER 
- STEAM RAILROAD 
- STREET RAILWAY 
- ADJOINING PLATE 

Kenyon Street Detail – 1896

Red numbers indicate modern street addresses.



West End North to Asylum Ave - 1909



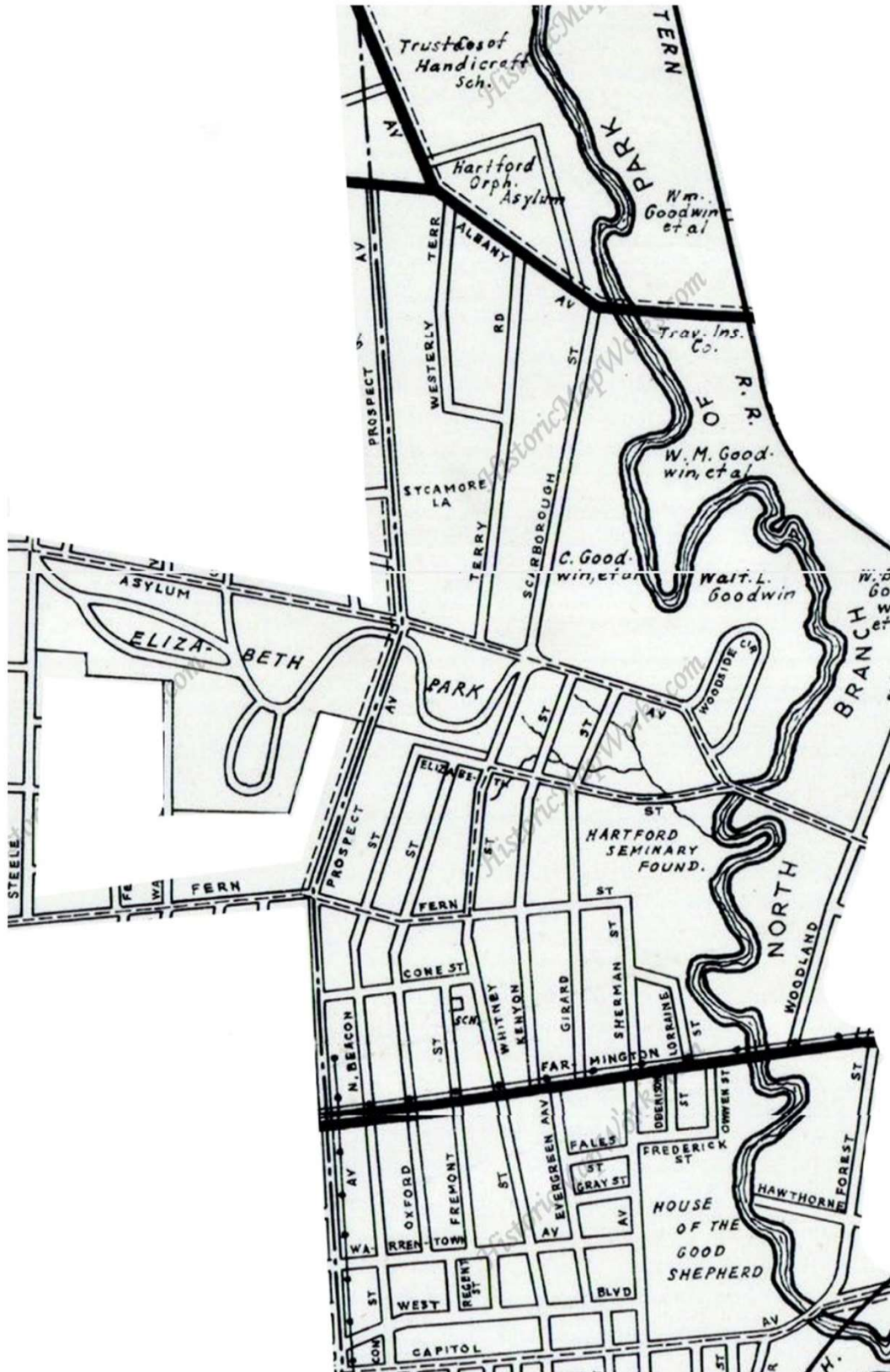
1909- The last parts of Sherman, Fern and Elizabeth are not yet built. Most lots north of Fern have no houses. There is no commercial development on Farmington Avenue, only residences and 2 churches. Trolley tracks are on Sisson, Farmington and Prospect. 18 Cone St has 6 greenhouses (replaced by a house 6 years later). 3 barns are behind 186 Oxford. The only institutions on Farmington Ave. and north on the map are: Noah Webster School, United Methodist Church, First Church of Christ Scientist (gone, but across fr, Kenyon), Elizabeth Park and the CT Home for the Blind (Hfd College for Women site).

South (not pictured) is The House of the Good Shepard (Sisson's original estate, in 1905 a home for 'wayward' girls), the Hartford Theological Seminary on Owen and a fire house on South Whitney. A stream runs behind So. Tremont which W. H. Scoville has built - a massive horse barn for racing trotters will be built behind these properties. Not many buildings yet south of Warrenton. The sewer lines are very screwy.

