THE WALNUT HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT NEW BRITAIN, CONNECTICUT

A GUIDE TO A WALKING TOUR

written and illustrated by

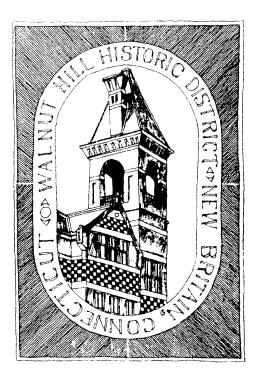
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AN INTRODUCTION TO WALNUT HILL

Welcome. In September, 1975, the Secretary of the Interior, acting upon the recommendation of John W. Shannahan, State Preservation Officer of Connecticut, admitted WALNUT HILL to the National Register of Historic Places. The WALNUT HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT was thereby created — an honor shared by some 10,000 buildings, districts, and sites throughout the United States and its possessions.

The National Register of Historic Places is the official list of the nation's cultural resources worthy of preservation. Among the qualities considered in the designation of WALNUT HILL were its

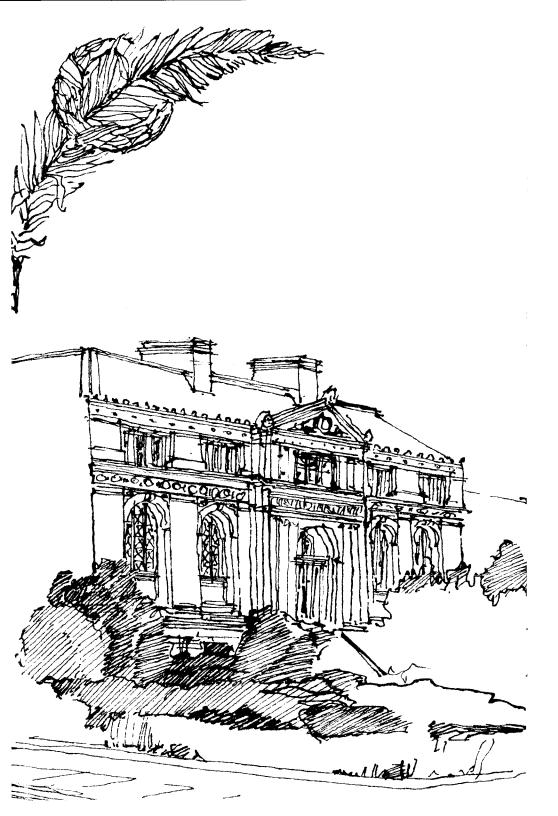
significance in American history, architecture, cultural impact, integrity of the district, location, design, physical setting, and workmanship. Further consideration was given to its association with both persons and events significant in our country's history. The district has yielded (and may continue to yield) information important to the study of American history.

WALNUT HILL, which has retained the charm of 19th century urban America, is located in the heart of New Britain and above its urban center plane. At the same time, its tree-lined streets combine the charm of a suburban garden community. The District comprises ten blocks and approximately 150 houses and public buildings, many of which are architecturally distinctive. Walnut Hill is adjacent to lovely Walnut Hill Park, designed in the late 1860s by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvin Vaux, the nation's foremost landscape architects.

WALNUT HILL provides the city dweller with the opportunity of living within an environment that reflects more than 150 years of refinement in culture and style. The district also is within walking distance of many urban resources, some of which are located within the district itself. These include the New Britain Museum of Arts, Youth Museum, New Britain Institute Library, and Hawley Children's Library, New Britain General Hospital, numerous churches and temples, specialty shops and services, public and private schools, and the beautiful 100-acre Walnut Hill Park. In addition, the unique topography of WALNUT HILL provides unparalleled vistas.

Only by walking through the quiet streets of WALNUT HILL can one truly appreciate it. We suggest you begin at the neoclassic corner of High, South High, and West Main Streets, and continue by following the map printed on the center fold of this booklet.

Welcome to WALNUT HILL!



THE NEO-CLASSIC CORNER

HIGH, SOUTH HIGH, AND WEST MAIN STREETS

This crossroads is a balanced, late 19th-century urban space. Two architects, William H. Cadwell, and William F. Brooks, lived here. Although Mr. Brooks' house was replaced by the Y.M.C.A. on High Street, Mr. Cadwell's house at 130 West Main Street, survives virtually unchanged.

