

NEW HAVEN RAIL YARD, SMALL STORES BUILDING
Vicinity of Union Avenue
New Haven
New Haven County
Connecticut

HAER CT-160-F
CT-160-F

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
PHILADELPHIA SUPPORT OFFICE
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
U.S. Custom House, 3rd Floor
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

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Location: Vicinity of Union Avenue
New Haven
New Haven County, Connecticut

USGS New Haven Quadrangle, UTM Coordinates:
18.673620.4573340

Date of Construction: ca. 1940

Present Owner: Connecticut Department of Transportation
2800 Berlin Turnpike
Newington, Connecticut 06131

Present Use: Vacant; formerly acetylene and other storage

Significance: The Small Stores Building is significant as a component of the New Haven Railroad's repair and maintenance facilities. It was built to provide safe storage for acetylene, a potentially explosive gas used in welding. Its function is reflected in its brick and concrete materials and the fire stops along the roof.

Project Information: The rail yard is being reconfigured to provide for improved operation of commuter and Amtrak Northeast Corridor trains and to provide a storage yard for commuter equipment. The project requires removal of the building. This documentation was undertaken pursuant to a Memorandum of Agreement among the Federal Transit Administration, the Federal Railroad Administration, the National Railroad Passenger Corporation, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, the Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, and the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

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Description

The Small Stores Building is a small one-story brick building measuring 15'- 6" x 60'-6" in plan, oriented with its long axis in approximately a north-south direction. On the north, west, and south elevations, the near-flat shed roof is concealed by a plain parapet that is 3-1/2' high. The building rests on a poured-concrete foundation that rises approximately 3-1/2' above ground level; because the land occupied by the rail yard was reclaimed from New Haven harbor in the nineteenth century, most buildings were constructed with timber-pile footings below the foundations, but this could not be verified in the case of the Small Stores Building.

Windows are nearly square in shape and have concrete sills and soldier-course-brick heads supported on steel angles; nearly all have been boarded up with plywood sheets, but one retains its twelve-pane steel industrial sash. The spacing of windows and doors is irregular. There is a single window on the south end and a pair of windows on the north end. The west elevation has a window near each end with three doorways in the middle. Only the southernmost doorway is in use; the others are boarded up. The east elevation has a window near the south end and a large double-door opening on the north end.

The interior is divided by brick fire walls into three portions: two 23'- long end rooms and a smaller middle room approximately 12' long. The north part is further divided in two by a partition finished with gypsum wallboard and plywood sheets. The fire walls rise up through the roof to the level of the parapets. Presently the middle room is fitted out as toilets. The rest of the interior is unfinished, revealing the inside of the exterior brick walls, the 2" x 8" rafters supporting the roof deck, and the concrete slab floors. The floor level in the north portion, inside the double doors, is at ground level; the foundation is interrupted for the doorway opening. The floor level in the rest of the building is at the level of the foundation walls.

Two globe-shaped sheet-metal ventilators for the south and middle portions are located on the roof near the fire stops.

Historical Background

The Small Stores Building was built around 1940 as a storage facility for acetylene gas and other materials. Although at this time the railroad had electric-arc welding capability in some of its shops, oxyacetylene welding was also very important in the repair and refurbishment of locomotives and rolling stock. One of the nearby Lambertson Street roundhouses (neither of which is now standing) had a centralized system for distributing welding gases throughout the building, a common feature of railroad shops in the early twentieth century. Presumably, the Small Stores Building was used for storing portable acetylene and oxygen tanks, as no evidence exists for bulk storage tanks and handling equipment.

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The building's specialized function is evident in the use of brick and concrete as its principal materials, thereby achieving a certain level of resistance to fire, and in the fire walls that divide the building in three, thereby isolating to some extent the effects of a fire or explosion.

Significance

The Small Stores Building demonstrates the ongoing usefulness of the New Haven Rail Yard even as the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad was relying on much larger shop facilities for most of its repair and overhaul work. With the construction of the Van Nest shops in New York City, the Readville shops outside Boston, and the Cedar Hill shops in the north part of New Haven in the early twentieth century, the railroad had three major facilities that could address the needs of its hundreds of steam and electric engines and its thousands of freight cars. At the same time, the old shops near the New Haven station continued in use for painting, boiler and tank repair, and general machine-shop work. New Haven was also a center for work on the railroad's self-propelled motor cars, and starting in the late 1930s, diesel locomotive repairs were based in New Haven as well. The railroad continued to invest in this facility with buildings both large and small through the 1940s.

Bibliography

Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. Insurance maps of New Haven, 1951, 1972.