West End of Hartford

1931

Portion of Plate 024
Atlas: Hartford - New Haven - Middlesex -
Litchfield - Tolland Counties 1931
Dolph & Stewart 1931
Item # US12629

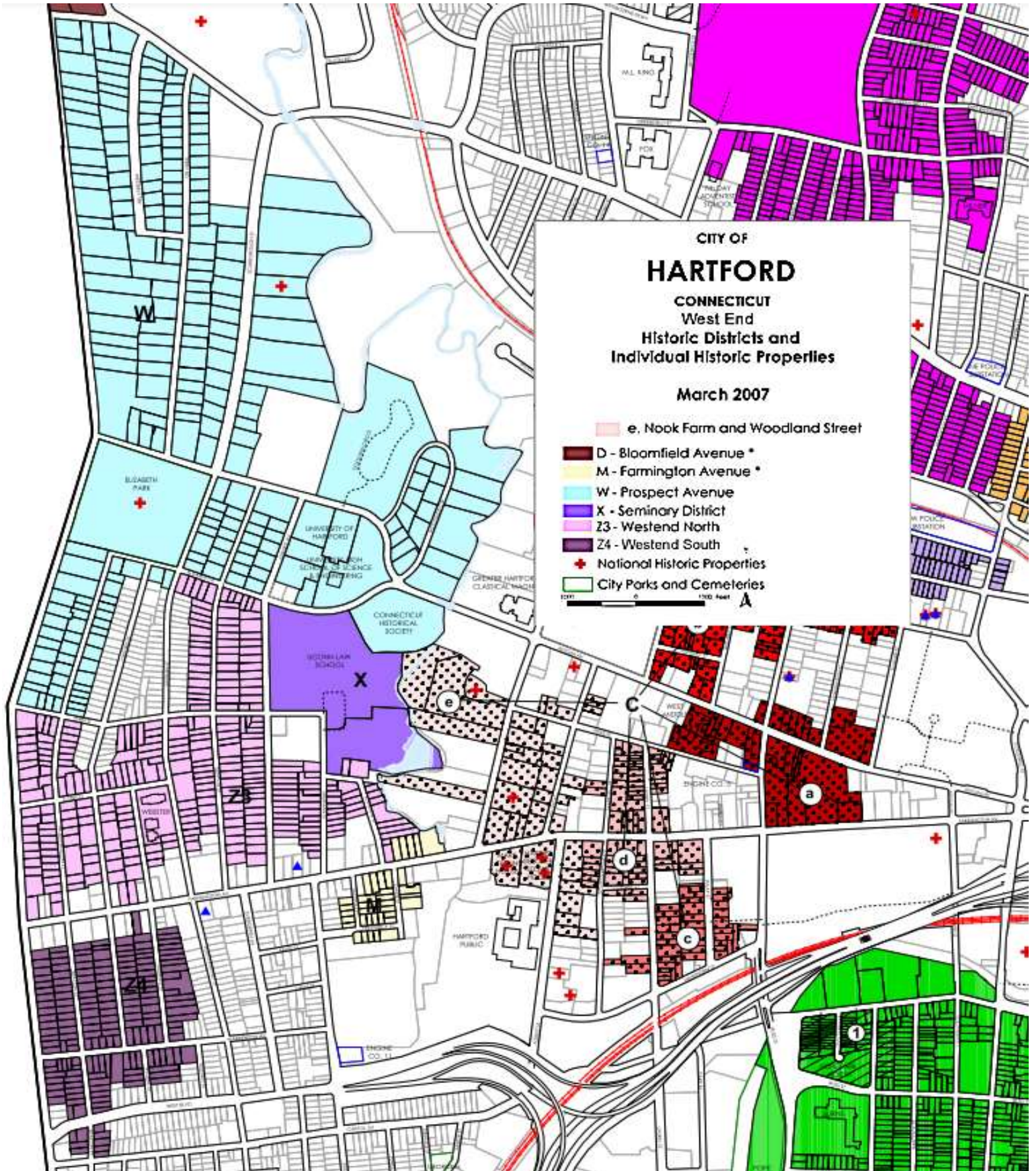


1931- The neighborhood is fully built-up by now. The Hartford Seminary is now on Girard (Law school moves there in 1978), and the Hartford Orphan Asylum is on Albany next to the Handicraft School (site of the Unitarian Society of Hartford). The Goodwin mansion on Asylum has been up for 5 years. And the Curtis Veeder home for 3 years (now the CT Museum of Culture & History, there since 1950). Hartford College for Women began in 1933, but on Asylum 1958-2003. Its Butterworth Hall was built in 1918. Little Hollywood was developed 1919-1923, redeveloped as Clemens Place in 1983. There is public transit on Capitol, Prospect, Farmington, Fern, Asylum, Albany & Bloomfield - Farmington and parts of Prospect seem to have overhead lines. Farmington Ave. appears to have been developed as a retail space starting during the 1920s. The Park River won't go underground at Farmington Ave. until I-84 is built in the 1960s.