Brooks' New Britain Institute Library, 8 High Street (#1, see map, centerfold, illustrated, page 6), built in 1901, is a distinctive Roman-style building. Throughout the 19th century American architects and builders copied liberally from the rich encyclopedia of European architectural styles. This library, for example, is an excellent adaptation of a "Roman Bath".

The Library is constructed of cream-colored brick and carved terra-cotta, and trimmed with copper. Its golden tones and majestic proportions express a high degree of classical training. The main floor, situated on a pedestal base of rough hewn, or "rusticated", stone blocks, is comprised of a rhythmic series of brick piers inset with Roman (rounded) arches affording maximum interior light. The carving is especially fine. Palm fronds, heros' wreaths, and a punctuated pattern of sun discs symbolize victory over ignorance and darkness. The sun disc, the ancient Egyptian symbol of the Eye of God, or Knowledge, signifies that this building is a sacred place, a "temple of knowledge".

The beautiful 1901 Institute seems in its totality to symbolize light, order, knowledge: even the "idea" of a Roman bath as the prototype of this building is not so bizarre. For the Romans, baths contained, besides the usual pools, saunas, and gymnasium facilities, libraries and chambers for intellectual discourse.

The New Britain Institute, one of the nation's earliest continuing libraries, was begun at South Congregational Church about 1842. In 1852 this church library became the nucleus of the Institute as a free, public library,

reading room, and assembly hall. The library moved from one rented quarter to another until bequests from Cornelius B. Erwin, founder of the Russell & Erwin Company (now Emhart Industries), and others, enabled the present edifice to be built. In 1976 an addition for book stacks and offices was completed.

At 26 High Street (#2), is the Hawley Children's Library. Designed by Brooks and built in 1931 in a compatible, harmonious style, the library is now joined to the main building. Delicately balanced proportions harmonize the English Tudor facade. (The New Britain Youth Museum, originally housed in the lower level, recently moved to its new building behind the children's library.) Of special architectural charm is the simple, Gothic-styled "lantern" at the peak of the library roof.

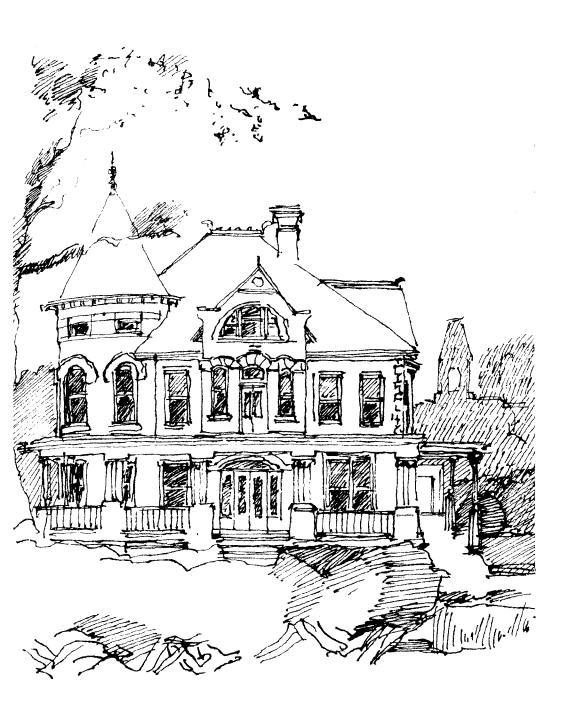
Other classically styled buildings ring the corner. The 1907 Baptist Church (#3), in yellow brick, is a starkly simple Gothic landmark. Saint Mark's Episcopal Church, 145 West Main Street (#4), c. 1922, in grey, cut stone in the Norman Gothic style, forms a complimentary backdrop to the library. Part of the beauty of this corner is the interrelationships of these buildings.

