

Connecticut
State Register of Historic Places
Benton Street Historic District, Hartford

Revised

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as will be on agenda

Historical Comm

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1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Benton Street Historic District

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 9, 13-15, 14, 16, 17-19, 18, 20, 22-24, 23, 27-29, 28, 31, 32, 33, 35, 36, 38-40, 44-46, 47, 48-50, 49, 53, 54, 56, 57, 58-60, 63-65 Benton Street.

City/Town: Hartford Vicinity: South End

State: CT County: Hartford Zip Code: 06106

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: x
Public-local: x
Public-State:
Public-Federal:

Category of Property

Building(s):
District: x
Site:
Structure:
Object:

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4. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: Residential Sub: _____
Commercial _____

Current: Residential Sub: _____

5. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification:

Italianate, Queen Anne, Second Empire, Perfect Six, Neo-Classical Revival,
Vernacular

Materials:

Foundation: stone, brick
Walls: brick, clapboards, shingles, synthetic siding
Roof: wood shingles, asphalt shingles

Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The Benton Street Historic District comprises the 21 residential properties and six parcels now vacant facing Benton Street between Wethersfield Avenue and Franklin Avenue in the South End of Hartford. This part of Hartford is generally residential on the east-west cross streets such as Benton Street and commercial, in many instances altered from residential, on the north-south avenues. The mid-20th-century Bulkeley High School is across Wethersfield Avenue at the east end of the district and the Trolley Barn (listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1983) a block or so to the south on the west side of Wethersfield Avenue (See Figure 1, District Map).

The Benton Street Historic District houses were all built between ca. 1860 and 1910, during the period of development of the South End of Hartford. Twelve of them are frame, nine brick. Breakdown by styles is as follows:

- 5 Italianate
- 7 Queen Anne
- 1 Second Empire
- 5 Renaissance Revival/Perfect Six
- 1 Neo-Classical Revival
- 2 Vernacular

The general appearance of the district is urban. The land is flat and the street is narrow, with houses closely spaced. Uniformly on the building line, they are set back about 10 feet from the sidewalks, 10 to 20 percent of which still are slate. There are few trees. Descriptions of the individual properties are given by the following inventory.

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Inventory

All street numbers are on Benton Street. Dates are taken from Merle Kummer, ed., *Hartford Architecture, Volume Two: South Neighborhoods* (Hartford: Hartford Architecture Conservancy, 1980), p. 109.

The first three entries for each property are:
Street number on Benton Street
Nine-digit map, block, and lot number from Assessor's records
Year of construction

- 9 221-004-022 1904 3-story brick Italianate 3-bay 6-family house. Brownstone sills, segmental soldier course lintels. Two central front doors under transoms. 1-over-1 replacement windows. Shadow of missing 3-story central front porch. Bracketed wooden roofline cornice. Flat or low pyramidal roof. (Photograph 2)
- 13-15 221-004-022 Vacant parcel.
- 14 222-001-025 1897 2-story frame vernacular gable-roofed house with synthetic siding. Full-width 2-story enclosed front porch under gable of front section of house. Rear section is wider and taller, with separate gable roof and cross gables. Windows are 1-over-1. (Photograph 1)
- 16 222-001-026 1896 2-story 2-family frame Queen Anne gable-roofed house. First floor covered with clapboards, second floor with conventional shingles, and third with fishscale imbricated shingles. Original 1-story front porch features central gable with raised classical scrollwork embellishment and arcaded frieze under dentil course. Two 1-over-1 windows at first floor east of door and small window with horizontal large central pane surrounded by small square panes west of door. Repeated at second floor. Single front door but small second-story porch suggests house was built for two families. Jerkinhead front roof gable. (Photograph 1)
- 18 222-001-027 Narrow vacant parcel.
- 17-19 221-004-021 ca. 1860 2 1/2-story large brick Italianate double house. Brick walls to grade. Tooled brownstone lintels and sills. Replacement 1-story porch with concrete steps and floor. Single 1-over-1 replacement windows on either side of porch at first floor; above, two on either side of central bearing wall. Third-floor windows, not as tall as those at first and second floors, are 3-over-3. String course below third-floor sills. Plain roof overhang. Flat or low pyramidal roof. 2-story wooden porches on rear. (Photograph 2)
- 20 222-001-028 ca. 1875 2-story frame Queen Anne irregularly shaped gable-roofed house. 2-story porch, now enclosed, in angle of L. 1-story small west side entrance porch has bracketed posts. House covered with composition shingle siding. Paired tall 1-over-1 windows in front elevation at first and second floors. Paired round-arched windows in east side attic gable. Upper sash in gable-roofed attic dormers are round-arched. Main roof overhang supported by vertical brackets. (Photograph 5)