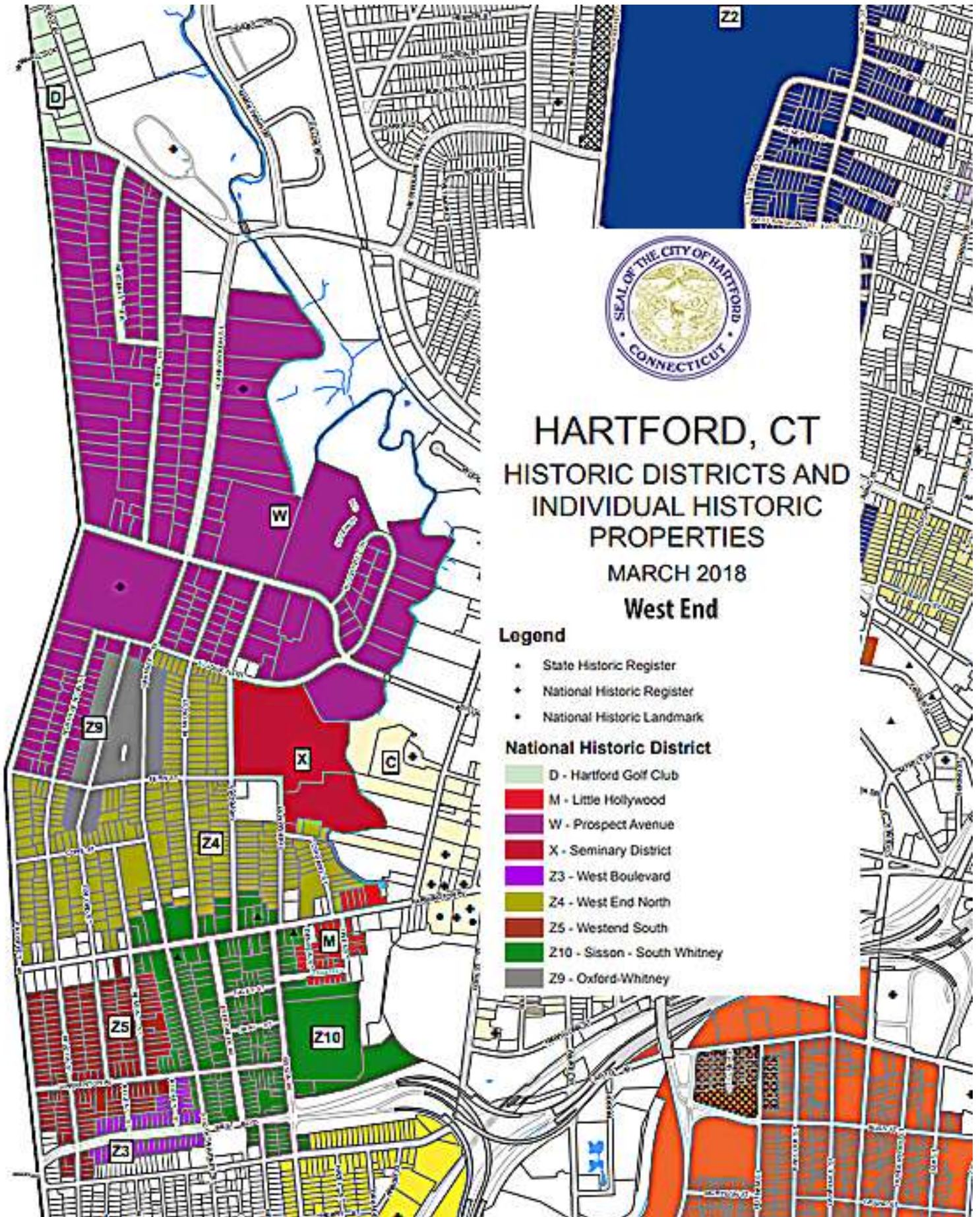
Detail of the City of Hartford's Historic District Map for the West End, 2007

Download Hartford Maps:

https://www.angelfire.com/planet/kenyon/map_neighborhood.html#HartfordMaps

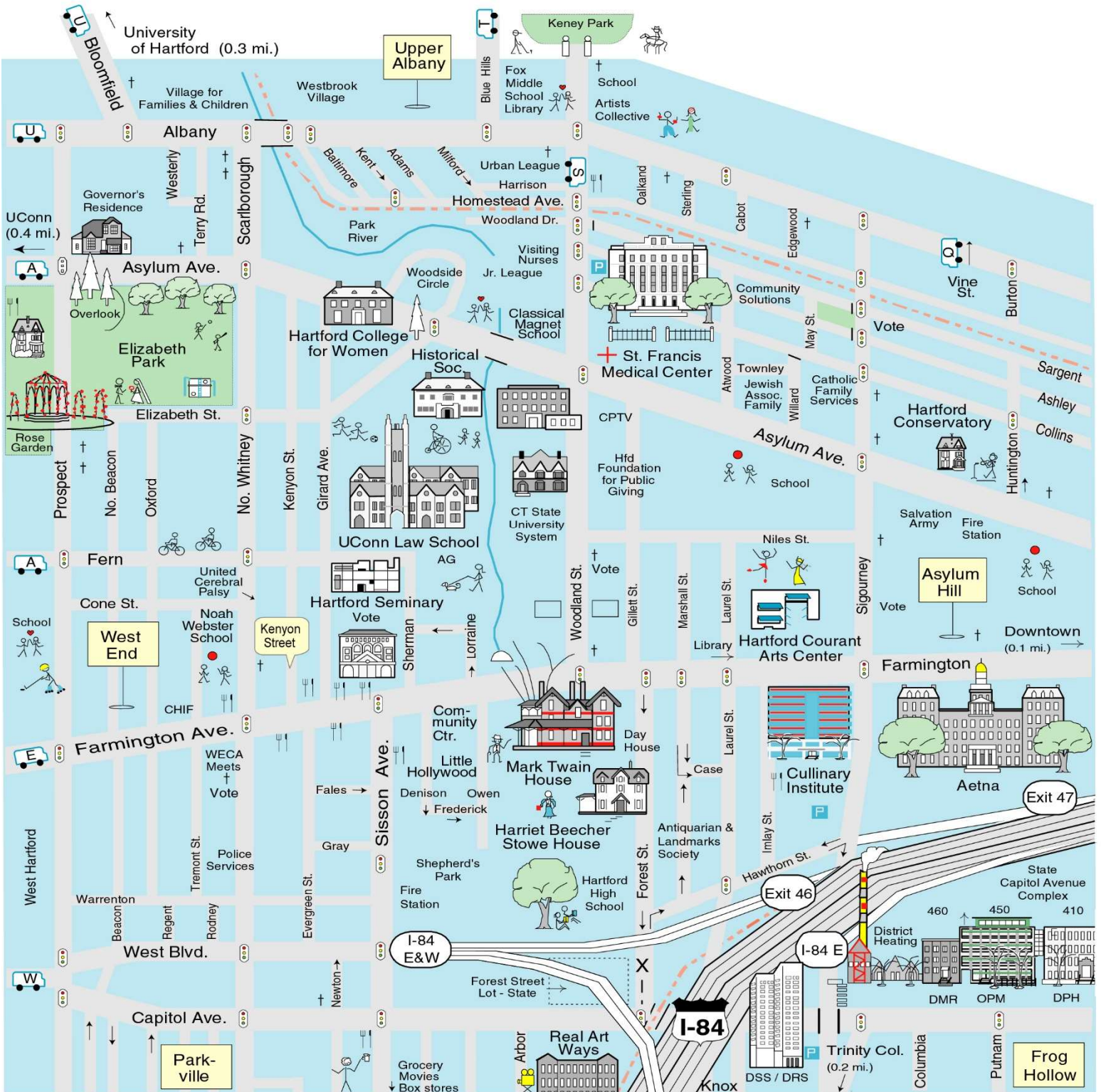


Detail of the City of Hartford's Historic District Map for the West End, 2018



2018 - There are 3 more historic districts added since 2007. The entire West End that is eligible is now on the National Register of Historic Places.