Saint Mark's interior is one of the loveliest in the city. Several of the magnificant stained-glass windows were made by the Morris Studios, London. The altar, in cream-white cut stone trimmed with carved, translucent alabaster, is enhanced by a delicate reredos with carved, polychromed angels and saints. In the Saint Mark's chapel, the heavy beamed ceiling is stenciled in bright colors. The windows in this space, dating from the mid-19th century, were brought here from the earlier Saint Mark's that stood at West Main and Washington Streets.

The United States Post Office, 120 West Main Street (#5), is a Greek style, grey, cut-stone building completed in 1910. Although designed to stand upon a low pedestal of grey granite, enclosing a tapis-vert (literally "green tapistry", or lawn) the building has been obscured in recent years by overgrown foundation plantings.

The Post Office is boxlike, elegant, simple, and refined, with a facade divided into three pavilions. The central pavilion is a liberal adaptation of an Ionic (Greek) temple portico. Six elongated, Ionic columns support an entablature of carved sun discs. The front door, accessible up a flight of "flow" steps from a paved terrace that affronts the portico pavilion, is itself encased in a tiny temple portico, or distyle. The acroterium (summit) of the little distyle is a flying eagle, undoubtably symbolizing the speed of the American mails. The flanks, or sides, of the building are simple. Below the roof line may be seen a decorative, punctuated frieze of rosettes enclosed in circles framed by pairs of lilies.

The William H. Cadwell Residence, now the offices of the law firm of Camp, Williams & Richardson, 130 West Main Street (#6, illustrated, Page 10), was built in 1890 by the architect, William H. Cadwell, as a wedding gift for his bride. Cadwell, a designer of commercial buildings, created this house in the period's fashionable French chateau style. The house is built of thin, cream-colored bricks (said to have been imported from Italy) and is trimmed in hand-carved, cream-colored terracotta, edged in rusticated quoins, and crowned with a slate roof.



The facade is comprised of three pavilions. The left is finished with a turret and the center is crowned with a gable. The central pavilion illustrates the mastery of Cadwell. Clusters of three carry the eye to the gable. The main floor is the entry of double, arched plate-glass doors framed by leaded-glass sidelights and a half-elliptical fan-light of special delicacy. The upper story mirrors this composition with a triad composed of plate-glass windows divided by a balcon-fenetre (balcony door). (The balustrade, similar to the balustrades of the broad veranda, have been removed.) The balcon-fenetre is crowned with a jewel-like stained-glass transom. The arches above this triad have voussoirs carved in natural forms. The keystone of the central arch is further enhanced with additional carving.

The third-story triad is three windows enclosed in a single hemispherical arch. This is unusual in that this arch is more than half a circle and contains the eye within the gable. The voussoirs of the gable arch are similarly carved terracotta. The gable peak contains, above a course of fret-work, what appears to be an adaptation of the sun disc motif.

The turret is strong and stout. The voussoirs above the second-story windows are especially beautiful. But the most remarkable feature is the curved, plate-glass windows that were customer-made to follow the arc of the turret wall.

The right-hand pavilion contains steps from the veranda to the drive, and a porte-cochere (carriage door). Above the porte-cochere are two unusual windows, one bayed, the other bowed. In fact, all of the windows are imaginatively treated: combinations of plate and leaded or stained glass and carved pediments. A rusticated stone, carved "Cadwell", at the curb, once serviced visitors alighting from carriages.

This house, virtually unchanged for nearly a century, is a valuable record of an architect's finest work. The Cadwell House is not only decorative, but sophisticated in its rhythms and geometric proportions.

High, South High, and West Main Streets, once completely shaded by majestic elms, is an unusually rich urban space. It exemplifies the late 19th-century ideal that Americans could build cities that contained the synthesis of 2,000 years of European architecture. On this corner can be traced, from the Egyptian sun discs of the ancients to the uniquely American terracotta in which these discs are carved, the evolution of Western thought and design.



A DETOUR TO THE ART LEAGUE BARN 28R CEDAR STREET

Have you a few minutes for a detour? Slip over to 28R Cedar Street, the New Britain Art League, Inc. (#7, illustrated, Page 12). Classes in painting and ceramics are regularly given here. Exhibitions also are often held in the League building, located in the center of the block. It is what it appears to be — a huge barn. Built for horses, it has been many things, including a pig farm, before its conversion during the 1930's to studios and galleries. Crowned by many gables and cupolas, the wood-constructed building dates from the 1870's. Inside there is a room of special horse stalls, complete with delicately hand-lettered signs of the names of the long-gone horses.