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ca. 1930 Pyramidal-roofed garage.

22-24 222-001-029 1911 Burton A. Sellew, architect 3-story brick Perfect Six with two 3-story 3-sided front bays. Central 3-story front porches missing. Concrete front steps and porch floor. Round-arched recessed entry. 1-over-1 windows with rough-finished brownstone sills and lintels. Sheet-metal Italianate modillioned cornice. (Photographs 1, 5)

23 221-004-019 1897 3-story brick triple decker/half Perfect Six. 2-story enclosed wooden replacement porch to east has 1-over-1 windows. 3-story 3-sided bay to west. Front door at second floor but not third, creating doubt that this is 3-family house. String course of angled brick under third-floor windows across front and along sides. (Photograph 2)

ca. 1860 Gable-roofed 1 3/4-story frame barn dating from use of land as farm; later in 19th century was bottling works. Addition east.

27-29 221-004-019 ca. 1860 2 1/2-story orange brick Italianate/Neo-Classical Revival/Renaissance Revival low-hipped-roof double house. 1-story full-width wooden porch has square picket railing with round columns under central low gable. First- and second-floor windows are 6-over-6, third floor 3-over-3. Brick walls to grade. Four windows each side elevation. Plain roof overhang. Two splayed brick chimneys rise from west wall, two rectangular chimneys from east wall. 2-story wooden back porches. Open to weather. (Photograph 3) Built by owner of bottling works at 23.

28 222-001-030 ca. 1875 2 1/2-story frame L-shaped Italianate 3-bay house with synthetic siding. Front door in east of three bays is protected by small replacement front entrance porch which is attached to 2-story enclosed porch at east front corner in angle of L. Windows in 1-2 rhythm on all three floors, 1-over-1 replacement sash on first and second stories, wooden 3-over-3s on third. Flat or low pyramidal roof has plain roof overhang. (Photographs 1, 5)

ca. 1970 4-car garage.

31 221-004-018 Vacant parcel.

32 222-001-031 ca. 1875 2-story frame Second Empire house with synthetic siding. First-floor porch has high parapet/railing, square posts, and shed roof. Door east, two 1-over-1 windows west. Second floor has two 1-over-1 windows above those at first floor, plain wall over door. Two shallow central shed-roofed dormers. Rehabilitated in 1998. (Photograph 5)

ca. 1980 Garage.

33 221-004-017 1909 3-story brick Perfect Six. 3-story wooden front porches with square posts and bead-board parapets, possibly replacements, are flanked by 3-sided projecting 3-story bays. Brownstone sills, segmental soldier-course brick lintels, 1-over-1 sash. Round-arched central entrance to recessed entryway. Heavy sheet-metal cornice breaks out over bays. Width of building increases half-way back, with window in angled wall section. Side elevation from front is composed of wall under chimney, two