West End Illustrated Map



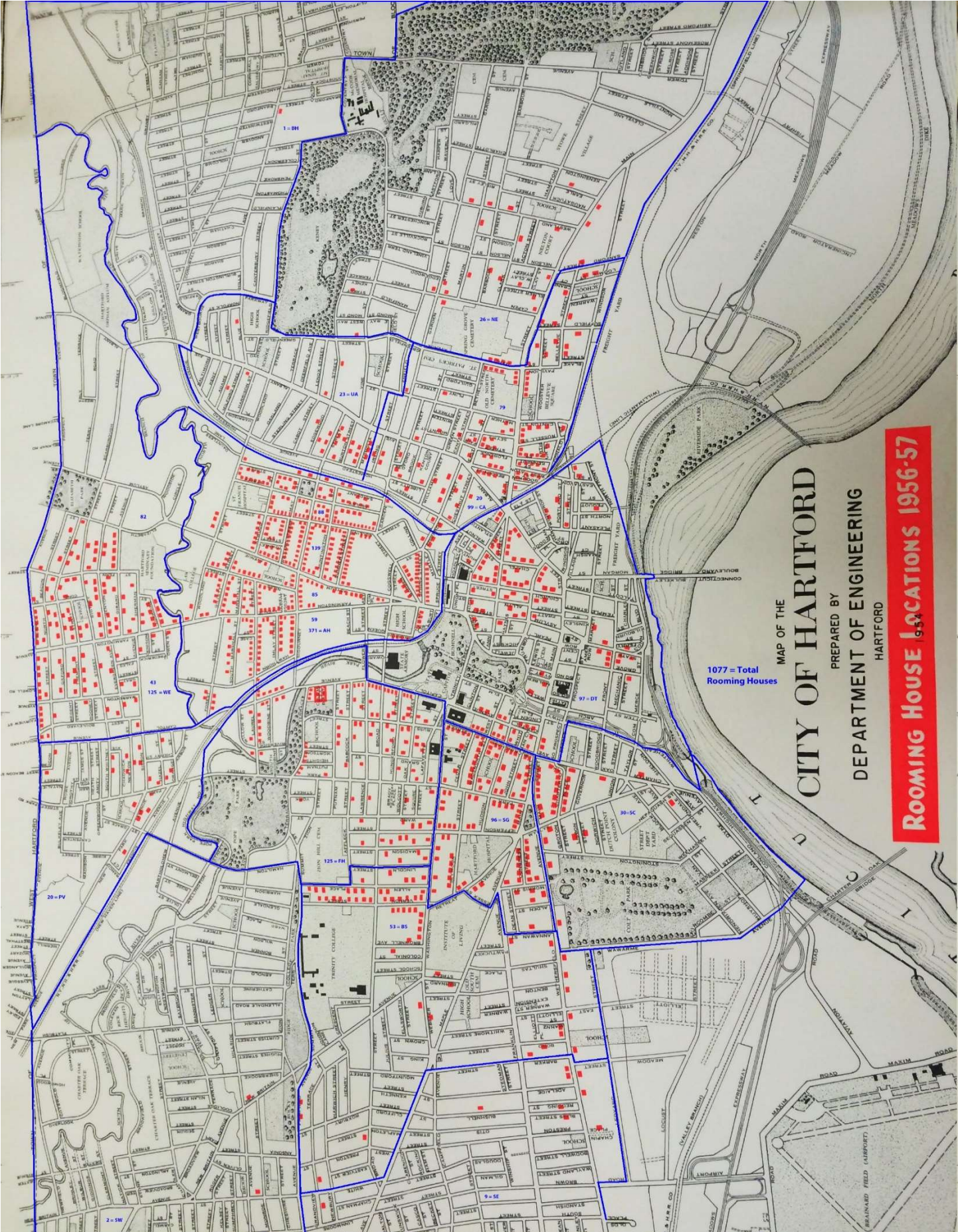
1999

© CWestDesign.com

See Kenyon Street Website - A Hartford Resource at: <http://angelfire.com/planet/kenyon/>

*My illustrated map shows all the features of the West End and Asylum Hill in 1999.
Every institution, non-profit, eatery, bus, traffic light and polling place.
This is one section of The Hartford Map.*

Hartford Rooming House Map - 1957



1957 – 1077 Rooming houses in Hartford in 1957. Indicates each licensed rooming house. Done by the City Engineering Map Department.

The West End: A Seller's Market for Real Estate

by Chip Rhodes

Poised between Asylum Hill and West Hartford, the West End is a neighborhood of dual personalities and, to hear area realtors tell it, such schizospheremia is apparently in heavy demand these days.

West End houses, known for their architectural splendor and individuality, are being bought almost immediately after going on the market for unprecedented sums. According to several realtors who deal in West End homes, the potential homebuyer cannot touch anything in the West End for less than \$180,000 and might end up spending two or even three times that.

"It's a seller's market," declares Merrill Lynch branch manager Helen Gardner. "It's a very strong and very active market. There are a lot of people actively looking for houses in the West End and they are quite willing to make sizable investments."

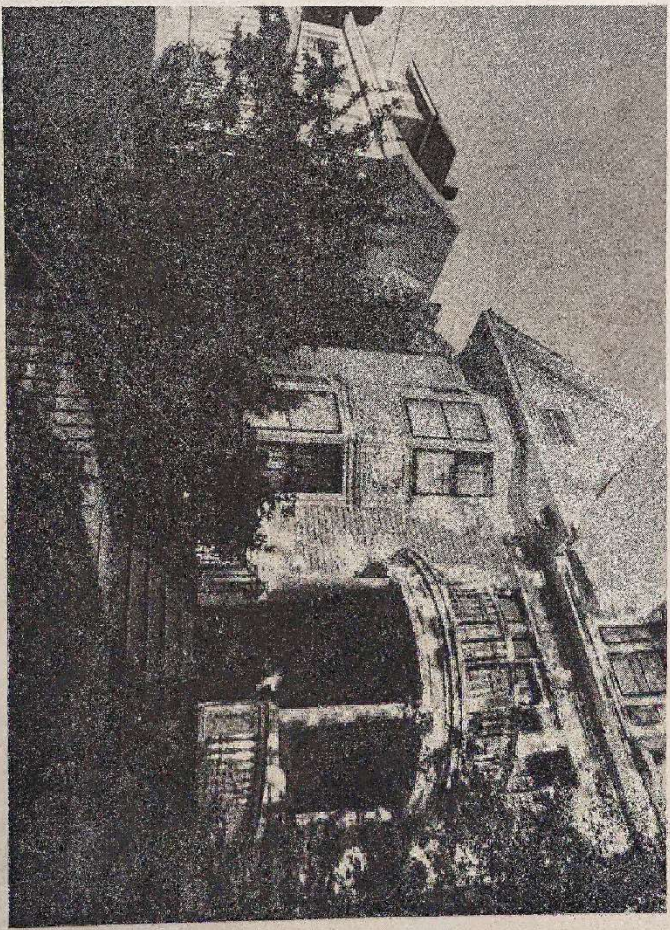
Says Mike Kelly, an agent with Century 21 Zubrisky & Sons Realty: "The West End has really been developing as a market, especially in the last

two years. A lot of young professional couples want to move in and the West End has superior housing so it's going fast."

Gardner, who moved into the West End fifteen years ago, remembers that time this way: "You could buy a house in the \$40,000 range and fix it up, but since then there has been steady appreciation and renewed interest in the city itself. When I was looking at houses, they showed me suburban homes and only when I insisted on seeing homes in Hartford did they show me West End homes. Now, potential buyers are shown the city."

Realtors attribute the popularity of the West End to a number of factors: besides a rejuvenated city economy, they cite renewed appreciation of the area's architecture, a vital and close-knit neighborhood, the presence of the generally well-respected Noah Webster elementary school, and proximity to the resources of downtown.

Although most realtors report a significant boom in the past two to four years, many trace its roots back to the early 1970's.



"The market in the West End started to turn around in the early seventies. When my husband and I bought our house on Kenyon Street 14 years ago, everyone said we were crazy," says Susie Hatch, a West End resident and real estate agent with the T.R. Preston agency. "No one expected such an increase in demand and such high appreciation."

compared with suburban homes, they are much more appealing," she says. Hatch points out that, traditionally, the school system, especially the Noah Webster School, has been a drawing card. But she fears that is changing.