The Art League is no common barn, however. Study the patterns of the wood siding — the clapboards that contrast with the half-timbering, and English Cotswold details at the gables. Notice the series of windows containing as many as 40 panes of glass per window! A whimsical touch to the wood workmanship — a jig-cut horseshoe — may be seen at the end gable.



THREE HOUSES ON SOUTH HIGH

Several years ago a little girl, visiting the city, noticed the name of this street, clapped her hand and exclaimed, "It must be a nice city that names a street "So High"!

South High Street contains a number of unusual houses. The oldest in WALNUT HILL, at 25 South High (#8, illustrated, Page 14), is a Greek-style house with shutters. This simple, wood frame farm house was built about 1830 by Enos Smith. It was purchased about 1840 by Abijah and Honore Flagg. Flagg was a magistrate of Berlin (in those days New Britain was a parish and district of Berlin) and also made wooden objects, including tool handles. In 1839 he founded the furniture company that in 1869 Bryan Churchill Porter purchased when he returned from the Civil War. Today B.C. Porter Sons, still located in its mid-19th century Main Street building (now modernized), is one of the nation's oldest continuing firms of its kind.

At 44 South High Street (#9, illustrated, Page 17), is a lovely Italian-style, wood frame "villa". "Italian style" to the 19th-century builder usually meant a house with three stories or bays across the facade, two and one-half stories high, and a flat roof. Note the fancy, jig-sawn brackets on the porch and at the eaves. This was the home of Dr. Samuel Waldo Hart. He believed that open sewage led to disease, and, while serving as chairman of the city Board of Health, helped develop the city's first sewage system.

Across the street on the bank, accessible by a well worn flight of brownstone steps, is 45 South High (#10). Built about 1840, it was occupied by Dr. Ralph C. Dunham and provided his home, dental office, and a dental school. Students boarded here and learned "on-the-job" training. Also Italian style, the building is further enriched by a simple Greek-pedimented door frame in the Doric order.

