STATE OF CONNECTICUT
CONNECUT HISTORICAL COMMISSION
59 South Prospect Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
(703) 566-3005
HISTORIC RESOURCES INVENTORY FORM
For Buildings and Structures

IDENTIFICATION
1. BUILDING NAME: Common: Afro-American Center   Historic: Thomas MacDonough
2. TOWN/CITY: Middletown   VILLAGE:             COUNTY: Middlesex
3. STREET & NUMBER (and/or location): 343 High Street
4. OWNER(S): Wesleyan University                     PUBLIC _ PRIVATE
5. USE: Present: Afro American Studies Center   Historic: Residence
6. ACCESSIBILITY TO PUBLIC: Exterior visible from public road: x yes _ no
   Interior accessible: _ yes, explain

ESCRPTION
7. STYLE OF BUILDING: Georgian Revival
   DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1901-02
8. MATERIAL(S) (indicate use or location when appropriate):
   _ clapboard
   _ wood shingle
   _ board & batten
   _ aluminum siding
   _ other: Wooden trim
   _ asbestos siding
   _ asphalt siding
   _ stucco
   _ concrete: type: poured
   _ cut stone: type: marble
   _ fieldstone
   _ cobblestone
   _ sills and lintels
9. STRUCTURAL SYSTEM:
   _ wood frame: _ post and beam: balloon
   _ load bearing masonry
   _ structural iron or steel
   _ other:
10. ROOF: type: gable original _ flat
     _ gambrel wing _ shed
     _ hip
     _ round
     _ sawtooth
     _ monitor
     _ other:
     _ material:
     _ wood shingle
     _ roll asphalt
     _ asphalt shingle _ built up
     _ tile
     _ other:
     _ slate
11. NUMBER OF STORIES: 2½
    APPROXIMATE DIMENSIONS: 1954 addition 77' x 37'
12. CONDITION: Structural: _ excellent
    _ very good
    _ fair
    _ deteriorated
    Exterior: _ excellent
    _ very good
    _ fair
    _ deteriorated
13. INTEGRITY: Location: _ on original site _ moved, when:
    Alterations: _ no _ yes, explain: West dormitory wing added 1954; interior remodelled
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 large Colonial Revival building
    faces east from the southwest corner of High Street and Washington Terrace. It is surround-
    ed by lawns on its large corner site. Across High Street is the imposing Greek Revival Rus-
    sell House (1828). This area, Middletown's most prestigious 19th century residential district,
    is now a part of the Wesleyan University campus.
17. OTHER NOTABLE FEATURES OF BUILDING OR SITE (interior and/or exterior):
  Front entrance with side lights and elliptical fanlight
  Columned two story entrance portico with half round fanlight in pediment
  Pedimented dormers and balustrade on hip roof

SIGNIFICANCE

Builder: Robert W. Burke

18. HISTORICAL OR ARCHITECTURAL IMPORTANCE: This large scale Colonial Revival house was built for Thomas MacDonough Russell in 1901-1902. Thomas MacDonough Russell was an architect and civil engineer, and the founder and president of the T.M. Russell Engineering & Supply Company. He served as Mayor of Middletown in 1908-09. In 1916 he became president of the Russell Manufacturing Company, founded in 1834 by his great-grandfather Samuel Russell, who built Russell House across the street. Thomas MacDonough Russell moved into Russell House in 1930, and his own house was sold to Wesleyan in 1934 for use as a faculty club. In 1954 renovation converted the building into quarters for the John Wesley Club, a non-fraternity social organization. This included a thirty room dormitory addition to the west. An extensive fire in 1967 ended a one year occupation by EQV fraternity; after repairs the building was used to house offices and students. It is now occupied by the Afro-American Society.

This house makes use of Colonial Revival decorative elements on a grand scale: Palladian windows; dentilicated cornices; pedimented dormers; balustrade on hip roof and two story columned entrance portico. These elements combine with the large scale, symmetrical

PHOTOGRAPH

photographer: Robert Svec
date: 5/78 view: east
negative on file: Roll 20, #24

COMPiled BY:

name: John E. Reynolds date: 5/78
organization: Greater Middletown Preservation Trust
address: 27 Washington St., Middletown, Ct. 06457

19. SOURCES: Middletown Land Records; Middletown City Directories; 1915 Aeroview Map; "John Wesley House" file, Wesleyan Archives

20. SUBSEQUENT FIELD EVALUATIONS:

21. THREATS TO BUILDING OR SITE:
   X none known  ____ highways  ____ vandalism  ____ developers  ____ other:
   ____ renewal  ____ private  ____ deterioration  ____ zoning  ____ explanation:

(see continuation sheet)
Center hall plan and large chimney masses to create one of the best examples of Colonial Revival architecture in Middletown. Both Thomas MacDonough Russell's brother Samuel Russell, Jr., and father, Samuel Russell, Sr. were also trained as architects. Speculation concerning the attribution of this building to one of these men rests on this training and similarities to other Russell family buildings which, however, are also undocumented designs. This house marked the end of High Street's reign as the preferred residential neighborhood of Middletown's leading families. This character was transformed during the 20th century by Wesleyan University's ever-expanding presence in the area.