

West Middle School

Hartford, Connecticut

In the nineteenth century Hartford named its school districts by their geographic location: the South School District was made up of the schools south of the center of the city (South School, Charter Oak Avenue School, Lawrence Street School, etc.) The West Middle School District was the district located west of the middle of the city.

The original West Middle School building was designed by Richard Mitchell UpJohn (1827-1903), and stood in back of the present West Middle School building that faces Asylum Avenue. UpJohn's school building was built of brick and brownstone in the high Victorian style, with "vivid polychromy", considered by architectural historians as "one of the best built during Asylum Hill's period of growth and greatest prestige." It stood three stories high and had sixteen rooms. The cost of the land and the building was \$154,165. It was completed and first occupied in 1873. In 1886 the original building was added onto at a cost of \$15,000. The school could accommodate 50 pupils in each room. A kindergarten was opened in the school in 1886. Major Thomas Smith served as the military instructor of the school's Companies A and B, and cadets drilled for one hour each week after school. There were some 80 cadets in the program.

Richard M. UpJohn was an architect of national prominence. He designed the present state capitol building in Hartford in 1878, and the state capitol of New York in Albany. In Hartford he also designed the Boardman house on Forest Street and the George Beach monument in Cedar Hill Cemetery.

After the state capitol was completed the state gave the previous capitol building in Hartford, the Old State House, and its land to the city of Hartford. Hartford then contracted with the federal government to build a main post office on the great east lawn. In 1883, the 1834 cast and wrought iron fence that had surrounded the east lawn and the east end's main brownstone massive gateposts were removed. Part of the fence and the two brownstone gate posts were placed on the Asylum Avenue side of the West Middle School. The fence went to the World War II scrap drive, but the brownstone gate posts remain to this day.

In 1930 the present West Middle School building was completed. It was designed by Malmfeldt Adams and Prentice in the then fashionable Georgian Revival style. It has a pedimented entrance pavilion, small pane windows, with red brick and white trim. The top cupola is patterned after the cupola of the Old State House. In recent years the windows of the cupola have been boarded up.

Malmfeldt, Adams & Prentice was the architectural firm that formed in 1930 as a temporary partnership between Carl J. Malmfeldt, Louis G. Adams and T. Merrill Prentice to design the Federal Building on High Street which was a Works Progress Administration project. They also designed an addition to the Noah Webster School and The Hartford Steam Boiler Inspection and Insurance Company's building at 56 Prospect Street. The firm was in existence from 1930-1932

After the current West Middle School opened in 1930, the UpJohn building was demolished.

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