TWO DETOURS: UP HILL, AND DOWNTOWN

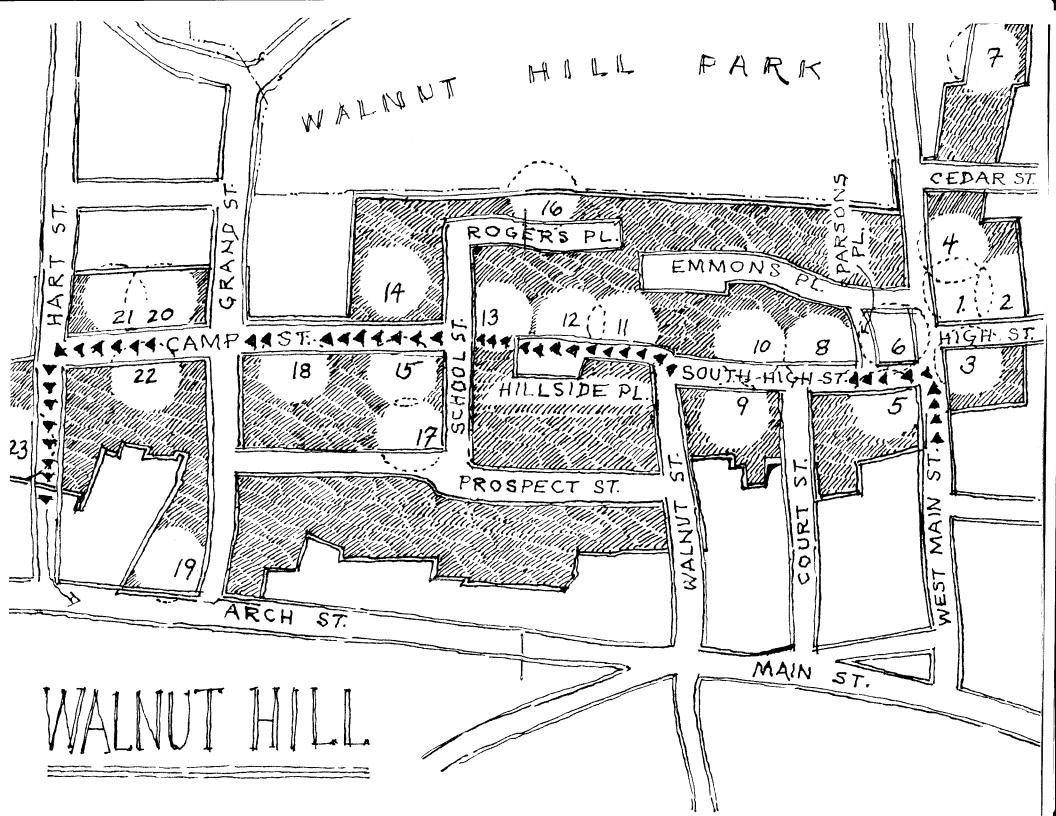
UPHILL

While on South High Street consider this side trip. Beside 19 South High notice the narrow, steep lane that dates from the age of horses. Called "Parson's Place", the lane takes its name from 19 South High Street, a former parsonage. Ascend Parson's Place to Eommons Place, a private lane, to the top of Walnut Hill. Here at the turn of the century lawyers, doctors, and merchants built charming houses to take advantage of the cool, fresh breezes and startling vistas of this higher elevation. The gardens of the Eommons Place houses all back onto the park. From the windows of the houses, the towers of Hartford are visible.

DOWNTOWN

Glance down Court Street. Although not included in the district, Court Street contains four unusual buildings, a Victorian oasis of special note: three mansions with richly varied roof lines and towers, and a small, neo-classic office that once housed the architectural firm of Perry & Bishop. The house in the center, 25 Court Street, with the tall, brick tower, built in 1880 in the French style (popularized by the building of the boulevards of Paris by Napolean II), was the home of industrialist Frederick Platt, founder of New Britain Machine Company, now a division of Litton Industries.





A STROLL THROUGH THE CAMPUS ON THE HILLSIDE

Where South High and Walnut Streets meet, framed by brownstone posts, and surrounded by serpentine walks of blue slate, is Hillside Place. In the 1880's this was the entrance to the original campus of Central Connecticut State College, then known as the Normal School. Many of the buildings near Hillside Place are associated with individuals who were affiliated with this pioneering educational institution.

Upon entering the gates the eye is immediately drawn to 1 Hillside Place (#11, illustrated, Page 21), a pretentious mansion with steep gables and slate roof. This is the house that Timothy Wadsworth Stanley built about 1860 in the Gothic style. Originally the house had wooden clapboard siding and shutters, and sported, like a hat, an open, Gothic-style lantern on the slate roof. Despite neglect, many Gothic details survive. The broad, flat arches of the doorway and porches are Gothic Tudor. At the porch corners are jig-cut quatre, foils (four leaf clover designs encased in circles). These are the product of the newly invented jig-saw that revolutionized the trimming of America's wooden houses. Tiny Gothic arches connect the spindles of the porch rails and jig-cut Gothic ginger-bread droops from the gables and dormers.

Stanley, a prosperous industrialist, civic and social leader, was a member of one of the city's founding families. He was involved in the establishment of the Union Manufacturing Company, Stanley Rule & Level Company (now a division of the Stanley Works, Inc.), and the American Savings Bank. Stanley was one of the 100 men of the parish of New Britain (population then was less than 3,000) who founded the State Normal School here in 1849.