"Homes that are in the middle price range — say between \$185,000 and \$250,000 — aren't

parts of the city as they become more successful professionally, and some are moving into the Hartford area because they've taken jobs downtown.

"A lot of the people moving in are young, two-income couples with children. There's a relaxed feeling in the area and it's a pleasant place to bring up children," says Gardner. Says Steve Park, president of



Photographs by C. M. Glover for The New York Times

West End Groove

Hartford Neighborhood Embraces Its Eclectic Roots

By STACEY STOWE

THE architecture is what draws them here: the Queen Annes in rainbow sherbet hues, the slate-roofed Victorians, the hushed stateliness of the Georgians.

When their grand windows light yellow as darkness falls, these houses say home. But it is the picket signs more than the picket fences that define the West End of Hartford, where neighborhood activism is as common as a welcome mat.

For instance, 25 years ago, when a beloved luncheonette was on the verge of closing, a business plan hatched over a backyard hedge resulted in three new owners, all from the neighborhood.

When it appeared that a duckpin bowling alley, a fixture in the lives of neighborhood children, was going



Above, Apostoles Theodosopoulos with his son, Apostoles, in front of their apartment on Kenyon Street. Top, Connie Borodenko, right, at the corner of Oxford and Warrenton with a neighbor, Jasmin Rzayeva.

West End schools: an enriching experience

8/10/87 *A. Carter*

I have lived in Hartford's West End for 15 years. I have one child enrolled in the public school system and two preschoolers whom I intend to enroll in the system.

This neighborhood is where my husband and I have chosen to raise our children and enjoy the special blend of small-town living and urbanity that makes the West End unique. I found the July 27 news story "West End exodus linked to concern over schools" to be a non-news story, inadequately researched and with a deliberately alarmist headline underscoring of front-page status in a statewide newspaper.

It seems to me that any story that discusses Hartford's public school system must recognize the system's major characteristic: the diversity of its student population. This diversity, by its very nature, raises complexities. Yet it also guarantees an enrichment of experience impossible to duplicate in a suburban school.

Combine this with many excellent teachers and exciting programs and you have an "extra" quality that many parents are seeking for their children. These are the people who

stay in the West End and make the neighborhood and its schools work. Ultimately, their children will have learned a very valuable lesson: the ability to initiate and sustain relationships with people from all types of backgrounds. What a wonderful gift to give one's child.

At least five of the families that recently moved here within a two-block distance of my home have enrolled their children in public schools. The majority of the houses sold in this same area over the past year were sold for reasons unrelated to "the school debate." The West End — which is the sum total of its people, churches, schools and other institutions — is alive and well and will be 50 years from now, regardless of Courant Jeremiahs.

Mary H. LaPorte
Hartford

Editor's note: The writer is president of the Noah Webster School PTA.

I have lived in the West End of Hartford for nine years. My children went through Noah Webster School and Quirk Middle School. They are

now in private schools. The combination has made them well-rounded individuals, capable of interacting and communicating with people of all races and ethnic, cultural and educational backgrounds.

I believe the exodus to West Hartford and other suburban towns is not helping anyone. Some of the families that left Hartford never set foot in a city school, let alone gave the school system a chance.

I have learned there is no perfect educational system. When the schools lack, the parents must pick up the slack. The blame is not only on those who leave the city.

Chloe L. Horton
Hartford

Cancer battle slow

During my lifetime, I have seen far too many of my relatives and friends die of cancer.

Fifty years ago, my mother died of breast cancer.

Thirteen years ago, my daughter Lucinda developed a brain tumor.

West End institution yields to modern merchandising

by BARRY LUBIN

I must be getting old. Not only are Republicans beginning to make sense to me, but I'm finding that, more and more, I dislike change, especially change that is not for the better.

Such change is taking place in the West End. Dougherty's Drug has been sold to Consumer Values Stores (CVS).

In this change, the post office, liquor store, luncheonette, crowded isles — in short, a neighborhood drug store — will be replaced by a nice, clean, plastic mass merchandising.

Oh, I'm sure the prices will be less on things that are essential to life: deodorant, toothpaste,

mouthwash. And I'm sure that my efforts to overcome strident inflation will be aided in the pennies I may save by shopping at CVS. But I wonder, what will I lose in the bargain? More of what we all seem to be losing, that chance to interact as human beings with institutions, stores that retain the human scale.

For instance, I wonder what success the West End would have if a complaint were lodged with CVS, as was done with Dougherty's, that the porno magazines were interfering with your ability to count your change at the cash register. Without too much prodding, Dougherty put them to the side and covered up the more

revealing parts. Will CVS refer you to their corporate office?

But this is not my main hurt over the change in ownership. The real trouble lies in what I feel is the passing of an institution in the West End — the drug store luncheonette.

In the almost six years my family and I have been West End residents we have developed a habit of having Saturday breakfast at Dougherty's. We tasted through the original proprietors, whose names escape me, Freddy, brief eggs were greasy, but even remember by someone we don't own, Jay, whose breakfast was delicious.

VOL. I, NO. 2

THE WESTENDER

Hartford, Conn.

