

WALNUT HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT

On 2 September, 1975, a singular honor was bestowed upon the City of New Britain when the Secretary of the Interior at Washington, D.C. accepted the Walnut Hill Historic District Proposal to the National Register of Historic Places, creating the **Walnut Hill National Historic Landmark District**. In a letter simultaneously received by the Mayor of the City of New Britain, the City Plan Commission, and the Historic District Study Committee, John W. Shannahan, State Historic Preservation Officer for Connecticut, stated: "Enrollment on the National Register provides a level of protection for the property owner against federally funded or licensed projects which could jeopardize the site or its immediate environs. In addition, inclusion enables the site owners to apply for matching grant assistance from the National Park Service for preservation or restoration of the site."

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the Nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Consideration for acceptance is measured not only by the value that the particular building or site may have to the immediate community, but its significance nationally, also. Designation to the National Register makes private property owners eligible for Federal grants-in-aid for historic preservation through State administered programs. Furthermore, designation provides protection through comment by the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation on the effect of Federally financed, assisted, or licensed undertakings on historic properties, as stated in Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 and Executive Order 11593.

The 1966 Act states: "The Secretary of the Interior is authorized to expand and maintain a national register of districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects significant in American history, architecture, archeology, and culture, hereinafter referred to as the National Register. . . ." The role of the Federal Government in preservation activities was emphasized on 13 May, 1971, with the signing of Executive Order 11593: "Protection and Enhancement of the Cultural Environment." This states: "The Federal Government shall provide leadership in preserving, restoring, and maintaining the historic and cultural environment of the Nation."

Recommendations to the National Register are received from the State Preservation Officers who have previously conducted thorough investigations. The National Park Service, acting on behalf of the Secretary of the Interior, reviews the plan and gives approval. "The National Register of Historic Places" is published in hard-cover with pertinent information about each property. The most recent addition, published in 1974, contains descriptions of the approximately 7,000 properties throughout the nation honored by this designation. Furthermore, a cumulative listing of all National Register properties is published each February in the *Federal Register*. Copies of the cumula-

tive list and hard-cover edition are available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Among the qualities considered in the designation of **Walnut Hill** include its significance in American history, its architecture and cultural impact, the integrity of the district, its location, design, setting, workmanship and feeling. Further consideration included its association with persons significant in our past, and events that made valuable contributions to the broad patterns of American history. Thought was given to the district's character representing a high degree of artistic integrity as a distinguished entity (even though certain components lack individual distinction). Also, the district has yielded and may continue to yield significant information important to the study of American history.

National Historic Landmark Districts under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 are eligible for 50% matching grants-in-aid. Funds are granted to the individual states for distribution. The individual states may transfer funds either to local governments or directly to private organizations or individuals for the development of properties listed in the National Register. Development funds are used for the protection, rehabilitation, restoration, and reconstruction of historic properties. Evidence of conformance to professional standards as established by the Secretary of the Interior must be shown in the forms of plans, specifications, shop drawings, or other materials submitted to the State Preservation Officer, 59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Ct. 06106, for submission to the National Park Service, or by the onsite inspection by the Division of Grants personnel.

Walnut Hill, a commanding site above New Britain's urban center plane, is adjacent to lovely Walnut Hill Park that Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvin Vaux, the nation's foremost landscape architects, designed in the late 1860's. Its architecture traces the evolution of a 19th century industrial center; it contains the residences of several nationally prominent individuals, including Professor David Nelson Camp, a pioneer in the national standardization of public education, and Charles E. Mitchell, the first United States Patent Attorney. Besides houses that capsize the charm of 19th century urban America the district's ten blocks contain outstanding public buildings, including the New Britain Public Library, the Greek-style Post Office, the Old Normal School whose tower is both the focal point and the symbol of Walnut Hill; several churches in the Gothic Revival style, and an unusual brick Armory.

Walnut Hill is in the heart of New Britain. Its tree-lined streets combine the charm of a suburban garden community with the advantages of urban life. **Walnut Hill** provides the opportunity for city people to dwell in picturesque dignity following the celebrated examples of Brooklyn Heights, New York City;

Georgetown, Washington, D.C.; and Beacon Hill, Boston. **Walnut Hill** is the opportunity to live within an environment reflecting more than 150 years of refinement in culture and style. Sensitively restored, this district can reflect the proud history of our remarkable Hardware City and the vivid personalities who forged it. **Walnut Hill** is a village in the city: a greenward of hundreds of mature trees, the foliage of which restores sweetness to the urban air.

Walnut Hill is within walking distance of many priceless urban resources, the tangible by-products of the Hardware City's rich history. Included are the New Britain Museum of American Art, the Youth Museum, the New Britain Institute Library and the Children's Library, New Britain General Hospital and several other private healthcare centers, numerous churches and temples, public and private schools and nurseries, many shops and services, and beautiful Walnut Hill Park, a 100 acre sylvan retreat in the heart of the city whose year-round programs encompass numerous cultural and recreational events.

The distinctive, historic homes of **Walnut Hill**, range from multiple dwellings and dwelling-offices to modest cottages and elaborate mansions, in an array of styles that cater to a broad spectrum of tastes. Its unique topography — a steep rise above the flat plane of the central business district — provides unparalleled vistas not only of New Britain's revitalized urban center but the gold domes and glass-sheathed towers of Hartford, as well. The Capitol City is a twenty minute motor-trip from **Walnut Hill** via the city's new highway interchange system with a convenient entry at Cedar Street, the northern boundary of the district. Via this highway at the district's door are the many employment opportunities of Central Connecticut.

Consider the possibilities: gracious, beautifully proportioned, entirely individual, historic homes and public buildings located in a sylvan, village atmosphere in the heart of culturally rich New Britain. The designation of **Walnut Hill** to the National Register of Historic Places is a singular honor for our City.

May 1976

The drawing illustrates the view from Walnut Hill, East, about 1890

The Historic District Study Committee

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