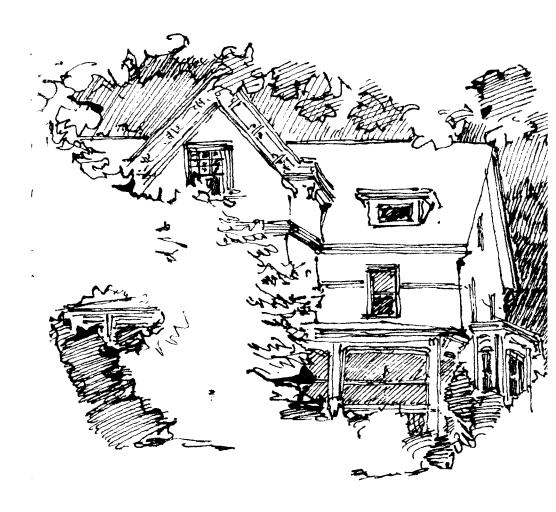
At 15 Hillside Place (#12, illustrated, Page 23), nearly obscured by trees, is the home of Attorney Charles E. Mitchell, who wrote the charter of the city. In 1889, when he was living in this Queen Ann-style house, Mitchell was appointed first United States patent attorney at Washington, D.C. by President Benjamin Harrison. While serving as state senator during the 1870s, Mitchell sponsored the bill that funded ¾ of the cost of the construction of the Normal School.

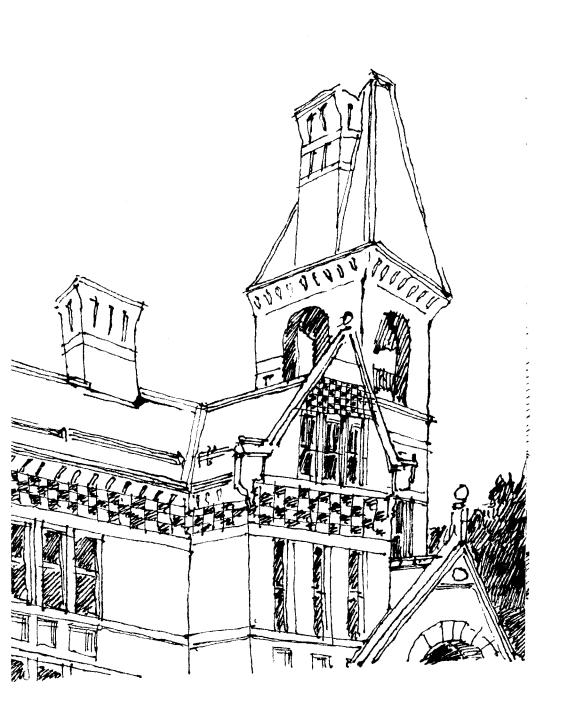
Mitchell's lovely wood frame house, originally with symmetrical porches (the one to the right has been enclosed), exemplifies the wood-workmanship of the Queen Anne style of the 1870 - 80s.

Compare the Stanley and Mitchell houses. Perhaps only 10 years apart as to the times of their construction and virtually mirror images, they appear radically different. Both have central pavilions containing front doors and



pointed central gables that break the roof line. Both have balanced facades and paired porches. But notice how the scale and proportions of domestic American architecture changed in ten years. The Stanley house looms, literally towers; every element tends to exemplify the verticality of "Gothic" splendor. The Mitchell house, on the other hand, is horizontal, squatter, broader, and lower to the ground. The former roof lines, the square plate-glass windows, and the bulbous porch columns all contribute to this effect. Although scarred by neglect and insensitive modifications, these buildings fortunately survive as a testimonial to our search for identity.





THE OLD NORMAL SCHOOL . . . CONTINUING THE TOUR OF THE CAMPUS

At the crest of Hillside Place, the focus and symbol of WALNUT HILL, is the Normal School (#13, illustrated, Page 24). Designed about 1880 by Warren Briggs, a Bridgeport architect, it was built of brick and brownstone and remains virtually unchanged since its construction. The Normal School moved in in 1883 and became the state's first school to standardize the training of public school teachers. Since the late 1920s the building has contained the offices of the New Britain School Administration.

The building is surprisingly simple, and was built coincidently with the capitol at Hartford. But compared to the ornate capitol, the Normal School appears devoid of ornamentation, modest, and austere.

The feeling is strongly vertical. The elongated windows, numerous chimneys, gables, and the tall, substantial tower (once crowned with an elaborate, lacey weathervane of cast iron) typify the 19th century noble experiment: standardization of free, public-school education. Simple in line, the building expresses great sophistication. Windows in clusters of three carry the eye across the facade. Circles carved in brownstone triangles at the gables may again be those Egyptian sun discs that are so profuse throughout WALNUT HILL — the eye of knowledge, the all seeing eye of light.