JULY 1973

PICTURES AT AN EXHIBITION

The Museum of Art Center presents a new exhibition of photography by three Hartford photographers: Larry and Nancy Westender, John and Joan Westender, and John and Joan Westender. The exhibition is at 141 North Main Street, Hartford, Conn. The exhibition will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

Over 100 people gathered for the opening of the exhibition at the Museum of Art Center. The exhibition is a collection of photographs by three Hartford photographers: Larry and Nancy Westender, John and Joan Westender, and John and Joan Westender. The exhibition is at 141 North Main Street, Hartford, Conn. The exhibition will be open from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.



Photo by Marshall Westender

Join Elizabeth Park Picnic

Join Elizabeth Park Picnic on July 29th from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. The picnic is held at Elizabeth Park, Hartford, Conn. The picnic is a family affair and is open to all. There will be food, games, and entertainment. The picnic is a great way to spend the day with family and friends.



Photo by Marshall Westender

ETHNIC HISTORY OF HARTFORD PUBLISHED

The book "Ethnic History of Hartford" is now published. The book is a collection of essays by various authors, including Marshall Westender. The book is a comprehensive look at the history of the various ethnic groups in Hartford, Conn. The book is available at the Museum of Art Center.

Stegosaurus Lives

One of the most fascinating fossils ever discovered is a Stegosaurus. The fossil is a complete skeleton and is the only one ever found. The fossil is now on display at the Museum of Art Center. The fossil is a great example of the power of science to uncover the secrets of the past.

Jay, a woman who knows everyone, has the "time of day" for anyone, especially the "regulars." The regulars are many and varied — route salesmen on coffee break, local businessmen having lunch — but most particularly the old people in the West End. Not only did Jay and the food know how they liked their foods, but more important, they knew that they liked people, so they talked with them.

A chance to meet, a chance to talk, and after breakfast mail your letters, pick up the newspaper, fill your prescription. This will all be missed among the straight rows of nationally advertised specials of things America can't do without.

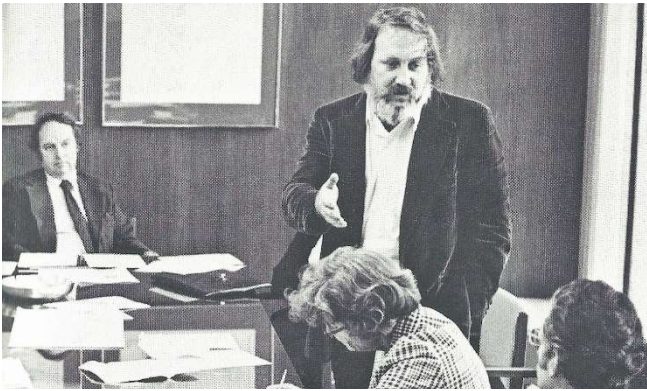
In all fairness to CVS, they may be very good to deal with, and all this may not be true. But they did give Jay only three days notice to close up. And, being the woman she is, she took them to court and obtained an injunction allowing her to vacate in a more reasonable time!

Jay is moving down the block to what was formerly Schatz, now Marcello's, taking the regulars and us with her.

But Dougherty's will pass, as has the neighborhood grocery store, the policeman on the beat, and much else that reminded most of us that we are individuals that count.

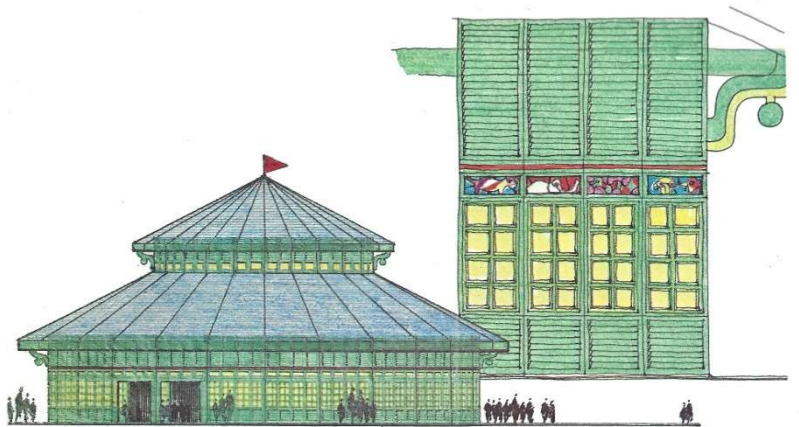
Knox Foundation

2 Year, \$1 Million Downtown Hartford Initiative (1974-1975) – photos from annual report



Jack Dollard at Knox Board Meeting.

Right: Jack's pavilion design for the Bushnell Park Carousel.



Middle: Tracey Cameron in her studio with 7 finished horses, her cat and myna bird (555 Asylum, now Artspace).

Artists were hired to paint the horses, according to her specs, in the basement of 555.

Based on the cost for the 1980 Santa Monica carousel, I think the restoration cost was over \$100,000, and the building additional.

Bottom: Before it was assembled, the pieces were on display in the Wadsworth Atheneum's Avery Court.

Bottom Right: One of Tracey's charming 12 month panels which adorns the top of the carousel (look up!).