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- 1-over-1s, single window in angle, pair of 1-over-1s, single window with high sill, single window. 3-story wooden rear porches. (Photograph 4)
- 35 221-004-016 ca. 1890 2-story frame Queen Anne house in Greek cross plan with gable end to street. Enclosed 2-story porch east, which has synthetic siding, wraps around to east cross piece of structure. Main building covered with grooved composition shingles. One 1-over-1 window first and second floors west of porch, one in gable end.
- 36 222-001-032 ca. 1860 2 1/2-story Italianate painted brick plain 3-bay house. Door west, two 1-over-1 replacement windows east. Small replacement porch west. At second floor above door small window in former historic tall opening suggests porch originally was two stories. Brick wall projects one wythe at water table and again below small third-floor windows. Two windows at all floors on side elevations. Enclosed 2-story wooden porches on rear. (Photographs 5, 7)
- 38-40 222-001-033 1899 2-story frame Queen Anne gable-roofed house covered with synthetic siding. Original full-width front porch in front of two doors west and 3-sided 2-story bay east. Console brackets at top of bay's angled walls maintain pattern of square corners. Small gabled second-floor porch west. Round fluted posts, turned balusters in porch both first and second floors. Windows in 3-sided bay are 1-over-1. Two smaller 1-over-1's in front gable end. 3-sided bay under gable on east side elevation. (Photograph 7)
- ca. 1970 Garage.
- 44-46 222-001-034 ca. 1875 3-story frame Neo-Classical Revival double house with concrete steps. Synthetic siding to 3" from grade. Two central front doors have transoms with central vertical muntins, flanked by single 1-over-1 windows. Second- and third-floor 1-over-1 windows are over first-floor doors and windows. Side elevations' fenestration from front is single window, group of three windows 2/3 way back with central high sill. Flat or low pyramidal roof. (Photograph 7)
- 47 221-004-015 1899 3-story brick Perfect Six similar to 33. Concrete steps. Replacement wood 1-story porch may have original engaged turned and bracketed columns. Shadow suggests original 1-story porch in front of extant arched recessed entry. Brownstone sills; soldier course segmental lintels. Second and third floors between bays may have paired windows (building is boarded up), as at 49. Sheet metal cornice with scrolled frieze under modillioned crown molding. Two pairs of windows at each floor on side elevations. (Photograph 6)
- 48-50 222-001-035 1897 2-story frame Queen Anne 2-family house covered with composition shingles. 2-story entrance porch west. 2-story 3-sided bay east. Two original front doors have glazing (one with vertical pointed panes) over horizontal panels under common header of dentil course and crown molding. Entry flanked by turned posts. Most windows are 1-over-1, but in second floor of bay upper sash have four tall vertical panes with pointed glazing at tops, as in west front door below. In attic gable end paired 1-over-1s flank central vertical panel in unified molded surround under classical header same as found over front doors. (Photographs 7, 8)

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ca. 1920 Brick garage.

49 221-004-014 1899 3-story brick Perfect Six, similar to 47.
Rough-finished brownstone water table and window sills. In original 1-story
wooden front porch turned and bracketed posts support classical entablature.
Segmental soldier-course lintels. 3-story wooden back porches. (Photograph
6)

53 ca. 1960 4-car garage.

54 222-001-036 1898 2-story frame Queen Anne 2-family house covered with
wooden clapboards. Mirror image of 48-50, but porch all original with
turned posts and balusters. Brick foundation. (Photographs 7, 8, 9)

ca. 1920 1-story frame L-shaped garage.

56 222-001-037 1898 Third example of 2-story frame Queen Anne 2-family house
similar to 48-50 and 54, but much detail lost. Synthetic siding. All three
houses have 3-sided bay on one side elevation, 48-50 and 56 on east, 52-54,
mirror image example, on west. (Photograph 7)

57 221-004-012 Vacant parcel.

58-60 222-001-038 ca. 1875 2-story frame gable-roofed, now astylar, double
house covered with synthetic siding. Front elevation is devoted to four
1-over-1 replacement windows at both first and second floors. Pair of
1-over-1s above is recessed in attic gable end which forms fully recessed
tympanum. 1-story shed-roofed entry porches on both east and west side
elevations. (Photograph 7)

ca. 1930 Brick garage.