A VISIT WITH PROFESSOR CAMP

Camp and School Streets are really an extension of the old Normal School campus. Here, at 9 Camp Street (#14, illustrated, Page 26) lived Professor David Nelson Camp. At 10 Camp Street (#15, illustrated, Page 29) stands the New Britain Seminary that the Professor built as his private school.

All the property south of the Normal School, including most of Prospect Street and Camp Street to Hart Street, was originally a farm owned by a Camp family apparently not related to Professor Camp. This family (whose Greek-style house survives at 24 Grand Street) included a number of New Britain farmers, teachers (including Walter Camp, the Yale professor who created the modern game of football), and attorneys. This Camp family subdivided their farmland into building lots and created Camp Street, where Professor Camp built his house.

In 1850 Camp was invited to become one of the first teachers of the Normal School. It was at this time that he built the lovely, white, Italian-style house at the head of the path that later became School Street.

Professor Camp's house originally had batten-board siding (vertical boards). The house has a beautiful, delicately balanced Gothic-style porch carved with quatre-foils. Delicate brackets support the broad eaves of the porch, roof lines, and cupola. Linger and enjoy that cupola . . . its balanced proportions and Roman-arched (rounded) windows. Imagine the views from that height! Incidentally, the well in the side yard still works.

Professor Camp served as principal first of New Britain High School and then of the Normal School during the 1850-60s. He retired, toured European educational institutions, and returned to join his good friend, Henry Barnard, the American pioneer of normal school education, in Washington, D.C. In 1870 Professor Camp came back to New Britain to open Seminary in the building he had built the previous year. Boys and girls from throughout the Northeast came to study with this nationally known educator.

Professor Camp built his 1869 school building in Italian style, including a tall tower and Roman-style windows. Although modified in recent years by different siding, the school was intended to be a companion to the Professor's house. Notice the similarities between the house cupola and the school tower.

During the 1880s the Seminary was absorbed into the Normal School, whose new campus arose adjacent to the professor's country house. The

Teminary became the first "model school" for the in-classroom training of teachers.

Professor Camp was an active community leader. He served as third mayor of the city and vice president of the New Britain National Bank; founded a Y.M.C.A.; co-founded Skinner Precision Industries and Adkins Printing Company; in association with Henry Barnard edited an educational journal; wrote several text books and the history of the city—a detailed picture of 19th century life—that was published in 1889. When Professor Camp died in 1916 at the august age of 96 he was termed "New Britain's Grand Old Man".



TWO DETOURS: UPHILL AND DOWNHILL

UPHILL

Notice the driveway between Professor Camp's house and the Normal School, and note the name, "Stanley Place", carved in brownstone at the entrance. Follow this driveway beyond the ornate, brick carriage house behind the Professor's house and up the steep incline behind the Normal School. Now examine the Normal School's beautiful tower.

This drive is a private street that was laid out in the 1890s. (#16) Originally called Stanley Place, it was named for the two Stanley cousins who built the Colonial revival, shingle-style houses here at the turn of the century. (One cousin was the third wife of Timothy Wadsworth Stanley who previously lived at 1 Hillside Place). Later the drive's name was changed to Rogers Place, when members of the Rogers Family (Professor Camp's daughter married Daniel Rogers) occupied the hillside residences. These two houses, on the highest elevation in the district, are important not only because of their architectural distinction, but because of their seclusion high above the city and adjacent to the park.

DOWNHILL

Detour down School Street to 51 Prospect Street (#17). This Italian-style house with brownstone steps and curved veranda (a later addition) appears to be constructed of cut stone. It is an unusual treasure because it is made of stucco cast to simulate cut stone. Unique to the city, the house was built about 1860.

COTTAGES, TEMPLES AND VILLAS — THE HOUSES OF CAMP'S WOODS

Prospect and Camp Streets are lined with houses spanning 100 years of style change: early Greek, temple-front (with the gable at the front); Italian, flat-roofed "villas"; French with mansard roofs pierced with dormers; Queen-Anne and English-style with fancy wood shingles and decoratively spindled porches; Eastlake cottages; and multiple family apartments. These houses create a neighborhood as rich and varied as a Victorian patchwork quilt.

