STATE OF CONNECTICUT

CONNECUTI HISTORICAL COMMISSION
5y South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(203) 566-3005

HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

IDENTIFICATION
1. BUILDING NAME: Common: Downey House
    Historic: Elihu W.N. Starr House
2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown
    VILLAGE: 
    COUNTY: Middlesex
3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 298 High Street
4. OWNER(S): Wesleyan University
    PUBLIC _ PRIVATE
5. USE: Present: Student center
    Historic: Residence
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: _yes _ no
    Interior accessible: _yes, explain _ student center _ no

DESCRIPTION
7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Italianate
   DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1841-1842
8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
    _clapboard _ asbestos siding
    _wood shingle _ asphalt siding scored to
    _board & batten _ stucco resemble ashlar
    _aluminum siding _ concrete: type: 
    _other:

9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
    _wood frame; _ post and beam _ balloon
    _load bearing masonry _ structural iron or steel
    _other:

0. ROOF: type:
    _gable _ flat _ mansard _ monitor _ sawtooth
    _gambrel _ shed _ hip _ round _ other _ cupola
    _material:
    _wood shingle _ roll asphalt _ tin _ slate
    _asphalt shingle _ built up _ tile _ other:
    37' x 63' (N.E. wing 33' x 14'),
1. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2
   APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: S. wing 42' x 42'

12. CONDITION: Structural:
    _excellent _ _ good _ fair _ deteriorated
    Exterior:
    _excellent _ _ good _ fair _ deteriorated
3. INTEGRITY: Location: _ on original site _ moved, when:
   Alterations: _no _ yes, explain: Parts of south wing added, 1936; interior altered

14. RELATED OUTBUILDINGS OR LANDSCAPE FEATURES:
    _barn _ shed _ garage _ other landscape features or buildings:
    _carriage house _ shop _ garden

15. SURROUNDING ENVIRONMENT: College campus
    _open land _ woodland _ residential _ scattered buildings visible from site
    _commercial _ industrial _ rural _ high building density
16. INTERRELATIONSHIP OF BUILDING AND SURROUNDINGS: This house is sited on a steep slope
    at the southeast corner of High and Court Streets. It has entrances on two levels, one off
    High Street and the other off Court Street. High Street in the 19th century was the most
    prestigious residential area in Middletown, and is now a part of the Wesleyan University
    Campus.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):  
Elaborately foliated ironwork on veranda

SIGNIFICANCE

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This house was built by Elihu W.N. Starr in 1841/42 on property sold to him from the family estate of his father Nathan Starr, Jr. Elihu Starr was engaged in the manufacture of swords and rifles with his father. He was also active in local civic and military affairs, holding such public offices as postmaster, town clerk, and judge of probate. In 1860 he was named Brigadier General of the Connecticut 2nd Brigade. The house was sold in 1853 to John A. Russell, whose father Samuel W. Russell built Honors College (Russell House, 1828) on High Street. In 1884 Elizabeth and Anna Patten purchased the house and operated the Misses Patten Boarding and Day School here. Wesleyan acquired the property in 1922 for use as a faculty club. Renovation and a large south addition converted it to its present use as a student center in 1936.

The building is well adapted to its hill site; the original northeast wing with its Court Street entrance enables the building's orientation to include both High and Court Streets. The original Tuscan Villa style remains intact despite the alterations of 1936.

(see continuation sheet)

PHOTOGRAPH
photographer: Roger Sherman  
date: 2/78  
negative on file: Roll 10, #34  
view: west

COMPILED BY:
name: John E. Reynolds  
date: 5/78  
organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust  
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19. SOURCES: Middletown Land Records; Middletown City Directories; "Wesleyan University Alumnus" (Middletown: October 1935); Connecticut State Historical Commission Survey 1970; 1851 Clark Map; 1877 Bailey Map

20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:

X none known  
_ highways  
_ vandalism  
_ developers  
_ other:  
_ renewal  
_ private  
_ deterioration  
_ zoning  
_ explanation: 
It is similar to the Alsop House (1838) across High Street in such stylistic details as the unbracketed projecting eaves, wide frieze and elaborate veranda ironwork.

This house, with its Tuscan Villa style, bridges the architectural transition on High Street from the Greek Revival/Tuscan Villa Alsop House (1838) to the Italianate Villa Coit-Hubbard House (1856). This early and sophisticated use of Tuscan Villa form demonstrates the concern of the 19th century residents of High Street to remain current with the architectural fashions of the time.