

HABS  
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Norwich City Hall (Norwich City Hall and Courthouse)  
Union Square  
Norwich  
New London County  
Connecticut

HABS No. CT-1

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20240

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Owned and occupied by the City of Norwich

Norwich City Hall derives its significance as a largely unaltered example of the Second Empire style of municipal government architecture and as the seat of municipal government since the building's erection.

## I. Historical Information

### A. Physical History

1. Erected 1870-1873
2. Burdick and Arnold, a local architectural firm. Evan Burdick was also the architect for the Broadway Congregational Church, Wauregan Hotel, and several other structures.
3. Local contractor John W. Murphy was the builder. Stedman's Directory of the City and Town of Norwich (Norwich; Norwich Printing Co., 1874)
4. Original plans are not available.
5. A new wing was built in c. 1909, designed by Norwich architect Charles H. Preston. Throughout the building original metal ceilings, plaster ceiling medallions, and furniture survive, despite modernizations. Original hardware is also in place.

### B. Historical Context

"The present Norwich City Hall is a successor to an earlier courthouse. On April 24, 1865, a town meeting was held to discuss petitioning the state legislature to make Norwich the sole shire town of the county. At the same meeting a committee was appointed to select a suitable site for county and town purposes to replace the courthouse which had recently been destroyed by fire. The action of the legislature was adverse to the town's petition, but the citizens of Norwich continued to work towards the construction of a new courthouse in their town. Finally the General Assembly of 1869 passed an act giving the City of Norwich, New London County and the Town of Norwich the power to combine to erect a building. Early in 1870 a site was selected for the multipurpose building. It should be noted that the courthouse functions for New London County have traditionally been shared by courthouses in New London and in Norwich. This dual courthouse system is unique in the state and has had a good record as evidenced by plans to build new dual facilities

in the future." Kate Ohno's draft National Register form. D. Hamilton Hurd, ed. History of New London County, Connecticut, (Philadelphia; J.W. Lewis & Co., 1882) Historic Resources Inventory, Connecticut Historical Commission, Norwich City Hall and Courthouse by John Plummer, January 1981

## Part II Architectural Information

### A General Statement

"The Norwich Town Hall is a monumental red brick Second Empire building located in a prominent position on Jail Hill dominating Norwich's downtown core." Kate Ohno's draft National Register nomination.

### B. Description of Exterior

"This building stands at the junction of Broadway and Union Streets, facing Union Square. It is 110 feet from front to rear and 108 feet wide. It is three stories high (including the basement occupied by the city for police purposes), with a French roof. The main cornice is fifty-eight feet from the ground. The tower rises twenty-nine feet from the roof. The basement story is of cut granite; the other stories are of galvanized iron, and the roof is covered with tin. The cellar is the whole size of the building and contains the steam boilers for the building, coal bins & c. The basement floor is occupied by the cells for a lock-up, a police room (30 X 50) and spacious rooms for all the ordinary police business of the city. On the first floor are the offices of the Town Clerk and other town officers, the County Clerk's office, the Probate Court, the office of the Chief Engineer of the city fire department, the Common Council chamber (28 X 45) and the offices of the Mayor, the City Clerk and Water Commissioners. On the floor above are the Town Hall (38 X 62), in the rear, and the Court room in front (34 X 50) with simple ante-rooms, library rooms, Sheriff's offices & c. Each story is supplied with water closets, fireproof vaults extending from the ground, and every convenience for the accomodation of business. The tower contains a clock with illuminated dials, which are lighted up by night, and a 3,000 pound bell, which is used by the clock and also as a fire alarm bell. The interior finish is of yellow pine, chestnut and black walnut. The plans of the building were by Burdick & Arnold. The work was superintended by Evan Burdick. The woodwork was executed by Gilbert L. Congdon, the masonry by Joseph A. Smith. The furniture was made to order by N.S. Gilbert & Sons. The entire cost of the building was about \$350,000." 1874 Norwich city directory.

### D. Site

Built on a prominent site, Jail Hill, overlooking downtown Norwich.

Part III Sources of Information

Original blueprints of the Town Hall c. 1907 ,available at the office of the City of Norwich's Director of Public Works. The blueprints include the Broadway elevation,the basement and first story plans.

Armstrong, Henry R. History of Courthouses and Jails in New London County, n.p., 1960

The Day (New London), May 1976

Historic Resources Inventory, Connecticut Historical Commission, Norwich City Hall and Courthouse by John Plummer, January 1981.

Hurd, D. Hamilton , ed., History of New London

County, Connecticut. Philadelphia; J.W. Lewis & Co., 1882, 317-318

Leading Businessmen of Norwich and Vicinity. Boston: Mercantile Publishing Co., 1890

National Register nomination, draft, by Kate Ohno, January 8, 1983

Norwich Bulletin (Norwich), November 24, 1974

Stedman, John W., Stedman's Directory of the City and Town of Norwich, Norwich: Norwich Printing Co. , 1861-1917

prepared by Bill Lebovich  
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