63-65 221-004-035 Vacant parcel.

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6. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable Criteria: A x B ___ C x D ___

Significant Person(s): William Benton

Architect/Builder: Burton A. Sellew

State Significance of Property and Justify Criteria Noted Above.

Summary

The Benton Street Historic District is significant architecturally and historically because it contains both brick and frame well-preserved examples of domestic architectural styles of the late 19th century and because it is a nearly intact block dating from, and documenting, the history of an active period of growth in Hartford.

Architecture

The first three houses to be constructed in the district, about 1860, were 17-19, 27-29, and 36, all of brick material in the Italianate style, then at its zenith in the pre-Civil War years. These three examples exhibit the standard Italianate features of boxy cubical mass, classical trim, and low overhanging roof. Two are double houses of the type common throughout the city in the style, often divided in ownership by a central bearing wall. A few years later a frame version of the Italianate style followed in 1875 at 28. A final brick Italianate house at 9 is given the date 1904, which is late for the style. The frame double house at 44-46 which is classified in the Inventory as Neo-Classical Revival may have had Italianate characteristics when built.

All seven examples of the Queen Anne style in the district, 16, 20, 35, 38-40, 48-50, 54, and 56, are frame. The earliest, 20, dates from 1875. Its asymmetric plan, paired tall windows at both first and second floors, and vertical roof-support brackets are characteristic of the style. Even more faithful to the style, and gaining in significance because of their number, are the three houses at 48-50, 54, and 56. The three are the same design, 54 being a mirror image of the other two. The three-sided two-story bays, diamond-shaped glazing, turned porch posts and balusters, classical trim unifying front doors and attic windows, and cross-gable roofs are all character-defining features of the style.

There is one Second Empire house in the district, 32, which on the one hand is in excellent condition having been rehabilitated within the past year but on other hand has lost most of its stylistic features other than the mansard roof.

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Hartford's ubiquitous Perfect Six is represented by five examples, 22-24, 23, 33, 47, 49. All follow the usual mode of brick construction with double front bays flanking central entrance, brownstone trim, and heavy sheet-metal cornice. One of the Perfect Sixes, 22-24, is the only building in the district for which the architect is known. He was Burton A. Sellev (1878-1932), one of the two or three most prolific architects in the city's history. The chief component of his work was multi-family dwellings, as represented on Benton Street.

The district exhibits a high degree of integrity with few intrusions or demolitions. The dense urban fabric gives an excellent sense of domestic architecture in the styles fashionable in Hartford in the fourth quarter of the 19th century, now in a good state of preservation.

History

When Hartford was settled in the mid-18th century, the South Meadows were desirable farm lands, with their fertility enriched by annual flooding of the Connecticut River. One of the colonial settlers who owned land and raised crops in the south Hartford area was Andrew Benton. His descendants continued to be land owners here for two centuries, including, presumably, William Benton whose Wethersfield house shows in the 1869 atlas at the eastern end of Benton Street (Figure 3). The 1869 *City Directory* lists William Benton, farmer, at 90 Wethersfield Avenue. Land for the municipal South Cemetery at the west end of Benton Street was given to the city by the Benton family. The historic role of the family by way of local residence and philanthropy was recognized in naming the street.

According to Close, the recognized authority on Hartford streets, Benton Street was accepted by the city in 1888. The fact that it nevertheless appears on the 1869 atlas can perhaps be explained by the conjecture that it was not yet a public thoroughfare. Figure 3 shows three buildings on the south side of the street, one on the north. The first, from Wethersfield Avenue, on the south, may be 17-19, or the barn at 23 since the barn is set back from the street. The second probably is 27-29. The one building on the north may have been 32 or 36.