Knox Foundation Board and Staff

Knox Foundation Board

1974

John J. Riege
Samuel S. Fuller
Marion Wilcox
Mary Edwards

1975

John J. Riege
Samuel S. Fuller
Marion Wilcox
Mary Edwards

Knox Foundation Staff

1974 & 1975

Jack Dollard
Carolyn West
Jessie Ackerman
Cheryl Baker
Bob Bickford
Tracey Cameron
Toni Gold
Bob Gregson
Pat Hare
Karen Hemmingsen
Elizabeth Hicks
Susan Hoffman
Tim Keating
Ann Kieffer
Wendy Knecht
Paul LeMay
Sue Levine
Peggy Lord
David Miles
Richard Milhollan
Ted Montgomery
Howard Moreen
Elliot Porter
Nancy Savin
Mark Schubb
Tyler Smith
Leigh Standish
Neil Taty
Tom Tramont
Tim Wolf

Knox Parks Foundation Board

1974

John J. Riege
Samuel S. Fuller
Marion Wilcox
Mary Edwards
Peter Cascio
Victor Cassella
Harry Hartman
Eugene Mulcahy
Claire Knowlton
Eloise Harris
Victor Jarm

1975

John J. Riege
Samuel S. Fuller
Marion Wilcox
Peter Cascio
Mary Edwards
Eloise Harris
Victor Jarm
Eugene Mulcahy
Claire Knowlton
Ivan Backer
Edward Beckwith

Knox Parks Foundation Staff

1974

John Alexopoulos
Frank Keitt
Frank Cleland
Jose Diaz

1975

John Alexopoulos
Frank Keitt
Frank Cleland
Jose Diaz
Joy Favretti
Jeff Merriman
Gary Hermanowski
Anne Paschal



(L to R) Jack Riege, Claire Knowlton, Ed Beckwith



(Clockwise from bottom) Carolyn West, John Alexopoulos, ?, Claire Knowlton, ?, Vic Jarm, Ed Beckwith, Eloise Harris, Jack Dollard, Mary Edwards.



(L to R) Mary Edwards, Ivan Backer, Jack Dollard



Paul LeMay's Peace Train annual fiddle contests were supported by Knox, 1975. Thousands came to these Bushnell Park concerts supported by Knox 1975.











Kenyon Street House Map

Showing date built, architect, if known, awards, type of ownership in 1973-1980 (photos 2012).

<u>Built</u>	<u>House</u>	#	#	<u>House</u>	<u>Built</u>
		Farmington Ave			
1893*		28	31	Lot	
c 1890	1973: Rooming house 	34	37	Apartment Building	
1897	1973: Original home- Alice Lionheart 	38	41		c 1890
	1973: Three Family			2006 Award-Winner - Hartford Preservation Alliance 1974- Young owner & 3 Roommates	
1908		44	49		1896
	1973: Rooming house ~1983- Young couple			1973: Rooming House ~ 1975 Young family + 4 kids	
1895		52			
	1973- Mrs Lyle & grown son, Rooming hs				

1899		56	55		1893
	~ 1977 – Young couple w/ roomer			1973: Rooming house ~ 1979 – Young family, 1 kid	
1896		62	63		c 1890
	Frederick R. Comstock, architect 1973: Older Woman – Rooming House			1973- Older Couple – Two Family	
1899		70	65		1900
	1973 – Hartford School of Accounting – Rooming House ~1977 – young family, 2 kids			Charles A Atkins, 1 st owner, builder A History of 65 Kenyon Street 2007 Award-Winner - Hfd Preservation Alliance 1973: Carolyn West & David Getomer	
1898		76	67		1897
	Hapgood and Hapgood, architect ~ 1980 Young family w/ 2 kids			A. W. Scoville, architect, Levi Drake House Follow the Exterior Restoration Before After 1973: St Heliars Rooming House 1980: Young family, 1 kid	

c 1890		80	75		1904
	<p>1972: Drug den 1973: Young family, 3 kids</p>			<p>Bayley and Goodrich, architect 1973 Older German sisters</p>	
c 1900		82	79		1904
	<p>Original home – Nick Carossi, Mrs. Carossi’s original family home</p>			<p>William H Scoville, builder Older resident, roomers/ Young single.</p>	
			83		1904
				<p>William H Scoville, architect 1973- Mayo-Smiths (renters) ~1977- young couple</p>	
1897		88	87		1904
	<p>1973 - Rooming house ~1976 – Young family, 2 kids</p>			<p>William H Scoville, architect 1973 - Older woman rented rooms 1975 – young family, 1 kid</p>	
1870		96	95		c 1875
	<p>Eugene Kenyon, Maria K. Stanley 2009 award winner - Knox Parks Foundation Hartford Blooms Award 1973- Original owner Margaret Rochford / 1974- young family 1 kid</p>			<p>Original Home – Mrs. Bush Eventually, many young couples and singles</p>	

1896		100-102	101		c 1890
	William H Scoville, architect 1973: Young Renters in two-family			1973 ~ Older residents, Rooming house	
1898		104	105		1907
	Original Home – Doris Cashman			1973 ~ Older residents, Rooming house	
1898		108	109		1894
	1973 - Rooming house			William H Scoville ~1976 – The Osgood family	
1898		110	43 Fern		c 1890
	1973 – 1976- young family, 4 kids			1973– Rooming house, not owner - occupied ~1975 – young couple 1977 – young couple, 1 kid	
Fern Street					

Between 1973 and 1983 – 10 years - the 32 homes on Kenyon's first block went from:

*5 original residents and 2 young families to
3 original residents and 20 young families*



Vintage West End t-shirt

Carolyn West © 2023