While strolling along Camp Street, notice the variety of "cottages". Tucked into the hillside, they often have basement floors with garden-level rooms that served as cool, summer dining-rooms. The houses here are surprisingly spacious. For example, tiny 48 Camp Street (#18), built about 1880 in the Eastlake style, has a living-dining room more than 20 feet long with a 12-foot ceiling. Other unusual interior features include a curved staircase with a stained-glass window, and a delicate corner fireplace. Below stairs is a summer dining-room with an ornate, stamped tin ceiling. The dining room opens on a trellised terrace that overlooks the garden.



At Grand and Arch Streets stands the stout, French-style Armory (#19) built during the 1880s. Round corner turrets flank a central tower that, until recently, was crowned with a mansard roof pierced with L'oeil-de-boeuf (bull's eye) windows. Glancing in the opposite direction, up Grand Street hill, you can see the many buildings of the New Britain General Hospital.

Continue along Camp Street. One of the oldest houses on the block between Grand and Hart Streets is the Corbin-Rossberg house at 95 Camp Street (#20, illustrated, Page 32). The front portion was built perhaps as early as 1840 in the Greek style. It has been extensively enlarged through the years in a sensitive, compatible style. Appreciate especially the well-proportioned bay window (modified Queen-Anne style) at the side. Although the house seems dwarfed by huge hemlock trees, the interior is spacious and airy. The generous side veranda, a necessity to urban life in the late 1880s (when it was probably added) is draped with old wisteria vines whose magnificant lavender blooms are a spring event.

This area was once called Camp's Woods because of the many native trees that stood here. The area is still heavily wooded — a cool, quiet oasis during the humid Connecticut summers. This part of Walnut Hill, in fact, is almost unchanged. Except for the loss of a few picket fences and the paving of the street, the detail, plantings, and scale appear similar to the streetscape enjoyed by 19th century urban dwellers there. Old trees, slate and brick walks, broad lawns, small barns, and other outbuildings testify to the age of horses.

103 Camp Street (#21), an Italian-style house, is another Corbin house. (The Corbins, including seven brothers and their descendents originally had a farm at Corbins Corners, West Hartford. They settled here and developed their own industries. There are at least four other Corbin houses in WALNUT HILL.) Gaily painted in yellow and white, this house is highlighted with unusually rich facade ornamentation. Opposite the Corbin-Rossberg house stands 98 Camp Street (#22). This Italian-style house of the 1860s still retains its shutters, a feature removed from most of the houses, but once a common sight and summer necessity. Notice especially the brick paving pattern of the front walk and the unusual combination of slate and brick paving at the front sidewalk.

At 18 Hart Street (#23, illustrated, Page 35) stands one of the largest houses of the district, built by the industrial Hart family, early settlers of Berlin-New Britain. The house originally faced Arch Street, and its property included much of the block bounded by Hart, Arch, and Winthrop Streets. Early in this century the house was moved to Hart Street, and Arch Street was developed with apartment blocks and stores.

The Hart house reflects the mastery of the carpenter's art. For example, look at the delicately detailed, lace-like front portico. Miniature, carved Corinthian columns and an unusual combination of rounded or Roman arches support delicate, wooden-filigree screens. This filigree work is echoed in the wood-work of the front gable, dormer windows, and side porch. The fragile delicacy of this woodwork juxtaposed with the looming mass of the structure creates fascinating contrasts. The French-style house has a mansard roof shingled with hexagonally cut slates. Built in the 1870s, it is a modest version of the grandest mansions of the city, now all demolished, that once lined Franklin Square and East Main Street. The House, the last of its style, reflects the sophisticated taste and exceptional craftsmanship of 19th-century New Britain.



THE WALNUT HILL NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DISTRICT

CONCLUSION

This is WALNUT HILL. Here is a composite picture of 19th-century life, from simple farmhouses and modest frame dwellings to the Institute's complicated symbology and the amazing craftsmanship of the Hart House. WALNUT HILL is a potpourri of styles and shapes tucked into a ten-block area between the park and Main Street. Relatively untouched in recent decades, it survives as it always was: an unusual, compatible blend of institutions, offices, schools, and houses . . . WALNUT HILL.