A second plate in the 1869 atlas, of the 4th Ward, prepared by Seth E. Marsh, shows greater detail, perhaps dating from later than 1869, although there is no such indication in the publication. On this plate seven lots are laid out in the district on the south side of the street, with the two buildings noted above standing, and three lots on the north, with the house noted above. On the south, land west of the parcels was owned by H. & S. Bissell. Hiram Bissell (1818-1910) and Sylvester Bissell were prominent masonry contractors with projects such as the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial Arch (1884) to their credit. As developers, they also constructed and sold residential buildings.

By the time the 1880 atlas was published, Franklin Avenue was in place and Benton Street had six houses on the north side, three on the south. By 1896 more buildings had been constructed, and the atlas displayed owners' names. The State Savings Bank owned two brick houses on the south side and A.E. Milderberger another. According to the 1896 *City Directory*, Henry D. Milderberger, attorney with office at 297 Main Street, resided at 17 Benton Street. Across the street the atlas shows C. W. Wells and the directory lists Jordan C. Wells, councilman

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7th Ward, painter and decorator, with both business and home at 60 Benton Street. Other names from the atlas which also appear in the directory are Alvin W. Chamberlain, bookbinder at Case, Lockwood & Brainard, 28 Benton Street; Emily Profitt, widow of John G., 36 Benton Street; Karon Carroll, packer at 40 Governor Street (Capewell Manufacturing Company), home "up" (upstairs) 46 Benton Street.

The district was completely built up by the time the 1909 atlas was published. Not a single parcel was vacant, save for the narrow strip between 16 and 20. By contrast, the district has suffered several losses in the late 1990s (compare Figure 1, District Map, with Figure 2, current MDC map), primarily by demolition following fire, as at 57 and 63-65.

In 1909 several of the double houses (13-15, 17-19, 25-27) had one owner rather than the customary two as at 44-46. Names of more residents are available from the 1914 directory, the first year in which an alpha-numeric listing of names was published. Names in the district included:

- 13 Frank DellaPazza
- 17 Tony DeBella, japanner
John Zozzoro, laborer
- 27 James F. Degnan, shipping clerk
Frank M. Thompson, clerk
- 29 Joseph J. Barthouski, carriageman
John J. Keefe, printer
- 44 five names, three of them Donahue, and
Meyer Weinberg, grocer 44 Benton Street, home 44 Benton
Street

While few occupations of residents emerge from the 19th-century data, one was an attorney with his office downtown. By the time of World War I, the list of residents reflected ethnic diversity associated with immigration and vocations associated with Hartford's participation in industrial and commercial development.

While almost wholly residential, the district long had modest non-residential functions. The initial use for farming preceded construction of any houses. Then in the late 19th century the barn at 23 was adapted to become a bottling works and by the turn of the century Jordan Wells conducted his painting and decorating business from his home at 60, while in 1914 Meyer Weinberg was both grocer and resident at 44 Benton Street.

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7. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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Atlas of Hartford City and County 1869. Hartford: Baker & Tilden, 1869, Plate 21; 4th Ward, by Seth E. Marsh.

Benton, Byron, descendant of Andrew Benton. Conversation, July 27, 1999.

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Close, F. Perry. *History of Hartford Streets.* Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1969, update of *History of Hartford Streets*, Hartford: Municipal Art Society, 1911, p. 12.

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8. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: 6.5

Verbal Boundary Description:

The north and south boundaries are drawn along the rear lot lines of properties facing Benton Street between Wethersfield Avenue and Franklin Avenue. The east and west boundaries are the east lines of 9 and 14 Benton Street and the west lines of 58-60 and 63-65 Benton Street.

Boundary Justification:

The boundary is drawn to encompass the properties facing Benton Street between Wethersfield Avenue and Franklin Avenue. Benton Street starts at Wethersfield Avenue; the district starts where the street starts. The district terminates with the west lines of the last properties in the block facing Benton Street because Franklin Avenue is a wide commercial strip which functionally and visually terminates the residential character of the district.

9. FORM PREPARED BY

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